Abstract

Decent and in Order: The Pagan Stigmatization of Eusebius’ Polemics against the New Prophecy
by
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The purpose of this study is to examine the second century Montanist (c. 170 CE) movement and the possible correlation of it with pagan prophecy. Rather than accepting prophets who spoke in ecstasy, the cultural understanding of the early church condemned prophecy in ecstatic states due to their pagan associations. Contrary to contemporary ideas that Christian prophecy was ecstatic, there is no evidence that early Christian prophets engaged in ecstatic behavior when they prophesied. Max Weber’s and I.M. Lewis sociological theories are employed to show that the condemnation of the Montanists was due to different cultural understandings.
Decent and in Order: The Pagan Stigmatization of Eusebius’ Polemics against the New Prophecy

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
In partial fulfillment of
The requirements of the degree of
Master of Art
Department of History
by
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2005

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my mentor, teacher and second mother, Susan Carlson, for her encouragement and feedback. This project and the past several years would have been much more difficult without her in my cloud of witnesses. Thank you for teaching me to be teachable and for spurring me on to love and good deeds.

And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches.

Κοινωνεῖτω δὲ ο κατηχούμενος τὸν λόγον τῷ κατηχοῦντι ἐν πᾶσιν ἀγαθοῖς.

Galatians 6:6
Introduction

It is quite *en vogue* these days to give some type of clemency to those who were condemned by the early church fathers as heretics. Those who held false beliefs not only threatened the establishment of the true doctrine, but also were to be considered enemies of the state. The church’s expulsion of heretics by the church fathers are seen as exertions of power and the heretics as victims of the power struggles and enforcements of rules. Those who won the arguments are considered “winners” and those who were defeated are “losers.”¹ The choices made and the rhetoric involved created political forces which forced those who were not unified out of the orthodox church.

Walter Bauer’s *Orthodoxy and Heresy* contended that there were competing factions or versions of Christianity that rivaled what became the “orthodox” church.² He challenged the assumption that heresy was born out of orthodox belief. With the unification of Church power and the assertion of the power by the Roman church over other forms of Christian belief those deemed “heretics” lost. It is certainly accurate the politics and rules that came into play expelled and marginalized groups such as the Gnostics and Docetics, however, the early Church believed that their truth was at stake. The definitions and terms of doctrine were not only essential to establishing the faith but for preserving it.

Unfortunately, the categories of “winners” and “losers” and the reduction of conflicts with those outside the established doctrine is far too simplistic. In their effort to create a tradition and a standard by which Christianity was to continue, the early church fathers and leaders made choices and decisions about who held accurate beliefs and practices and who did not. These decisions impacted not only the heretics but also the structure of the church as a whole. The establishment and choices brought about the necessity to establish and preserve the traditions that were thought to be passed down by

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). I held this view until after about midway through my research when I realized the complexity of the issues involved concerning Montanism were beyond “winners” and “losers.”
the Apostles. These choices and the creation of rules created a culture of belief which was held sacred by the early church.

Sometimes the choices made were not necessarily based upon the “truth” or “falsity” of another group, but by their cultural display and behavior under the guise of “Christianity.” Such was the case around 170 CE when an individual named Montanus began a prophetic movement in Asia Minor. He and his entourage preached that the consummation or return of Christ was imminent, held to a strict asceticism, and made many converts. Their prophecy involved ecstatic behavior which was strongly correlated with pagan concepts of prophecy by their opponents.

The main opponent of the movement was Eusebius who compiled a lengthy rebuttal against the movement. He strongly believed that Montanus and his following were false prophets. He viewed the Montanists’ prophecy as close to the pagan concept of prophecy and not in alignment with the previous prophets of the church. The conceptions of pagan and Christian prophecy and inspiration were the primary dividing lines by which the Montanists were denounced. The differences in cultural understanding between the orthodox church and the Montanists were a primary factor in leading to the denunciation of the movement.

Even among the early church there was an understanding that ecstatic experiences did occur and that divine contact or revelatory information could come with ecstatic experience. In their rejection of the Montanists’ ecstatic prophecy, the early church did away with a much larger symbol---the current symbol of divine interaction which they had previously accepted as a legitimate form of revelatory knowledge. This thereby limited a particular epistemological source of their enemies and created the power source of revelation to be restricted to the orthodox church. I argue that their rejection of ecstatic prophecy was mainly due to their associating it with pagan prophecy. The rule created which associated ecstatic prophecy with pagan prophecy was established by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians and upheld by Eusebius in the case of Montanism.

My primary sources are from a broad range of ancient authors, both Hellenistic and Roman, who wrote concerning prophecy and divination. Skepticism and promotion of oracle centers and prophecy were quite common throughout antiquity; however, it seems that very few pagan authors condemned the prophetic ecstasy which was fairly
widespread. Plutarch and Cicero discuss the oracle at Delphi. Roman Emperors often sent for an oracular response from the oracle with regard to war. In the *Phaedrus* Plato discusses the issue of mania and manic experience with respect to the Sibyl, he believed that ecstasy related to the god Apollo took over the woman’s body. For early church sources I will draw upon the *Didache, The Shepherd of Hermas*, Tertullian’s *De Anima*, Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, Augustine’s *City of God*, as well as other Christian sources.

My secondary sources include Laura Salah Nasrallah’s *An Ecstasy of Folly*, I.M. Lewis’ *Ecstatic Religion* and *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change* edited by Erika Bourguignon, each of which discuss the role of ecstatic experience. For discussing early church experience and attitudes toward ecstasy I will use James Ash’s *Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church*, David Aune’s *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, and M. Eugene Boring’s *Sayings of the Risen Jesus*.

My first chapter examines the definition and roles of a prophet in antiquity. I broadly define the parameters of prophecy and ecstasy. The ancients believed that dreams, omens, and oracular utterances were important, held epistemological value and were considered “prophetic.” In order to place the prophet/prophetess in his/her proper context I will observe the sociological framework of Max Weber and I.M Lewis as primary theorists by which to view the issue of prophecy and ecstasy. These theorists establish the idea that the conflict between the Montanists and the orthodox church was a matter of cultural conflict.

The second chapter examines the role of prophets and inspired speech in Graeco-Roman society. Since many of the converts to Christianity resulting from Paul’s missionary efforts were Greeks or Romans, it is necessary to examine the role of prophecy and oracular experiences in the Graeco-Roman context. The specific examples of pagan oracular experience examined will be the Sibyl and the Oracle at Delphi. These prophetic figures provide evidence for the correlation between prophecy and ecstatic experience. The oriental mystery cults such as the cult of Dionysus and Magna Mater, which contained ecstatic frenzy in their worship, are also examined.
The third chapter surveys the Christian concept of inspired speech and the role and experiences of prophets in the early Christian tradition, specifically in the book of Acts and in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. To understand the early Christian concept of inspiration and prophecy we will examine Philo’s and Josephus’ ideas. In defense of their prophecy, the Montanists claimed that the ecstatic experience was consistent with prophets before them. This section shows that early Christian literature did not approve of prophesying in ecstatic states, which provides a basis for Eusebius’ polemics against the Montanists.

The final chapter show how early Christian attitudes of prophecy and ecstatic experience changed, based upon the early church’s self-identification and distinction between pagan and Christian cultures. In its understanding and grappling with what it meant to be “the Church,” the early church developed certain rules and manners of appropriate behavior. One of these rules involved the proper manifestation of the Holy Spirit in an orderly fashion. We also survey the ideas of several early church fathers with respect to the Oracle at Delphi, Sibyls, and manic behavior associated with prophecy. Their attitudes reflect the idea that rather than being in ecstasy, Paul and the early church fathers believed that prophecy was controllable and the frenzy involved in prophecy was the result of demons.

The early church had notions of correct and incorrect notions of inspiration and prophecy early on. This redefinition provided a distinction between pagan and early Christian cultures. The establishment of the rules of prophecy and inspiration by Paul were upheld by the later church fathers and even among Tertullian, the most prominent Montanist of all.

Chapter 1

Prophets and Prophecy in the Roman Empire

Around 170 CE a sectarian movement of Christians arose in the area of Asia Minor prophesying that the consummation or return of Christ was imminent. They preached a strict asceticism and attracted many to follow them. They prophesied in
ecstasy and believed that the Holy Spirit, or the Paraclete, was bringing about a new movement which would culminate in the return of Christ. Outsiders called the movement Montanism after its founder, Montanus. The adherents preferred to be called “the new Prophecy.” The Montanists believed that there was a form of prophetic succession which was built upon the Old Testament and New Testament prophets. They believed that they were the culminating prophetic movement before his return.3

The Montanists were condemned shortly after they arose. Ancient authors and modern scholars have written much concerning why the Montanists were condemned. The complexity of their movement is not to be understated.4 There are many reasons for the condemnation of the Montanists ranging from the rise of the monarchical bishop to the ordination of women.5 Eusebius provides many reasons for the Montanist condemnation as well: their prophetesses gave false prophecies, they wore too much make up, which was a sign of harlotry, and they received gifts for their services.6 One of the most intriguing reasons mentioned was that the Montanists prophesied in “a manner which the prophets in the past did not partake in” which probably refers to their prophesying in an ecstatic state.7 This is quite intriguing considering that the nature of prophecy in antiquity was often correlated with ecstatic experience. These ecstatic experiences served as a symbol to those around them that the prophet or prophetess was engaged with a deity.

Even among the early church fathers there was an understanding that connection with the divine or revelatory information came with ecstatic experience. But the early church’s understanding of ecstasy was different from the behavior exhibited by Montanus

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7 Ibid. 5.16.7-8.
and his followers. In an effort to distance themselves from their pagan neighbors the early church redefined the meaning of ecstasy and prophecy. Their view and definition of the term ecstasy changed from the pagan meaning to their own understanding of a revelation to an individual, not the possession by a deity resulting in ejaculatory comments dubbed as “prophecy.” For Eusebius and those prior to him, prophecy and ecstasy were two separate manifestations. According to them, the combination of prophecy with ecstasy was the result of demons, a sure sign of false prophets. However, the result of rejecting the Montanists had much larger consequences. In their rejection of the Montanists’ ecstatic prophecy, the early church did away with prophecy as inspired utterances and created new rules for worship and manifestation of the Spirit.

I will argue that the rejection of the Montanists’ ecstatic prophecy was mainly due to the early church’s understanding of pagan prophecy versus the Christian view of inspiration and prophecy. The parties in conflict, the Montanists and the orthodox, can best be viewed as having a difference in cultural understanding. According to Eusebius, the Montanists prophesied according to the standards of pagan culture, despite their adherence to Christian doctrine. The Montanists believed they were the means by which the Kingdom of Heaven would be established on earth. This understanding of prophecy can be viewed as a clash of cultures that had two consequences: 1) it served as a dividing line between Christians and pagans with respect to inspiration, which thereby served as a self-definition process for the early Church, and 2) it caused the manifestation of prophecy as a form of inspired speech eventually to decline. The rule created which associated ecstatic prophecy with pagan prophecy was established by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. This rule was enforced and upheld by Eusebius in the case of Montanism. Unfortunately, in the rejection of the Montanists, the early church threw the baby out with the bathwater, and the manifestation of prophecy, which was so highly valued in early Christian communities, was discouraged.

My first chapter will survey the role of prophecy in ancient society and the nature of what the ancients viewed as “prophetic.” I argue that a factor in the condemning of the

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8 It could be argued that the nature and understanding of prophecy changed to the reading of inspired texts rather than the giving of inspired utterances, which is what happened with early Judaism, however this issue is for another paper. See Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, Types of Authority in Formative Christianity and Judaism (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999).
Montanists was a differing understanding of what was and what was not truly “prophetic.” This encompasses certain behaviors, beliefs and mannerisms which were correlated with prophecy in the ancient world. In its rejection of these manifestations, the early church made an authoritative statement against not only certain worship behaviors, but also established the rejection of prophecy as a whole. As we shall see, what the ancients understood as “prophetic” encapsulated a broad range of meanings. This included the ecstatic experiences of the same nature that Montanists displayed. Whether it be through divination, dreams, augury, or prophetic ecstasy, the ancients believed that the gods or God was speaking through various cultural signs and symbols they interpreted as being inspired by the gods.

\textit{Definitions}

To begin, we must state that in providing definitions it certainly is not enough to simply look at the word. Words have a specific meaning given the cultural and historical context in which they are used. For example, in providing a meaning for a prophet we could choose a contemporary meaning which would relate to one who passionately stands up for social justice. Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi would be good examples of prophets with respect to this meaning in our contemporary contexts. However, in dealing with antiquity and the ancients, the word may hold this meaning and a whole lot more. In providing our definitions there must be some flexibility in what we define as a prophet, and rather than going through the complete etymology of each term I will simply give you the meanings I have decided to use in this paper.

The functional definition of the prophets are those who speak for their deity.\footnote{The functional definition of the prophet is one who speaks for their deity. Prophecy comes from the Greek “pro” meaning “before” and “pheme” which means “speak.” The added suffix, -tes, denotes the person performing the action.} In classical Greece the prophet was seen as an announcer or spokesman, generally this was for a deity and could include an interpreter of signs. The development of the word changed in the Hellenistic era and took on the meaning of those who gave prophecies
under “inspiration.” For the Christian, the prophet was an office held within early churches. The prophet spoke for their deity, namely God, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus.

Eugene Boring believes the Christian prophet was one who was “an immediately-inspired spokesman for the (or a) deity of a particular community, who receives revelations which he is impelled to deliver to the community.” This definition provides an excellent background; however, I reject the temporal notions involved. The sense of immediacy is not necessary because we do not know if the prophet received the prophecy that day, a month before, or on the road to the congregational meeting. Second, there is no indication that Christian prophets were “impelled” to deliver their prophecy. As we shall see, this is a dividing point between pagan and Christian prophets. One was controllable, the other was not.

Another term that is related to the prophet and is often translated as “prophet” is μαντικός which is related to “mania.” The mantic was often a corollary term with “prophet” as was “chresmologos.” It will be seen throughout this paper that prophecy and madness often were related. In pagan societies madness was seen as the greatest form of prophecy for it was when the prophet was mad so that his/her rational capabilities were pushed out and the individual was completely possessed by the god or deity.

Inspiration (ἐπιπνοοῦς) in antiquity related to the presence of a divine entity which would somehow be central to the prophet or speaker. The meaning of inspiration relates to something that is spasmodic and is related to breath, wind, or spirit. The inspired individual in antiquity was generally the one who received the spirit or spirits and gave a speech under inspiration. The prophetic speech in and of itself was seen to be a divine manifestation. Parke states, “Speech was highly important as a divine manifestation. The Latins did not draw a distinction between a god’s spoken prophecy and destiny itself.”

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The prophets or prophetesses in antiquity were seen as coming under the inspiration of their deity and speaking in his/her name or authority. David Potter notes three primary ways the prophet could receive his/her revelation. The first is based upon a revelation or image placed on the medium’s mind. The second is physical possession by the deity, who spoke directly through the prophet’s mouth. The third was that the prophet could see the future due to an ability that was passed down from a divine parent. The earliest prophets proclaimed revelation of the future or told the counsel of the gods to others. The revelation of the gods could come through a vision, dream, or from an angel or demon. It is common to think of the prophets as explicators of written dictates; however, I believe this is too narrow an interpretation and is acceptable only where written religious dictates are present.

There was a broad range of what was considered “prophetic.” The ancients believed that divine revelation could come through several forms. Revelation came through trained diviners who interpreted natural signs. These techniques were manipulative or observational. Casting lots and examining entrails of animals were manipulative. Observational divination included interpretation of animal movement and cataloguing of auspices, and natural disasters. The oracular means of revelation came about through inspired individuals under the influence of possession of a god. The god inspiring the prophecy would take control of the faculties resulting in ecstatic, frenzied, or abnormal behavior. To Quintus, Cicero’s brother, the notion of ecstasy and frenzy was the noblest form of prophecy and served as verification of a true prophecy.

These prophecies and experiences often involved some sort of revelation (apocalypse) which means to “make fully known” or “disclosure of something hidden.”

16 Both angels and demons (daemon) could be seen in a positive or negative light depending on the message they bore. In the New Testament era the δαιμόνιον was seen as an “unclean” spirit, causing harm. We shall discuss this issue further in chapters 2 and 3. Naphtali Lewis, *The Interpretation of Dreams and Portents in Antiquity* (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers Inc., 1996); Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.33
18 Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.32.67. This is quite a different notion of prophetic verification than the Judeo-Christian understanding, which plays an important role in the condemnation of the Montanists. See chapter 3 and 4 below.
These revelations could be personal revelations to the individual or to a corporate body. In the Judeo-Christian context they were generally revealing something about the last days (ἐσχάταις ἡμέρας). In mystery religions and even in Christianity they dealt with a revelation of one’s nature or the mysteries of the universe and one’s place in it.

The primary experience that we will examine is ecstasy. Ecstasy comes from the Greek ἐκστασις meaning “to be placed outside” or “to be displaced.” With regard to these definitions the individuals under inspiration engaged in a state of exaltation in which they stood outside or transcended themselves. The first definition denotes that the ancients engaged in ecstasy experienced some sort of soul migration or ascendance into the spiritual realm. The second definition relates more to possession and soul displacement by the god. This definition carried with it a negative connotation by the early Christians even though ecstasy was part of their tradition. For the Christians ecstasy involved more revelatory experiences as indicated by the first definition. One element of ἐκστασις is a trance in which the person receives a personal revelation. In the majority of the biblical data these trances are highly personal and changed the course or direction of the individual’s life and have little to do with prophesying under inspiration to a larger congregation. The Revelation of John is certainly an ecstatic revelation, however, there is never any indication that the God “possesses” the author or uses his voice in the experience.

Terms such as “altered state of consciousness”, “trance”, and “dissociation” are often loosely used throughout anthropological, psychological, and religious literature to explain ecstatic and prophetic experiences. These terms shall be used throughout this paper rather loosely as well with regard to ecstasy and revelatory experiences. While each of these states may involve some type of spirit possession or spiritual influence they do not always necessitate such an interpretation. Some types of spirit possession involve

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20 Andrew Greeley argues that ecstasy is a legitimate form of knowledge, however he never discusses who or what one knows through these experiences. Andrew M. Greeley, Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
a trance, others do not.\textsuperscript{21} Trances can be interpreted as spirit possession, but may often not be the case.\textsuperscript{22}

Modern psychology categorizes ecstatic experiences under the broad term “Altered States of Consciousness.”\textsuperscript{23} These states can be stimulated by drugs, certain postures, music, self-mutilation, and alcohol. Biophysically, altered states of consciousness are grounded in a change or deviation from the normal state of the central nervous system. In these states the central nervous system is in an above normal state of arousal. General characteristics of these altered states of consciousness include disturbed time sense, loss of motor control, change in emotional expression, body image change, perceptual distortions, feelings of rejuvenation, and hypersuggestibility.\textsuperscript{24} Though modern studies have shown that ecstasy and altered states of consciousness do not always have a religious significance, the ancients strongly correlated ecstasy with divine interaction.\textsuperscript{25}

\(\varepsilon\kappa\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma\) was not the only word that denoted an altered state of consciousness involving spiritual or mental displacement. Those who were inspired were also \(\varepsilon\iota\nu\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma\) or “full of God” which is where we get the word “enthusiastic.” In contrast to being \(\varepsilon\iota\nu\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma\) those acting within their rational faculties were \(\varepsilon\iota\nu\nu\omicron\omega\varsigma\). For the Latins the word denoting altered states was \textit{furor} which is often used in relation to the prophetess at Delphi and the Sibyls. Though the use of these words often indicates a displacement or an altered state of consciousness, they are not exclusively related to these states. We shall see that there are instances when it is clear that ecstasy or rapture experiences are clearly meant, but the words are not mentioned.

For the Greeks the primary means of revelatory experience were through oracles, dreams, and omens. With the Hellenization of the known world by the conquests of

\textsuperscript{22} As we shall see, to Eusebius trances and ecstatic prophecy were a sign of demon possession and were often diagnosed as such in antiquity.
\textsuperscript{24} Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness." 225-226.
Alexander the Great, the Greeks’ notion of revelation and oracles spread and influenced Palestine and the Levant. The Romans had no prophets like the Greeks or the Jews, but were known for auspices and haruspices. They also received knowledge and revelation through the Sibyl and her oracles, which were their primary religious literature, and through some visions such as the appearance of Romulus to Procolus. With the influx of Hellenistic culture after the Macedonian Wars there was a great influx of religious ideas into Rome. The idea of ecstasy and prophecy was officially integrated into Judaism of the first and second century as exhibited by Philo and Josephus. The early Christians adopted their prophetic understanding from this cultural context.

In religious contexts, ecstasy often carries with it a form of contact with the divine, numinous, or Holy One. Greco-Roman culture held that when the soul was divorced from bodily constraints, such as when in states of sleep or ecstasy, a person was responsive to the divine will and could gain insight into the future. In the case of the ancients the states of ecstasy were wrapped up in contact with gods, angels, or demons. Modern and ancient ecstatic experiences seem to be revelatory in nature and are believed to hold epistemological value to both modern and ancient man. These revelations could


29 Rev. 1:10-17; 4:1-3


31 Rev. 1:10-17; 4:1-3

be requested by individuals such as from the oracle at Delphi or they could be complex visions revealing events of the past, present, or future.³³

From this we can see that prophets are considered as mediators of the divine who receive information or revelation from the gods or the divine realm.³⁴ In the Greco Roman world the primary prophetic experience was characterized by ecstatic frenzy which symbolized direct contact with the gods or the divine realm. For later Christian communities ecstatic experience served in the role of prayer or praise to God through the medium of glossolalia as well as individual revelation to a particular individual for his/her personal understanding or use.

Many scholars have assumed a priori that Christian prophecy was ecstatic, without giving much clarity to the idea. The evidence does not support the idea that Christian prophets were “outside” of themselves when they uttered their prophecies, nor were they engaged in any trance. This does not mean that trances and ecstatic experiences did not occur in early Christianity, but rather that the Christians did not associate madness with ecstasy or prophecy. Montanism held that the experience or outward manifestation of prophecy was the means by which to judge the prophet or prophetess in the instance of Montanism. It became the visible manifestation of what was going on internally, which was a fairly standard approach to evaluating a prophet.

The basic definitions of Christian and pagan prophets are bound by similar experiences. They both speak on behalf of a deity under inspiration. They both existed in similar cultural Mediterranean climates and probably drew influences from each other.³⁵ But these similarities are not enough to warrant a full-fledged equation. I hope to show that the basic understandings in regard to each were different, based upon their different inspirational frameworks and their outward behaviors.

Prophets had a prominent influence in creating and sustaining orders of power. Max Weber defines a prophet as a “purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.”\(^{36}\) Weber’s primary criteria for determining a prophet is one who received a personal call from the divine and revelatory experience.\(^{37}\) More specifically, prophets were endowed with a gift or charisma which set them apart from the ordinary individual.\(^{38}\) Their preaching or doctrine can revive a stagnant or failing religious system or establish a new cult. In contrast to the prophet, the priest serves an existing religious order and “dispenses salvation by virtue of his office.”\(^{39}\) This office often exists in a hierarchical order and has certain social boundaries or customs to maintain.\(^{40}\) When the salvation or establishment of the religious order is threatened, possibly by a prophet, the priest or hierarchy often responds in a way that is resistant to change. Sometimes the results can lead to a completely new cult or sect, or the power to retain or enlarge its membership can push prophets or those desiring change to the outer perimeters of the organization. In extreme cases the membership of a specific cult can split, one party following the established priesthood, the other following the prophet, which then forms a completely new sect. At other times the existing order protects its membership by pushing prophets to the outer perimeters of its organization.

According to Weber, prophets were those who brought in new teaching which challenged the established priesthood.\(^{41}\) Weber’s argument makes sense in certain contexts and especially with the evaluation of the Montanist crisis of the early church. The New Prophecy’s experiences and behaviors challenged the established priesthood

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Ibid. 65.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
which ultimately resulted in the utter condemnation of the New Prophecy and the demise of prophets as part of the larger institution.\footnote{Ash, "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church," 248-52.}

Though Montanus and the New Prophecy did not preach anything new, it is not uncommon in antiquity for prophets or diviners to arise and preach a new doctrine, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition.\footnote{Many scholars recognize the orthodoxy of Montanus’ teaching, and even the first Latin church father, Tertullian, became a member of the movement, but they did revive a form of prophecy which existed in the ancient Hebrew tradition. Fredrick Klawiter argues that Montanism was an attempt at reviving ancient Jewish prophecy. See Trevett, Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy, 93-94; Frederick Charles Klawiter, "The New Prophecy in Early Christianity: The Origin, Nature and Development of Montanism, A.D. 165-220" (Thesis Ph D --Univ of Chicago Divinity School March, 1975).} The rise of Jewish Apocalypticism during the Hellenistic era was a “new” movement which provided Jews and the later Christian movement with hope in the expulsion of foreign rulers and the establishment of a theocratic state or a messianic age. This form of teaching carried over into Jesus’ teaching as well as Paul’s and was manifested among the Montanists.

Weber’s analysis of social and religious structure is particularly enlightening with regard to the Montanist crisis of the late second century CE. It is certainly accurate that with the rise of the early church hierarchy certain rules and organizations came into place and offices were created to preserve the rising establishment.\footnote{Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, trans. James Moffatt, Second ed., vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1908) 483.} The organization of the church governed by bishops as the primary leadership displaced the Pauline notion of apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, etc. The Montanists laid claim to having the charismata which identified their movement with the Holy Spirit. This association of the Montanists with the Holy Spirit was an attempt at establishing spiritual authority and legitimacy. Their prophets and their movement began within the church but faced with strong opposition, Montanism was eventually condemned and pushed out of the orthodox church. As their movement grew and became more prominent the orthodox or “proto-orthodox” became more threatened by their spiritual experiences and believed that they were not in alignment with church doctrine.\footnote{Ehrman, Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew. Ehrman uses the term “proto-orthodox” as if there was no established view of correct or incorrect doctrine until the establishment of the established canon and creeds of the church. While the ecumenical councils established a universal belief system across the empire, it does not negate the fact that issues of correct and incorrect
I.M. Lewis’ sociology of ecstatic religion shows that cultures believing in spirits have an internal and peripheral social structure. The possession and accommodation to these spirits shift balances of power between males and females, those within the internal power circle such as chiefs, priests and elders, and members of other tribes outside of one’s own. In the culture’s belief system the spirits generally are seen as amoral and have no specific reason for possessing an individual. Lewis these spirits as “peripheral” and come from outside one’s society. This idea of outside spiritual attack carries with it accusations of witchcraft which is often an open and direct accusation, rather than a subversive means of undermining the opponent’s authority.

Those who are in charge of alleviating possession such as shamans or prophets also are capable of making claims of witchcraft as well as being accused of witchcraft. The assumption is that if the individual is capable of curing possession he/she is also capable of causing it. These accusations often carry with them the crossing of some form of cultural taboo which is either explicit or implied within the group.

As religions permit revelations and ecstasy, they may progressively establish a religious authority. This authority may grow and become established to the point where it no longer tolerates new revelations and ecstatic experiences are no longer acceptable. The leadership of the group may act out of fear of the “spiritual” ones who claim direct divine revelation and attempt to push them out of their cult.

Weber’s theory as well as that of I.M. Lewis’ sociology of ecstatic religion provides an excellent background for the study of social groups and sectarian movements. They each deal with power, authority, charisma and changes in social structure. Lewis’ theory accounts for some of the underlying reasons for the polemics involved in pushing one group out. The accusations of witchcraft and crossing cultural taboos provide the general background to understanding the accusations against the Montanists. The early church and the ancients believed in spirit possession and made


47 Ibid. 28.

48 Ibid. 29.

49 Ibid.
accusations of witchcraft against their neighbors which is part of Eusebius’ polemics against the New Prophecy. 50

Both the Montanist and the orthodox parties claimed to be “inspired.” These claims raised the question, “By whom or what does the other party’s inspiration come?” The charismata or gifts of the Holy Spirit were thought of as being present, but in slow decline. 51 Each party laid claim to their understanding of charisma and to being essentially the spiritual church. 52 The outward behavior of the Montanists did not correlate with the rules and crossed the boundaries of the established behaviors laid down by the dominant authorities and the final result was argumentation, exorcism, and expulsion.

The rules and doctrines laid out by the apostles were a means of self-definition. They provided the early church a method by which they were to evaluate those within their group as well as creating distinctions between the church and pagan culture. This helped establish the boundary between “us” and “them” within the early church. Paul established a procedure for discerning true or legitimate prophecy and prophetic behavior which continued through the time of Eusebius. This discernment process created a standard by which one could tell the difference between the “true” and the “false,” the “in” from the “out.” From a sociological perspective, these evaluations are contingent upon the groups involved and the power which they wield.

As mediators of the divine, the prophetic process between the Greeks and the early Christians was the same. The prophets spoke in the name of their god and were thought to be receiving revelation. Thomas Overholt has addressed some of the problems of cross-cultural comparisons and has shown that despite dissimilarities between cultures, prophets do have similar patterns that are bound to their cultures. 53 I shall call this the “prophetic process.” This process, according to Overholt involves a revelation,

50 Eusebius, *EH* 5.16..8, 16-17.
51 Ash, “The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church,” 249.; Eusebius states how the gifts of the spirit were present during the time of Ignatius.
proclamation, feedback by the prophet’s audience, reaction to the deity, expectations of confirmation, and a response by the deity.\textsuperscript{54}

This prophetic process is a valuable framework for observing prophetic phenomena because it places the burden of who is a “true” and “false” prophet on the individual cultures involved. The authority of the prophet is based upon his culture and audience, which is contingent on how well he manages his charisma. Moreover, the burden of proof as to whether the prophet is a true or false prophet is put upon the prophet’s audience. Without the recognition of the prophet’s charisma the prophet is without honor.\textsuperscript{55}

The prophet’s audience is more often than not members of his/her own culture and societal group. It is up to these individuals to receive the prophet’s message and respond in one of three ways: accept the utterance, reject the utterance, or be indifferent to the prophet. The reception and feedback given is then processed by the prophet and presented before the deity who can open the doors for a new message to be delivered or the old one to be continued.

With regard to the prophetic process stated above, the Montanist crisis raises the issue of what occurs when two parties claim that they are inspired and that they each had received a revelation. The Montanists received a message indicating that the end of the world was at hand. They were told to repent, prophecy would cease after their deaths, and the New Jerusalem would descend in Pepuza.\textsuperscript{56} The orthodox believed that they had also received a revelation which was established by the New Testament. The difference between the two was that the orthodox had developed a tradition and a means to implement their rules through the community hierarchy which was being established by the bishop and other church officials.

Due to the difference in cultural understandings between the orthodox church and the New Prophecy, Eusebius accused the New Prophecy of exhibiting behavior that was not in accord with Christian prophetic tradition. The primary means of evaluating the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 427. Since the cultures indicated by Overholt as well as the ones we are dealing with believe in a deity, I have added the response of the audience directly to the deity as a part of the prophetic process.


statements made by Eusebius is to compare the ideas of inspiration and prophecy between the Greco-Roman concept and the Christian concept. The evaluations reveal similarities and great differences. The primary similarity is that in each cultural milieu the prophets were seen as a mediator of the divine revealing the will of their deity to the people. The differences are quite striking. We shall see that Eusebius’s arguments are valid.

In an effort to support my argument that Eusebius’ claims that Christian prophecy was different from pagan ecstatic prophecy and that the Montanists were not true prophets, it is necessary to compare the two categories of prophecy and inspiration. I will examine pagan prophecy and divination in the second chapter and Christian prophetic experience in the third. I believe it is possible to show some of the comparisons between the forms of inspiration and prophecy of the pagan world and the Christian world. I also believe it is possible to examine how some of the phenomena and the rules changed based on different cultural understandings.

We have defined ecstasy and ecstatic states broadly as a form of altered state of consciousness. These ecstasies could be revelatory in nature, involve possession by a god, or simply be a trance. These experiences often do not go unnoticed by cult groups and serve as a specific sign or symbol, and can alter or shape a society. Cult groups that believe in “demons” or “spirits” often have institutions or individuals in place that know how to deal with them. These individuals or institutions are called upon when an individual is plagued by an abnormality or when a society is suffering from cataclysmic damage such as an earthquake, plague, war, or a change in government. For the ancients these individuals were generally the prophets or diviners. These individuals could tell and interpret the cause of the event (the gods are angry) predict such events (the Roman Empire will fall) or give direction on how to handle it.

It is impossible to recreate the means of prophecy and ecstatic experience for many reasons. The first is that we live in a modern or postmodern culture in which these experiences are far different from our own. While some people are intrigued with shows such as Jonathan Edwards’ Crossing Over or may call Sister Sophia Psychic hotline,

these do not resemble the culture or the times of ancient Mediterranean antiquity. Second, the subjectivity of personal experience, especially religious experience, makes it is impossible to enter into anyone else’s shoes, especially that of a pagan ecstatic or a Christian apostle or prophet in antiquity. Third, we are dealing with individuals whose worldviews are most likely not our own. To grasp the mindset or mentality of an ancient is only completely possible by living in their time. Even if we did have a firm grasp on living in antiquity and all its customs, culture, and history, we could not provide an ancient interpretation simply because we are not ancients. Especially when dealing with issues concerning religion, the supernatural or prophecy which often deals with signs and figures requiring interpretation, it is rather difficult to put ourselves in their place.

The History of Religions approach has shown that there were many other religions existing alongside Christianity. These religions were not dead or dormant as many have held. On the contrary, as many terracotta figurines in ancient shrines indicate, these religions and their experiences had adherents who believed faithfully that their god or gods would change their lives. However, the History of Religions approach has emphasized so many similarities that it often has neglected the differences in each cult. It also neglects the continuing history of charismatic or spiritual phenomena as something “back then.” James Dunn states,

But too often a narrowly conceived history of religions approach can give the impression that the phenomena of first-century Christianity, particularly the manifestation of charismatic experience, belonged only to the ancient world of pre-scientific superstition. A larger phenomenology of religion approach begins from the recognition that similar ‘charismatic’ or ‘supernatural’ phenomena have been reported throughout the history of religion, no less in the popular religion of today than in the popular religion of yesterday.

There has been no comparative analysis concerning the early church’s view of ecstasy, inspiration and prophecy. It seems that while the early church initially was

60 Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit 5.
willing to accept prophecy as a valuable manifestation of the Holy Spirit, though the
close associations with pagan prophecy as displayed by the Montanists caused concern. I
will use various sources from Graeco-Roman and early church writings to show that the
eyearly church developed its anti-ecstatic attitude because of Montanisms close associations
with pagan culture.

Conclusion

Far from being a strange phenomenon, ecstasy and sectarian movements are quite
common and have been evaluated across all cultures and times. The rivalry between the
New Prophecy and the early church was a dispute between two cultures: One grounded in
a tradition and established rules, and another manifesting an old yet foreign manifestation
of prophecy which viewed itself as “new.” The latter’s expulsion by the orthodox was in
alignment with the established cultural tradition of the church.

In enforcing this tradition the orthodox firmly held their boundaries which were
based upon the idea of what it meant to be “inspired.” Eusebius viewed the Montanists
as manifesting pagan prophecy which was deemed outside of the Christian parameters
and concept of true inspiration. This was seen as coming from “another spirit”
(periphery) which threatened the established tradition and crossed cultural taboos.

The cultural comparisons which Eusebius and his sources made were based upon
their understanding of pagan and Christian prophecy and who was truly inspired. In the
next two chapters we will analyze the pagan and Christian understanding of prophecy,
ecstasy, and inspiration. The final chapter will examine the rules of discernment and the
reaction to pagan oracles by the early church fathers.
Chapter 2

Pagan Prophecy and Ecstatic Experience

We saw in the last chapter that prophecy, revelatory experiences and divination could be ecstatic in nature and involve altered states of consciousness. With respect to the Montanists, Eusebius attempts to paganize this prophetic movement and claims that Monatnus was the priest of the cult of Cybele, which often engaged in ecstatic behavior. This chapter will examine pagan prophecy and divination in an effort to understand the prophetic behavior and experience which Eusebius attributed to Montanus. It will examine pagan ideas concerning prophecy and ecstasy, oracular experience of two of the most well known oracles – the Pythia and the Sibyl -and some other instances of religious ecstasy in pagan cults.

Pagan prophecy and revelatory experiences often were ecstatic. They involved the impartation of a divine word or utterances through the presence of a spirit or natural causes such as vapors from an underground spring, and involved some form of altered state of consciousness. In general the Greeks and the Romans thought the inspired (ἐπὶ πνευμάτος) person was one who had πνεῦμα or spirit in them. The spirit entered the individual, joined with the soul (ψυχή), and pushed out reason or the mind. This drove the individual into a state of ecstasy or mania and what was said or prophesied was often ambiguous or not understandable to the hearer. Heraclitus is reported as saying “the Lord whose prophetic shrine is at Delphi neither tells nor conceals, but indicates (σημαίνει).” These signs required a second person to interpret the message. These individuals, not the person speaking the inspired utterance, were called the prophet.

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61 Plutarch, Def. Orac, 40, 50
62 Even when the responses were understood they were still unclear. For example, Ennius in his consultation of the Pythia concerning Pyrrhus received a response which could make either Rome or Pyrrhus the victors. See Ennius, Annals 6; D. S. Potter, Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 11.
63 Plutarch, De Pyth. Orac 404 D
In order to gauge the opinions on prophecy and divination in antiquity we shall examine several of the Greco-Roman thinkers to better understand the questions and answers that were given throughout antiquity with regard to prophecy and inspiration. We shall examine the works of Plato, Cicero, Plutarch and Plotinus in order to understand the various opinions throughout antiquity.

It goes without saying that the ideas of inspiration and madness were highly influential in antiquity. Oracles were consulted for major concerns, such as colonization and war, as well as mundane questions of love, marriage, and healing.64 Throughout the ancient world philosophers and religious men held many different ideas about inspiration and prophecy. The Platonic view of inspiration and prophecy was the most influential on later thinkers, which is where we shall begin.

Plato’s Socrates believed that knowledge of the future could be gained by the gods and that this knowledge was received by inspired utterance given under the realm of madness (μανία). He states,

Now many glorious sights meet the eyes of the blessed gods on the journeys to and fro beneath the vault of heaven which they take in pursuit each of his allotted task, and they are followed by whoever is able and willing to follow them, since jealousy has no place in the company of the divine.65

In an earlier section of the same text, Socrates urges his friend to look at the prophetess of Delphi, the Priestesses at Dodona, and the Sibyls to consider the benefits that Greece had received due to their madness.66 Socrates even promoted the idea of madness as a gift when he stated, “Men of old who gave things their names saw no disgrace or reproach in madness; otherwise they would not have connected with it the name of the noblest of all arts, the art of discerning the future, and called it the manic art.”67 This madness was higher than divination and augury because it came from God, whereas divination and “sober sense” was “merely human.”68

In the Timaeus Plato expounds on the nature of divination and how “no man achieves true and inspired divination when in his rational mind, but only when the power

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64 Plutarch, De Pyth. Orac. 404 E
65 Plato, Phaedrus 247
66 Plato, Phaedrus 244
67 Plato, Phaedrus, 244
68 Plato, Phaedrus 244
of his intelligence is fettered in sleep or divine inspiration.” Here we can see that true prophecy and divination occurred when one was outside of himself. While Plato does not use the word ekstasis in this passage, it is clear that in his viewpoint prophecy that is true occurs in another state of mind. This state is ἐνθεόου (lit. “in-god”) rather than ἐννους (lit. “in-mind”). In the Phaedrus Plato discusses the fact that madness (mania) is a divine gift which could even impart healing. Thus, for Plato and later Platonists madness was correlated with inspiration and served as the highest form of prophecy.

Not only was ecstasy and manic experience the highest form of prophecy, but it was also the means by which one could attain an understanding of the Form of the Good or the Beautiful. For Plato, there existed another world or realm in which everything was perfect; this was the realm of the Forms. In this realm there was the ideal and idea of everything. In the Symposium, Diotima claims that the final vision of the Beautiful comes upon the soul all of a sudden (ἐξαφήνετο) and is revealed to the soul. In this case one can see that a state of ecstasy or rapture can bring about a superior knowledge when the person is in a state of ecstasy.

Divine madness or inspirational prophecy was thought to bring about healing and the arts. In the same work Socrates raised the issue that prophecy was able to expose sin and bring about healing to a family. Divine madness was thought to bring about the arts and poetry via inspiration of the Muses. In the introduction to the Iliad Homer asks for inspiration to recount the Trojan War. In this manner the poet was not acting to tell the future, but to accurately tell the past through inspiration. Without divine madness brought about through the Muses, Socrates contends, “he and his sane compositions never reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman.” The poet is “unable to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his

69 Plato, Timaeus 71E
70 Plato, Phaedrus 244A-244E
72 Ibid. 244
73 Launderville, Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia 208-13.; Launderville raises some interesting issues concerning the Muses and contends that prior to Homer and Hesiod the Muses were able to lie. If this is accurate then those inspired by the Muses before this time may not have been accurate in their tales and recounting of history, thereby necessitating the telling by Homer and Hesiod. This ultimately gives the power of accuracy and truth into the hands or hearts of these two characters.
74 Plato, Phaedrus, 245
senses and his mind is no longer in him...” and the arts of dancing, dance songs, verse and odes are not a human affair but done under divine influence.\(^{75}\) This inspirational dance and ecstasy are that of the Bacchants, which as we shall see were quite wild. The result of all of this is that God uses these individuals as his “ministers” and that it is God who speaks and acts through them.\(^{76}\)

For Plato the spirits involved in possessing the ministers or poets are infused with demons (δαίμονες). According to Diotima in the *Symposium* the whole world of the spiritual (δαίμονες) is between divine and mortal.\(^{77}\) These demons were thought of as lesser deities who played an integral role in communication between the gods and man. Diotima goes on to say,

Interpreting and transporting human things to the gods and divine things to men; entreaties and sacrifices from below, and ordinances and requitals from above; being midway between, it makes each to supplement the other, so that the whole is combined in one. Through it are conveyed all divination and priestcraft concerning sacrifice and ritual and incantations, and all soothsaying and sorcery. God with man does not mingle: but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men, whether waking or asleep. Whosoever has skill in these affairs is a spiritual man to have it in other matters, as in common arts and crafts, is for the mechanical. Many and multifarious are these spirits, and one of them is Love.\(^{78}\)

For Plato, demons act as intermediaries between the realm of the gods and humanity and are able to inspire and give information concerning the future. They are able to provide blessings and maladies.\(^{79}\)

Cicero’s brother, Quintus, was of the opinion that divination was important and that the gods really did reveal the future to humans, though Cicero himself did not agree. Cicero believed that augury as an institution should remain for tradition’s sake, but it was of relatively low importance. Quintus defined divination or prophecy as “the

\(^{75}\) Plato, *Ion* 534B

\(^{76}\) Plato, *Ion* 534 C-D. Interestingly enough in some contemporary religious circles people discuss the notion that God “uses” them as if they did not have a choice in the matter. This raises some interesting questions on determinism and free will.

\(^{77}\) Plato, *Symposium* 202E

\(^{78}\) Ibid. 202E-203A

\(^{79}\) Plato, *Symposium* 203 A-E; *Phaedrus* 245
foreknowledge and foretelling of events that happen by chance” and divided divination into two categories: 1) Artificial, which includes augury, astrology, weather signs, and other natural phenomena that are based on long-continued observations, and 2) natural prophecy which is contained in dreams, visions, and prophecies by inspired individuals.⁸⁰

According to Quintus it was innate for the human soul to tell the future when some power occupied it from the outside.⁸¹ Quintus states, “If that power is abnormally developed, it is called ‘frenzy’ or ‘inspiration,’ which occurs when the soul withdraws itself from the body and is violently stimulated by a divine impulse.” He brings up the example of Cassandra who “prophesied…when under a heaven-inspired excitement and exaltation of the soul.”⁸² For Quintus, like Plato, “true prophecies are made during frenzy…”⁸³ He takes up the issue later and says that “the human soul never divines naturally, except when it is so unrestrained and free that it has absolutely no association with the body, as happens in the case of frenzy and of dreams.”⁸⁴ From this we see that it is the soul’s attachment to the body that can inhibit prophecy and divination. In order for true divination and frenzy to occur, the soul must leave the body or an invading source such as a demon or spirit must replace the rational mind.

Plutarch, while following in line with Plato to some extent, deviated from his view of inspiration and believed that an individual’s soul was innately capable of divining the future but is restrained by the body. Only when being released from mental control and the body can the soul perceive the future.⁸⁵ For Lamprias, Plutarch’s Stoic character, the release of mental conditions was essential for a state of frenzy or enthusiasm to occur.⁸⁶

In contrast to Lamprias, Theon, another one of Plutarch’s characters, believed that prophecy was given to the mind through visions and “creates a light in her soul in regard to the future; for inspiration is precisely this.”⁸⁷ With this there is no displacement of the mind, but rather a thought or vision is given by the gods and the prophetess by her

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⁸⁰ Cicero De Div. 1.18.34
⁸¹ De Div 1.31.66
⁸² De Div 1.40.89
⁸³ De Div 1.31.67
⁸⁴ De Div. 1.49.113
⁸⁵ Plutarch, De def orac 432 C
⁸⁶ Plutarch, De def orac 432 C-D
⁸⁷ Plutarch, De def orac 397 C
rational faculties and her own voice speaks or writes the prophecy for “the voice is not that of a god, nor the utterance of it, nor the diction, nor the metre, but all of these are the woman’s.”

Plutarch, like Plato, believed in demons as sources of inspiration, blessing, or evil. The sacred festivals, eating of raw flesh, fasting, and shouting obscene (αἰσχρολογία) language at shrines help avert evil spirits. Accompanied with these behaviors is “Frenzy and shouting of throngs in excitement with tumultuous tossing of heads in the air.” In order to avoid bad spirits, one had to welcome the good ones in through ecstatic behavior.

One of the primary proponents of religious and philosophic ecstasy in antiquity was the Neoplatonist Plotinus (204-270 CE) of Egypt. Plotinus was a Roman with a Greek education. In 232 CE Plotinus went to study with Ammonius Saccas. Here he learned Persian and Indian intellectual traditions and developed his philosophy of the One which consisted of three principles or hypostases or gods which are the Good, Intelligence and the Soul. In his view the goal of life, like Plato, was to have one’s soul attain union with the One. This could be done through contemplation in which the soul was swept outside of the body into ecstatic union with the One.

Plotinus believed that religious ecstasy was the primary means to reach union with God. God, also called the “One,” was the principle of all knowledge and perfection. All living creatures are dependent on him and must reach unity with him in order to be happy. An individual’s soul had to ascend to the One in order to reach true happiness. This idea he borrowed from Plato’s Symposium as we saw above.

Plotinus describes his experience in the following Ennead:

Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself becoming external to all other things and self-encentered; beholding a marvelous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the divine; stationing within It by having attained that

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88 Plutarch, De def orac 397 C
89 Plutarch, De def. orac 417C
90 Plutarch, De def. orac 417C
91 This ideology is not uncommon among those who hold the worldview that demons and spirits exist. I.M. Lewis has shown that some groups will learn to live with a demon or welcome a demon to get another one to leave. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession.
activity; poised above whatsoever within the Intellectual is less than the Supreme: yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning, and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the Soul ever enter into my body, the Soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be.\textsuperscript{92}

For Plotinus the soul was to be filled (πληροταιμα) with God to know His goodness.\textsuperscript{93} He states, “Then, the soul, receiving into itself an outflow from thence, is moved and dances wildly and is all stung with longing and becomes love.”\textsuperscript{94}

Other Neoplatonists such as Porphyry and Iamblichus believed in divine possession and inspiration which they thought could be brought about in several ways. In his \textit{De Mysterii} Iamblichus states “On the one hand, the Gods who inspire us are different and each produces a different inspiration, and on the other hand the difference in each mode of enthusiasm produces a different sort of divine appearance. For either the God possesses us or we become completely the property of the God, or we act in Common with him.”\textsuperscript{95} Iamblichus’ statement is revealing because it attempts to account for the unity and diversity of spiritual manifestations and inspiration. These inspirations are manifested in dreams, divination, and by the priestess at Delphi.\textsuperscript{96}

These ecstatic experiences took place at specific locations and with certain people, specifically at Delphi and with prophetic figures such as the Sibyl. The common people could engage in ecstatic behavior by engaging in mystery religions or foreign cults whose worship involved ecstasy.

\textit{Prominent Prophetesses}

Prophecies often were sought out by individuals at certain oracular sites such as at Delphi or the Temple of Ascleipeus. Oracles were specific locations where the gods

\textsuperscript{92} Plotinus, \textit{Enneads}, 4.8.1
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. 6.9.9.20; Paul and Luke also uses this verb in reference to reception of the Holy Spirit. See Acts 5:3, 13:52; Eph. 5:18
\textsuperscript{94} Plotinus, \textit{Enneads}, 6.7.22.8-10
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid. 123-43.
Prophecies were sought out for everyday life issues such as illness or marriage, or for large political issues such as founding a colony and going to war. Those who could not travel to various oracle sites could consult an itinerant prophet.\(^9^8\)

The most notable oracle in antiquity was the prophetess at Delphi in Greece. The sanctuary began its affiliation with Apollo dating to the end of the 9th century BCE. According to legend Apollo displaced Gaia and killed the snake or *Python* which dwelt there.\(^9^9\) It is thought that this slaying brought about Apollo’s role as the god of prophecy.

The priestess, or Pythia, was a chaste woman who could be anyone in Greece. She did not have to be of a priestly line.\(^1^0^0\) The process of receiving a prophetic utterance involved sacrifice or payment by the recipient and the purification of the Pythia. The supplicant would be led by a προφήτες to a space where he or she could not see the Pythia. The Pythia who had cleansed herself in the Castalian Spring, would burn laurel leaves and barley and adorn herself with laurel leaves. She then sat on her tripod and became possessed by the god. According to Lucan (39-65 CE) the Pythia, which had been dormant for quite some time, gave a prophecy to Appius in which:

> Apollo mastered the breast of the Delphian priestess as fully as ever in the past, he forced his way into her body, driving out her former thoughts, and bidding her human nature to come forth and leave her heart at his disposal. Frantic she careers about the cave, with her neck under possession; the fillets and garlands of Apollo, dislodged by her bristling hair, she whirls with tossing head through the void spaces of the temple; …first the wild frenzy overflowed through her foaming lips; she groaned and uttered loud dismal wailing that filled the vast cave.\(^1^0^1\)

Despite this vivid description, the issue of possession is debated as to whether or not it involved a frenzy, however, a majority of the literary records indicate that the Pythia was in an altered state of consciousness and both Greek and Latin texts utilize the language of


\(^{9^9}\) Lucan, *Bello Civili*, 5.70-85. In the book of Acts 16:17-19 the young girl who can predict the future is said to have a spirit of “Puthos.”

\(^{1^0^0}\) It is interesting to note that the Greeks believed that the gods could inhabit anyone at any time.

\(^{1^0^1}\) Lucan, *Bello Civili*, 5.167-174; 189-190
frenzy. The state in which the prophetess spoke was induced by some form of vapor, which very well could have induced an altered state of consciousness. As we have seen in the previous chapter, drugs and other toxins can produce hallucinations and other forms of consciousness. The Pythia’s responses sounded like gibberish to the requester and were put into some form by the προφήτης. Nonetheless, even with the interpretation the prophecy could still remain ambiguous to the supplicant.

Recent geological findings at Delphi have vindicated authors such as Plutarch and Strabo who stated:

the seat of the oracle is a cave that is hollowed out deep down in the earth, with a rather narrow mouth, from which arises breath that inspires a divine frenzy; and that over the mouth is placed a high tripod, mounting which the Pythian priestess receives the breath and then utters oracles in both verse and prose, though the latter too are put into verse by poets who are in the service of the temple.

The geological findings state that the shrine was located on a fault and that hallucinogenic vapors did come out from a cavern. These vapors contained ethylene, which has been known to excite the central nervous system and cause a sense of floating, euphoria, reduced inhibitions. Too much inhalation can cause unconsciousness and even death as is recorded by Plutarch. We may conclude that the priestess did utter her prophecies in an ecstatic state under the influence of toxic fumes, contrary to what Amandry and Fentrose have argued.


103 Scholarly debate surrounds the issue of whether or not the Pythia spoke in an intelligible language. I believe that she probably did not address the inquirer directly.

104 Strabo, 9.3.5


Sibyls were another type of prophetess who existed in the Greco-Roman world. These women should not be confused with the Sibyl who also had associations at Delphi. She spoke in hexameter verse and was consulted on a personal basis.\textsuperscript{108} The Sibyl was thought to be the oldest prophetic figure in antiquity. Heraclitus (late 6th century) uses the term Sibyl as a proper name, but as time progressed there appeared a group of prophetic women with the name. The name turned into a title. Varro lists ten Sibyls at different locations: Persian, Libya, Delphic, Cimmerian, Erythrean, Samian, Cumaean, Hellespontine, Phrygian, and Tiburtine. Other traditions include Egyptian, Hebrew, and Thessalian Sibyls.

These enigmatic figures were not so much oracle centers as they were prophetesses. These women apparently wrote down their prophecies according to various Greco-Roman sources. According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Tarquiniius, the tyrant of Rome (c. 616-579 BCE) was approached by an old woman who offered to sell him some books. Because the price was too high, Tarquiniius refused, whereupon the woman burned three of the books. The next day she returned and offered the six remaining books at the same price. Realizing that the second offer did not make economic sense, Tarquiniius refused again and the woman burned half of the books. Tarquiniius, curious about her intentions and the importance of the books, consulted the augurs who confirmed that the books were indeed important.\textsuperscript{109} Tarquiniius purchased the remaining three books from the Sibyl who immediately disappeared from his presence. Dionysius’ account is not the only story circulating concerning Tarquiniius’ encounter with the Sibyl. Varro also records the story.\textsuperscript{110}

The Sibylline Oracles were placed in the temple of Jupiter and kept under strict care by the priests. These oracles were the most important prophetic literature in the ancient world.\textsuperscript{111} In 83 BCE a fire burned the temple of Jupiter where the books were kept. Seven years later in 76 BCE, Caius Curio proposed that a group be sent to Erythrae

\textsuperscript{108} Parke and McGing, \textit{Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity} 9.
\textsuperscript{109} Dionysos of Halicarnassus, \textit{Antiquities} 4.62.1-5
\textsuperscript{110} Lactantius, \textit{The Divine Institutes} 1.6.19
to gather another set of oracles.\textsuperscript{112} The commission returned with one thousand verses which compiled into about one third of the original collection. Parke projects that there were probably other expeditions to get the utterances of the other Sibyls in colonies of Magna Graecia—Samos, Illium, Africa, and Sicily.\textsuperscript{113}

During the Imperial period the Sibylline Oracles were consulted and redacted. It is during this time that general oracles and Sibylline oracles circulated widely. In 17 BCE Augustus instituted the Saecular Games as a result of consulting the Sibylline Oracles. The games were to be held every 100 years and represented the longest term of human life.\textsuperscript{114}

During his reign, Augustus had to wrestle with the issue of unapproved oracles. In 12 BCE Lepidus died and Augustus assumed the position of \textit{pontifex maximus}. He issued an edict which ordered all books of oracles be submitted to the authorities and examined. Those which were genuine Sibylline verses were kept and entered into the collection. Those considered unsuitable and hostile to the emperor were burned. In 19 CE Tiberius had to deal with the issue of a circulating oracle that prophesied the end of Rome at the end of nine hundred years. Taking similar action to Augustus, Tiberius issued an edict to gather all the oracles and examined them. He approved of some and burned the others. This action did not quiet the oracle and in CE 64 Nero faced the same oracle after the great fire. The public remembered the oracle and apparently thought the end was near. Nero made a declaration that this prediction did not exist in the Sibylline Oracles.

Virgil records the visit of Aeneas to the Cumae to consult the Sibyl who was under the influence of Apollo:

\begin{quote}
Of Sybil's words as many times rebound.
Now to the mouth they come. Aloud she cries:
``This is the time; enquire your destinies."
He comes; behold the god!'' Thus while she said,
(And shivering at the sacred entry stayed,)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{112} Parke notes that it is interesting that Erythrae was evidently regarded by the Romans as the original home of the Sibyl. Parke and McGing, \textit{Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity} 138.

\textsuperscript{113} Tacitus, \textit{Annales} 6.12

Her color changed; her face was not the same,
And hollow groans from her deep spirit came.
Her hair stood up; convulsive rage possessed
Her trembling limbs, and heaved her laboring breast.
Greater than humankind she seemed to look,
And with an accent more than mortal spoke.
Her staring eyes with sparkling fury roll;
When the god came rushing on her soul.\textsuperscript{115}

The Sibyls, like the oracle at Delphi were under the inspiration of Apollo. Their state of possession indicates an ecstatic experience.

Despite the similarities in ecstatic experience between the Pythia and the Sibyls there are some notable differences. The Sibyl inserted herself into the oracles and referred to herself as Artemis. The Sibyl’s use of the first person reflects the fact that she did not lose her personal identity during her ecstatic trance.\textsuperscript{116} The Pythia was engaged in a deep form of ecstasy, which might have been deeper than that of the Sibyl. The Pythia’s personality was completely overwhelmed by Apollo.\textsuperscript{117}

With the various traditions of the Sibyl and her notoriety for being ancient, Jews and Christians utilized the Sibyl’s writings and created their own Sibylline Oracles in an effort to vindicate their religion. The date and the provenance of these oracles is debated among scholars, but most agree that they date to the third century BCE.\textsuperscript{118} The fact that Jews and Christians would use the oracles at all gives evidence of their prominence within pagan culture. Those composing the oracles probably believed that if they could have their own Sibyl they would be able to engage the Greco-Roman culture.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{116} Parke and McGing, \textit{Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity} 9.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.; Though Parke does not state it, I believe the fact that the Sibyl never seems to be completely consumed by the god is one of the reasons that the church fathers were willing to utilize the Sibylline oracles. The idea of loss of self or rationality is something that the church fathers looked down upon.
With the rise of Christianity there was still an interest in the Sibyl and her utterances. The composition of the third Sibylline Oracle, normally attributed to a Jewish Sibyl, promoted monotheism and had been established and circulated during the second or third century BCE. Christians added to the oracles and utilized them as evidence of the coming of Jesus. The church fathers believed that the Sibyl prophesied under the one true God and was thought to be a prophet for the Greeks on par with the Hebrew Prophets. The use of the Sibyl's utterances and the acceptance of her into the cloud of witnesses who foretold Christ is quite remarkable, considering many of the early fathers’ views on women and pagans. There are no negative comments concerning the Sibyl or her prophetic ability, but rather an acceptance of her as a true prophetess. As Potter states, “The fate of the sibyl in these centuries has recently been discussed in a number of valuable article by B. McGinn, and I do not think I need extend an already long discussion save to point out that the sibyl was not selected by Christians as an important prophetess because of the background of the Jewish sibylline tradition, but rather because she was so well respected by traditional believers.”

One section of the third oracle states:

Then indeed my spirit ceased its God-sent strain, and I besought the Great Father to ease me from my spell. And again the word for the Great God fluttered in my breast and bade me prophesy of each several land and to put in the minds of the kings that which is to be.

The utility of the Sibylline Oracles was quite prominent for the early Church Fathers and some of them had no qualms about using these texts in arguing with their pagan neighbors. Several things should be noted about this. The first is that just because they were willing to accept the Oracles as promoting monotheism and the coming of Christ does not mean that they approved of the ecstatic behavior of the Sibyl.

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120 Collins, The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism 32-33.
Collins notes that the fathers maintained a distinction between the Sibyl and the Hebrew prophets by her unwillingness to prophesy. This distinguishing fact indicates that though she was highly respected, she was still considered a pagan who resisted the will of God. Second, not every church father utilized the Sibyl’s writings. Arnobius treats the Sibyl with contempt and Irenaeus and Cyprian do not mention her in their writings. Third, the Sibylline oracles were used as a means of arguing against their pagan neighbors, that fortold their destruction unless they repented. Finally, the date of the section quoted above is unknown and is probably Jewish in origin. If this is the case then it is nor surprising that the Jews would preserve the same means of inspiration as their pagan neighbors. Other Jewish authors did so as we shall see in the next chapter.

While the Sibyls and the Oracle at Delphi are commonly known for their religious ecstasy, they are not the only sources of religious ecstasy in antiquity. Many cults engaged in religious ecstasy in an effort to gain knowledge of the future, or to have contact with their deity.

**Other Instances of Religious Ecstasy**

There are many other instances of religious ecstasy throughout pagan literature and it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine them all, however, there are some notable instances which indicate that ecstasy was common in foreign cults as well. The Romans had a general sense of suspicion towards the oriental cults which came into their territory. While most of the cults were perfectly acceptable in their native lands, their influx into Rome caused a threat to the Roman way of life and to the Roman gods. Dionysus of Halicarnassus stated, “So careful are the Romans with regard to religious practices that are not indigenous. So great is their abomination of empty display that lacks decorum.”

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124 Ibid., 378 n. 3.
125 Thompson, "Patristic Use of Sibylline Oracles," 129.; Arnobius Adv. Gentes, 1.62
127 Dionysius of Halicarnassus Ant. 2.19.5
The cult of Cybele, also known as the cult of the Great Mother (Magna Mater), was a foreign cult to Romans and was imported from Asia Minor through consultation of the Sibylline Oracles during the second Punic War. According to legend the Great Mother was a god of the mountain and her consort, Attis, was forced to emasculated himself when he was caught in an adulterous affair. Her priests were known for their clothing, drum beating, frenzied behavior, and self-castration. 128 The frenzied or mad behavior was quite astonishing to the Romans and they forbade any Roman citizen from participating or becoming a priest due the issue of self castration. 129 Despite their shock regarding the rites of the goddess and her priests, there is no indication that the Romans ever regretted bringing her to Rome. 130 In fact, she was given a temple on the Palatine Hill during the second Punic War. Magna Mater was associated with Meter in the Greek pantheon and later became associated with Dionysus due to similar rituals and similar forms of ecstatic worship. 131

The cult of Dionysus was known for its drunken revelries and ecstatic behavior. To the Romans, Dionysus was called Bacchus and was associated with the god of fertility and grain. To the Greeks he functioned in the same way, but was also seen as a deity who was to be feared for his ability to cause ecstatic madness. 132 He had the proclivity to attract marginalized individuals, especially women, to engage in his rites and to engage in ecstatic behavior.

In 186 BCE the Roman Senate responded to the proliferation of Bacchic rites because the rites and behaviors involved were seen as hostile to the state. Though there probably was general concern on behalf of the government and some individuals, Livy records the event in his histories and greatly exaggerates the behavior of those engaging in

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128 Juvenal, *Sat.* 2.94-117: 6.512-526; Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.600-628
129 Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Antiquities* 2.19.3-5. Rome, as a militaristic state and later an empire, prided itself on its martial prowess. As a result they needed to preserve all the males who could fight. This is another possible reason for the denunciation of the Bacchanalia. Livy portrays the men engaging in the rites as less than manly and not able to take up the sword.
131 Roller states, “We can see this clearly in the Romans’ puzzled reaction to the goddess’s ecstatic rites. In the Greek world, the outward manifestations of ecstaticism, particularly the loud, pulsing music and dance, were designed to introduce an interior state of openness to communication with the deity.” *Ibid.* 317.
132 See Pindar, *Dithy.* II.6-9; Euripides, *Palamedes* fr. 586; *Bacchae,* lines 1-169; Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a; Strabo 10.3.13.
the Bacchic rites. There is no indication that the Romans thought that the ecstatic behavior was to be feared or regarded as immoral. It is primarily due to the breakdown of social structure that the government instituted limitations on the rites, not because of their debauchery.

The goal for the initiates and those participating in the rites it was to engage with Dionysus and others in a state of ecstasy. This was seen as a form of communing with Bacchus. Like other mystery religions, it was also a means of gaining secret knowledge or salvation. Those wanting to partake of the afterlife could be initiated and engage in the ecstatic rites of Bacchus in an effort to be received by him in the underworld. Like Plato, the participants of the Dionysiac cult believed that engaging in divine madness was healthy.

Dionysus was thought to be a god of prophecy and there are associations with him at Delphi. In Euripides’ play, the Bacchae, the god is said to be a prophet (μαντικ) and to make his followers behave likewise. He states, “For Bacchic rout and frenzied mind contain much prophecy.” Euripides also characterizes Bacchus as the “prophet of the Thracians” who possibly gave oracles at Delphi prior to Apollo. Livy portrays the Bacchants as “prophesying” under the inspiration of the god as well. However, there is no indication of what they said. In this case, it is probable that their madness was similar to that of the Pythia or the Sibyl, but without posing requests for questions and answers to those prophesying. In this case the prophecy seems to be not only ecstatic, but also spontaneous in the worship services and induced by the indulgence of wine.

133 There is no doubt that the rites caused a stir in Rome. As a foreign cult admitted into the city and region, there would be general concern, but Livy seems to paint a picture of utter terror and a proverbial witch hunt, which other sources do not record.
135 Plutarch, Mor. Symp 7.10.2
136 Plutarch, De def Orac. 432E; Euripides, Bac. 298
137 This is quite possible since Dionysus’ name has been found in Linear B texts dating to the 11th century BCE.
138 Livy 39.13.12
139 Macrobi. Sat 1.18.1; Tac. Ann. 2.54
Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that ecstatic experience was often correlated with pagan prophecy. This form of prophecy was not only tolerated, it was promoted as the way of determining who was under true inspiration. From Plato to Plotinus, the notion of ecstasy and being outside of oneself held a strong hold on Greco-Roman culture. The priestess at Delphi and the Sibyl were believed to be among the primary oracular individuals who engaged in religious union with Apollo. Contrary to modern opinion, it is clear that the Pythia prophesied in an altered state of consciousness which was probably induced by fumes inducing what was perceived as an ecstatic union with Apollo. This ecstatic union had later sought after by individuals engaging in the worship of oriental mystery cults whose rites involved drinking alcohol, dancing and other behaviors prone to lead to altered states of consciousness.

The early Church fathers often criticized these cults and believed that they were worshipping false gods. Not only was their worship misplaced, but the actions and morality accompanied with the festivals and mysteries were often criticized. In order to understand the criticisms of the fathers we will now examine the prophets and ecstatic experiences in the early church.
Chapter 3

The Prophets and Ecstasies of the Early Church

This chapter will explore the role of prophecy, prophets and ecstatic experiences such as glossolalia in the early church. This topic is quite broad and it will be necessary to limit the range of examination to specific accounts in early Judaism, the New Testament and other specific early Christian literature. As a result we will examine prophecy and other ecstatic phenomena in Philo, Josephus, the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline epistles, and other early church documents such as the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas. We will see that though prophecy in the early church does not appear to be ecstatic, ecstatic experiences did occur in the early church.

According to Eusebius’ Anonymous source the Montanists claimed a form of prophetic succession which was partially derived from prophets during the rise of the early church. 140 Those in this succession, Eusebius argues, had no part in ecstatic utterances and neither did the prophets of old. He states,

They will never be able to show that any of the Old or New Testament, were thus violently agitated and carried away in spirit. 141 Neither will they be able to boast that Agabus, or Judas, or Silas, the daughters of Philip, Ammias in Philadelphia, or Quadratus, or others that do not belong to them, ever acted in this way. 142

Similarly, Eusebius states that Montanus spoke in gibberish or an unknown or unintelligible language. “He began to be ecstatic and to speak and to talk strangely, prophesying contrary to the custom which belongs to the tradition and succession of the church from the beginning.” 143

Eusebius, in his effort to paganize Montanus, uses the Anonymous source and Miltiadies to support his argument that true prophets do not engage in ecstatic behavior.

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140 Eusebius, EH 5.17.4
141 οὔτε τῶν κατὰ τὴν καινὴν πνευματοφορθέντας προφήτην δείξας δυσκόησιται
142 Eusebius, EH 5.17.3
143 Eusebius, EH 5.16.7. γενόμενον ἐνθονσιάν ἀρέσσαθαι τε λαλεῖν καὶ ξενοφοικέων
The alternative to this is clear: false prophets, particularly those of pagan cults, are the only ones who behave in ecstasy. He easily neglects the early Jewish understanding of prophecy and inspiration as well as issues related to the Corinthian church which Paul addresses. The reason for this is due to the prescribed definition of prophecy that Paul laid down in Corinth. Contrary to many scholars’ opinion, it does not appear that early Christian prophets were “out of themselves.” As we shall see, in correcting the Corinthian issue, Paul created a new definition of prophecy and inspiration that was quite different from their Greco-Roman counterparts. With all this in mind it would be worth our while to examine the early Jewish conceptions of inspiration and prophecy specifically in Philo and Josephus. Then we shall examine the role of prophecy and ecstatic experiences such as glossolalia—speaking in tongues, as well as other ecstatic experiences in the early church.

Inspiration and Prophecy in Early Judaism

The conception of prophecy and inspiration for the Jews and Christians did not occur in a vacuum. There is sufficient evidence to show that certain members of the Jewish population in Judea were strongly influenced by the Hellenization of the Alexander the Great and the following Seleucid dynasties. These influences ranged from education and athletics, to religious views of inspiration and prophecy. It is the last matter that we are concerned with. Unfortunately, we do not have very many sources from this time period, however, Philo and Josephus provide enough evidence for the assertion that some factions of early Judaism adopted a Hellenistic concept of inspiration.

We saw in the last chapter that the Greeks had a conception of inspiration involving the invasion of a spirit (πνεῦμα) or demon (δαίμων) into the individual which caused madness (mania) or enthusiasm (ενθουσιασμος). These experiences were considered the best form of inspiration by Plato and other pagans such as Cicero. With the

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144 Terrance Callan, "Prophecy and Ecstasy in Greco-Roman Religion and in 1 Corinthians.," *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985): 139-40.

Hellenization of Judea and other Jewish communities there arose a religious understanding that melded together the faith of the Jews and conceptions of inspiration. The primary individuals that reflect these understandings are Philo Judaeas (25 BCE-40 CE) and Josephus (37-100 CE). Because they are both contemporaries of Jesus and Paul, they are able to provide us with some idea of what Jews thought concerning prophecy and inspiration during this era. This will also give evidence of where Paul agreed and disagreed with his contemporaries.

Philo Judaeus was a philosopher and teacher in Alexandria. His works reveal that he was educated as a Jew, but also was schooled in the thoughts of Plato, Pythagoras and Stoicism. With this education and his Alexandrian setting it is not surprising that he held to Greek views of inspiration. Alexandria was a prime intellectual center and later Christians would adopt allegorical interpretations grounded in Hellenistic ideology. Unlike his nephew Tiberius Alexander, Philo remained a devout Jew and wrote consistently about Jewish law and philosophy.

Philo’s view of inspiration is consistent with Plato and Cicero. For Philo, a spirit or an angel would enter into the individual and his senses would be removed. The inspired individual would engage in a mantic frenzy. In his philosophical work Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit (On the Unchangeableness of God) he states that the man of God “being inspired, and entering into the soul and being filled with heavenly love, and being amazingly excited by the intolerable stimulus of heaven-inflicted frenzy, works in the soul a recollection of its ancient iniquities and offences.”

Like Plato and the other pagans of antiquity, Philo believed that the soul was to depart from the body “like the Corybantes, or those possessed with demons, being driven to frenzy, and inspired by some prophetic inspiration. For while the mind is in a state of enthusiastic inspiration, and while it is no longer mistress of itself, but is agitated and drawn into frenzy by heavenly love, and drawn upwards to that object, truth removing all impediments out of its way, and making everything before it plain.”

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that it is a good thing to lose one’s mind to madness in the midst of heavenly love. This experience in fact is the means of gaining clarity.

The two primary characters that engaged in prophetic ecstasy were Balaam and Saul. Each of these individuals was filled with a spirit just like Plato assumed. This spirit could be an angel that would forcibly make the prophet speak what was to be the future. The angel that Balaam encountered said “say what I prompt you, without any thoughts of your own, finding utterance, as I will guide the organs of speech in the way that shall be just and expedient, for I will direct your words, predicting all that shall happen.” In his work concerning the Life of Moses, Philo expounds upon how Balaam “immediately became inspired, the prophetic spirit (προφητικός πνεύματος) having entered into him, which drove all his artificial system of divination and cunning out of his soul; for it was not possible that holy inspiration should dwell in the same abode with magic.” We see that the inspiration came from the prophetic spirit who entered into Balaam and drove out that which was unholy. Here Philo departs from Plato in making a distinction between the holy and unholy, the spirit of prophecy and the presence of magic. Plato did not distinguish between holy and unholy or artificial and prophetic divination.

In the Special Laws (De Specialibus Legibus), Philo states that those who bear false witness, such as soothsayers, diviners, and augurs, do not have the (true) prophetic gift. Those who are true prophets utter prophecies under real inspiration, and are ignorant of their own powers of reason which have departed “and have quitted the citadel of his soul; while the divine spirit has entered in and taken up its abode there, and is operating upon all the organization of his voice, and making it sound to the distinct manifestation of all the prophecies which he is delivering.”

Philo’s contemporary, Flavius Josephus held a similar view of inspiration. Like Philo, Josephus used the idea of the spirit of prophecy and the presence of an angel

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149 Ibid., 1.50.277.
150 Levison, The Spirit in First-Century Judaism 45 n.43.
152 Ibid.
interchangeably. Balaam met the “divine spirit” who is designated as an angel. “When he was in a narrow passage, and hedged in with a wall on both sides, the ass on which Balaam rode understood that it was a divine spirit that met him, and thrust Balaam to one of the walls, without regard to the stripes which Balaam, when he was hurt by the wall, gave her; but when the ass, upon the angel's continuing to distress her...” This spirit is also correlated with the “spirit of God” later.

In a further parallel to Philo, Josephus believes that there is a removal of the senses in prophecy. In his exposition on Balaam, Josephus also believed that the Divine Spirit moved Balaam to speak and that he was “not being in his own power.” The spirit “puts such words as he pleases in our mouths and such discourses as we are not ourselves conscious of.” Balaam responds to Balak, “those that take upon them to foretell the affairs of mankind, as from their own abilities, are entirely unable to do it, or to forbear to utter what God suggests to them.” Thus, for Josephus the ones who attempt to perform augury or divination on their own accord are not true prophets. The true prophets are the ones that God, the divine spirit, or an angel enters into and possesses. Josephus blends the Jewish and Hellenistic traditions by correlating the angel, the Divine Spirit, and the invasion of God “who prevents us and enters into us, nothing that we say is our own.” The permeation of the spirit into the individual to the extent that they are not in control of themselves is a Platonic idea that both Josephus and Philo adopted.

Both Philo and Josephus are at home with the Hellenistic concept of inspiration. They have no problem with the loss of senses and control that the “angel” or “divine spirit” gives them. With this they follow the concept of Plato who believed that madness was the best form of inspiration. Unlike Plato, they attributed moral values to the presence of spirits and believed that there was true and false prophecy, holy and unholy.

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157 Ibid., 4.119.
158 Ibid., 4.119-20.
159 Ibid., 4.120.
Inspired Speech in the Early Church

According to Paul, there are two forms of inspired speech in the early church. The first is prophecy and the second is glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. These two forms of inspired speech separate Paul from his pagan counterparts because he draws a distinction between the unintelligible utterances which are usually associated with the Pythia from prophecy. There is no need for an interpretation of prophecy, but there is a need with glossolalia. He also distances himself from his contemporaries by this separation and claims that the mind is not involved in glossolalia, but is controllable by the prophet. These distinguishing features are what make prophecy and inspired speech in the early Church distinct from both pagan and early Jewish views of the phenomena. We shall examine the two forms of inspired speech in detail in order to better understand the distinguishing features and the evaluations that were made against Montanus.

Prophecy

To Paul, prophecy was an inspired utterance given by the Holy Spirit to a speaker in the speaker’s native language which could be understood by all. It fell under the rubric of spiritual things (πνευματικῶν) and it was to bring about edification (οἰκοδομήν), exhortation (παράκλησιν), and comfort (παραμυθίαν). Prophecy is one of the foremost spiritual gifts or manifestations of the Spirit and is on par with glossolalia with interpretation. Prophecy is to be used to edify the church as a corporate entity, rather than the individual. This is significant because there were some “spiritual” individuals in

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160 1 Cor. 14:1-5
Corinth who thought that speaking in tongues was the highest gift and used it as a form of spiritual authority over others. By distinguishing speaking in tongues from prophecy and stating that prophecy edifies the collective church rather than the individual, he denies the authority of those who believed themselves to be “spiritual.”

The prophecy of the early church contained elements of foreknowledge about the future. A prophet named Agabus came down from Antioch to Jerusalem and “indicated by the Spirit” that there was going to be a famine in the region. He also demonstrated that Paul was going to be bound and arrested.

Prophecy and inspired speech were always correlated with πνεῦμα which means “spirit, breath, or wind.” For the early Christian church this spirit was known as the Holy Spirit or the πνεῦμα ἅγιος. The role of the Holy Spirit is beyond the scope of this paper, however, it was seen as the primary positive source of inspiration throughout the New Testament. The other side of inspiration, the negative aspect was believed to come from demons or the devil. This is another point of departure of the Pauline notion of inspiration from both his pagan counterparts and some of his Jewish contemporaries.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples of Jesus and was seen as a fulfillment of the promise of Joel. The language used in Acts often signifies that they were filled (πλήσθημαι) with Holy Spirit. The verb Luke uses most often with reference to the Holy Spirit is πλήσθημαι which means to fill to overflowing. Most often the result of this experience is a prophetic utterance or speaking in tongues.

The early church believed that the Holy Spirit was constantly among them and even in each believer. Peter Brown states, “God’s Spirit was not an occasional visitor to the Church. It was always available to believers as a sign of His exclusive presence in their midst.” As a result of this belief each Christian was thought to have a spiritual gift or spiritual ability to build up the church. Their experiences ranged from the

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161 Acts 11:28 οἴσθημεν διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος
162 Acts 21:10-13
163 Acts 2:16
165 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14 See also “πνεῦμα πνευματικό” in the TDNT, pg 349
167 1 Cor. 12:1-14
ecstatic and inspired speech to the role of administrator and hospitality. 168 Though there were many manifestations of the Spirit, there were some which Paul felt some were of greater importance to Christians. Prophecy was among these gifts.

There is relatively little information about prophetic experience in the New Testament and other Christian literature. There are some phrases which occur throughout the book of Acts which might signify prophetic experiences. One common phrase which might have some bearing on prophecy and possible parallels to “the Word of the Lord” and other prophetic experiences in the Old Testament is the phrase “in the Spirit.” This phrase occurs 20 times in the New Testament and in almost every case has a reference to a prophetic utterance, spiritual inspiration, or a prophet. 169 Jesus cites David being under inspiration as “in the Spirit.” 170 The most notable example of this phrase relating to prophetic ecstasy occurs in the book of Revelation. John was “in the Spirit” on the Lord’s day. 171 He is later “in the Spirit” when he receives a vision of “One sitting on the throne” and several times he is “carried away in the Spirit.” 172 Agabus “indicated by the Spirit” that there would be a famine and made said “the Holy Spirit says” to Paul. In the Didache there is a command not to test any prophet who speaks in the Spirit (καὶ πάντα προφήτην λαλῶντα ἐν πνεύματι οὐ πειράσετε οὐδὲ διακρίνετε) which may refer to an ecstatic prophecy. 173 The author(s) further mention a prophet who “in the spirit orders a table to be spread shall not eat therefrom; but if he does he is a false prophet.” 174 There is

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168 In an effort to combat the Corinthians spiritual pride, it is clear that Paul assigns a spiritual “gift” to practically every action that might be looked down upon by the congregation as “unspiritual.” See Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 118-24.
169 See Matt. 22:43; Luke 1:17; 2:27; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:11; 14:16; Eph. 2:22; 3:5; 4:23; 6:18; Phil. 3:3; Col. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:18; 4:6; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10. Most of the exceptions have to do with a natural matter of will or purposing such as Paul “purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem in Acts. 19:21.
170 Matt. 22:43
171 Rev. 1:10
172 Rev. 4:12; 17:3; 21:10
173 “The Didache,” in Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, ed. James A Kleist (Maryland: Newman Press, 1948), 22. translates the “in the spirit” sections as “in ecstasy.” While the term “in the spirit” can and does imply prophecy and prophetic experience, there is no real indication of ecstatic experience in this case.
174 Did. 11.9 The reference to “in the spirit” may refer to some sort of ecstasy, but a prophet ordering a table to be prepared for a meal is self-seeking and may not legitimately be “in the spirit” all, which is why he is deemed a false prophet. This phrase does not appear in the Coptic text.
mention of prophets “performing the worldly mystery of the church.” Though what that might be is unknown.  

Prophecy in the Corinthian letter seems to indicate that those in Corinth imported in some of their ideas about prophecy from their pagan backgrounds. Paul indirectly and directly addresses the Corinthians with references to their pagan past. Paul also seems to emphasize the issue that the mind (νοῦς) plays a role in prophecy, but does not in glossolalia. This is quite different from pagan prophecy in which the best form of prophecy involved removing of the mind. Paul states that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophet which provides another point of departure from pagan ecstatic prophecy, with which the Corinthians certainly would have been familiar. Though there are varying degrees of activity with which the mind is “unfruitful” and which one retains consciousness and we should not suppose that the prophetic activity involved some sort of ecstasy to the extent that they were out of themselves. If the spirit of prophecy was under the control of the prophets, it is most likely the case that they were in their senses. The prophets apparently were able to control their utterances by starting and stopping when others began. This is a point of departure not only from the pagans, but also from Philo and Josephus who believed like Plato, that the inspired individual had no control of the spirit of prophecy. It was considered spontaneous to the extent that the speaker could not help what was said.

Another difference between Christian, pagan, and Hebrew prophecy is that the Christian prophet was never sought out. The inspiration of the Christian was spontaneous and usually occurred in a worship or congregational context. There were no oracular

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177 1 Cor 8:1; 12:2; 13:1-7;
178 1 Cor 14:14
179 Plato, *Timaeus* 71D; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* 33.
sites where Christian prophets could be consulted for Christians believed that they were now the temple of God and had the Spirit dwelling in them.\textsuperscript{182} Nor were there any recorded miracles performed by any Christian prophets. Contrary to the enigmatic phrases or utterances by a pagan prophet or prophetess Paul urges clarity in situations of worship. He would rather speak five words with his mind rather than speak ten thousand in a tongue.\textsuperscript{183}

Overall, the New Testament records little about the prophetic experience of the early church. Luke emphasizes that it is the filling or possession by the Holy Spirit which brings about prophecy. Paul picks up where Luke leaves off and emphasizes that prophecy is for the church’s edification and is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Prophecy was a controllable, yet spontaneous message given by the Holy Spirit to individuals or to congregations of people.

From these examinations we can conclude that Christian prophecy was different from both the Hebraic and pagan tradition. Christian prophets were not consulted like the Pythia or the Hebraic prophets. There is no evidence that they gave their prophecies in ecstatic states.\textsuperscript{184} Paul’s claim that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets indicates that prophecy was under the control of the inspired individual. They were to stop if someone else intervened or began to speak. If the prophecy was ecstatic, it was at a low level of disassociation which was controllable. The spiritual situation at Corinth does seem to be rather confused and it may be that the prophets in the community did

\textsuperscript{182} Paul Ciholas, \textit{The Omphalos and the Cross: Pagans and Christians in Search of a Divine Center} (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003). This is not to say that some converts did not still seek out oracles or engage in their former practices. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians brings up the issues of eating meat that has been consecrated to idols (1 Cor. 8). It is also clear that the Corinthians carried into their services their pagan ideas about prophecy and inspired speech, which necessitated Paul’s interjection. Conversion does not appear to be an overnight process. Jack Sanders states, “Thus for a Gentile to become a Christian in the early decades of the movement was not the radical religious and intellectual break with the past that modern Christians often think it was. Of course Christianity was different from other religious and intellectual alternatives, but it was not totally different.” Jack T. Sanders, “Conversion in Early Christianity,” in \textit{Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches}, ed. Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime, and Paul-Andre. Turcotte (New York, Walnut Creek, Lanham, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002), 639. See also Peter Brown, “Socery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity: From Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in \textit{Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine} (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

\textsuperscript{183} 1 Cor. 14: 19

\textsuperscript{184} Wayne Grudem defines the ecstatic state as involving 1) speaking against the will, 2) loss of self control and violent raving, 3) speaking strange things that made no sense to him, 3) unaware of his surroundings. Though I initially did not hold this view, I believe that Paul believed Christian prophecy was not to be ecstatic. See Wayne A. Grudem, \textit{The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians} (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999) 150-55.
experience some sort of altered state of consciousness either through a vision or a trance. This does not mean we should reject the idea that there may have been some ecstasy involved in the prophecy in Corinth, however, Paul did not promote such a correlation between prophecy and ecstasy. As David Aune states,

Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians is oriented toward persuading Christians to accept his view of prophecy and glossolalia, i.e. what their view and practice ought to be. Paul, therefore, is articulating an ideology of Christian prophecy.

We cannot be sure that what he recommends was actually practiced anywhere in the Christian world.\textsuperscript{185}

Aune further states that ecstasy, either controlled or uncontrolled, was a part of Greco-Roman tradition and it is no less likely to have existed in the Judeo-Christian tradition as well. Despite these claims, I am inclined to believe that if the prophecies were given in ecstatic states, they were supposed to be controlled and not violent outbursts needing translation or interpretation to the communities.\textsuperscript{186} There was need for regulation of what was said, but there appears no evidence that the prophets were out of their minds such as in the pagan prophecies.

\textit{Speaking in Tongues}

While it is unlikely that Christian prophecy was ecstatic, this does not mean that ecstatic experiences did not occur in early Christianity.\textsuperscript{187} One of the primary ecstatic experiences that occur throughout the New Testament is the phenomenon of \textit{glossolalia}, also called “speaking in tongues.”\textsuperscript{188} Speaking in tongues often occurs in prophetic contexts and is best understood as a form of inspired speech closely related to

\textsuperscript{185} Aune, \textit{Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World} 13.


\textsuperscript{188} There is a reference to speaking in tongues (\γλώσσας λαλήσωσιν καινάζει) in Mark 16:17, however, this is generally regarded by scholars as a later addition. See Francis Wright Beare, "Speaking with Tongues: A Critical Survey of the New Testament Evidence," \textit{Journal of Biblical Literature} 83, no. 3 (1964): 229.; Forbes, \textit{Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment} 52.
prophecy. Speaking in tongues generally is considered a miraculous ability by which one is prompted by the Holy Spirit to make ecstatic utterances in a language the individual has not learned. Paul spoke of speaking in the “languages of men or of angels” which is probably close to his conception of the phenomenon.

The phenomenon of glossolalia is found only in the New Testament and some scholars believe that Paul and Luke have different understandings of the spiritual manifestation. I do not believe this is the case. As stated above, Paul believed that speaking in tongues was the tongues of angels, a spiritual language, and could be the tongues of men, a human language. This accounts for the possibility that other people can understand the language such as on the day of Pentecost. Speaking in tongues can sometimes be understood by others such as on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given to the church:

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (ἦρξαντο λαλεῖν ἐτέρας γλώσσας), as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and

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190 Interestingly enough, instances of glossolalia or speaking unlearned languages appears also in demonic possession or demonization. See Cuneo, American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty 6, 234.


wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?" It is highly unlikely that between the death of Jesus and the feast of Pentecost that the disciples had learned various languages. The accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus indicate that the disciples went back to their old professions such as fishing. The speaking in other tongues, whether in a tongue of a known language or an unknown language, was seen as a miraculous gift at which those around the disciples were “amazed (ἐξίστατο) and astonished (ἐθαύμαζον).” In this case the speech was intelligible to those around them, but it was a miraculous event which the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak.

Like prophecy, it is clear that Luke intends his audience to correlate the reception of the Holy Spirit by communities with speaking in tongues. In the two other instances of speaking in tongues in Acts, the individuals receive the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues and prophesy. In the account following Peter’s vision, Peter goes to the centurion’s house and while preaching, the Holy Spirit comes upon the family and they begin speaking in tongues and exalting God. In this account there is no record of whether anyone understood what was said, because this was not the point. The point was that the Spirit was poured out onto the Gentiles, which to a Jew of the first century would be quite remarkable.

The next instance of speaking in tongues is when Paul is in Ephesus and ran into some disciples. It is likely that these people were Jews for they had received John’s baptism as an initial baptism but had not heard of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Paul laid

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193 Acts 2:4-8
194 Drunkenness and wine are two related terms that are used in correlation with prophecy, ecstasy, and other spiritual phenomena. See Isaacs, The Concept of Spirit: A Study of Pneuma in Hellenistic Judaism and Its Bearing on the New Testament.
195 John 21:3-14
196 Acts 10:46 λαλοῦντων γλώσσας
197 F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary, 3rd rev. and enl. ed ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990) 216. If the καί is rendered as an “even” the translation would express the surprise of the author that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues and even praised God!
198 Acts 19:6
hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues and prophesied. It
does not mention that anyone around them understood what they were saying when they
were speaking in tongues and there is no mention of what was prophesied.

In each of these instances there is no evidence that the disciples themselves
understood what was being said. They each spoke as the Spirit enabled them, though
they did not understand what they were saying. The Pentecost experience was the only
instance in the scriptures where anyone else understood what was being said.

The apostle Paul engaged in glossolalia and believed that it was a form of giving
thanks to God. In fact, Paul boasted that he spoke in tongues more than all the others
in Corinth. Speaking in tongues was something that built up an individual and was a
form of spiritual prayer and communication between the believer and God. It was not to
be done in a congregational meeting unless it was interpreted. In this context it seems
that Paul believed that no one understood what was said unless an interpretation was
given.

In the letter to the Romans, Paul states that since Christians do not know what
they ought to pray for, the Spirit groans and utters things that are not understood.

Concerning this section of text, Ernst Käsemann states, “The spiritual prayer is
incomprehensible in so far as it means the possibility of speaking with tongues.”

Contemporary studies on speaking in tongues reveal that it is a highly emotional
and ecstatic phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that seems to be out of the person’s
control which is why Paul states, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind
(νοῦς) is unfruitful.”

Unlike prophecy, which seems to be under the control of the
prophet, glossolalia is manifested in ecstatic outbursts. Apparently, there were members
in the Corinthian congregation who were engaging in these outbursts and cursing Jesus
under the supposed influence of the Holy Spirit. This is probably the reason for Paul’s

199 1 Cor. 14:17
200 1 Cor 14:18
201 Rom. 8:26
203 Felicitas D. Goodman, Speaking in Tongues; a Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia (Chicago:
204 1 Cor. 14:14
claim that “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed."  

He then proceeds to discuss the former manner in which the Corinthians were led and their behavior which was ultimately idolatrous. These behaviors may have dealt with pagan cultic initiations which had something to do with ecstatic experience. Conzelmann states, “They are here treated as Gentile Christians, which is in keeping with the composition of the community…The phrase certainly implies that they were not their own masters; but this can just as well mean being dominated in a general way by demons, the actors in pagan cults, as being swept into ecstasy.”  

We have seen in the last chapter that ecstasy and altered states of consciousness may involve demons, or acting out certain rituals to bring about frenzied states.

Paul levels the playing field for all of those who believe they are spiritual by emphasizing the unity of the body of Christ and the manifestations of the Spirit. The participation in the Christian community is one that does not exert power over one another, but utilizes the gifts that each has been given. He closes out the section with several rhetorical questions:

All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?  

The clear answer to all of the questions is a resounding NO!

It is interesting to note that Paul makes reference to cymbals and gongs in this passage. These are primarily used in Greek ecstatic cults probably evoked a sense of awe or wonder to the initiate. Again, Paul conjures up the previous life of the Corinthians in order to recall their former ways. Paul argues that just as the former life they led as pagans was nothing without love, living with spiritual gifts (charismata) is nothing without love, and indeed will pass away just as their former life changed. Utilizing an

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205  1 Cor 12:3; Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians 574-75.
207  1 Cor. 12:29-30
eschatological argument, Paul states that the gifts and the spiritual abilities that the Corinthians pride themselves on will pass away and even now, they are not perfect. We prophecy in part because we only know in part, but in the future we shall see everything as it should be seen.\textsuperscript{209} In this argument, Paul asserts that all the spiritual gifts and abilities that the Corinthians pride themselves on will be done away in the future.

Both speaking in tongues and prophecy have close parallels. They both are considered inspired speech and are prompted by the Holy Spirit. While one is a revelation \textit{from} God (prophecy), the other is a communication or prayer \textit{to} God (speaking in tongues). Both may have been ecstatic in nature and are considered as spiritually induced. Speaking in tongues has commonalities with other ancient cultures, especially in Greece and the prophets of Babylon.\textsuperscript{210} We have seen that the Pythia uttered ambiguous gibberish and the \textit{prophetes} interpreted the statement in a prophetic verse. In this regard Paul draws a distinction and states that the Christian is to speak in tongues and have it interpreted, but it is directed to God in prayer or praise. Prophecy is distinguished from tongues because it is a Spirit induced revelation given to an individual.

\textbf{Other Ecstatic Phenomena in Early Christian Literature}

The word \textit{εκστασίας} or a variant thereof occurs in the New Testament seven times. Each of the times the translators translated the text as “trance, “astonishment, or “amazement” and only three out of the seven times is there a revelatory experience involved. The use of \textit{εκστασίας} in conjunction with a revelatory experiences is different from prophecy or an inspired utterance. In each of the revelatory instances, there is a personal direction given \textit{to} an individual through some sort of supernatural medium. The revelation is specific to his/her case or situation and does not denote that any sort of utterance was given, hence lacking the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The first usage occurs in Mark during one of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus. The disciples received word from a man in the tomb wearing white, that Jesus was

\textsuperscript{209} 1 Cor. 13:9-10
not in the tomb and that he had risen. The disciples fled the tomb “for trembling and astonishment (ἐκστάσις) had gripped them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”\(^{211}\) There is no indication that these disciples had any type of revelatory experience or prophesied under an altered state of consciousness. The revelation of Jesus’ absence from the tomb and the messenger’s declaration that he had risen was enough to cause fear and a state of being beside or outside of oneself.

The second instance of ἐκστάσις occurs in Luke when Jesus healed a paralytic man. The Pharisees question his authority to heal by forgiving sins and Jesus responds. As a result of the healing the crowds “were all struck with astonishment (ἐκστάσις) and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."\(^{212}\) In this case, like the one above, there is no indication of any prophetic revelation. Like the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection, the healing miracle caused a group experience of ἐκστάσις as well as fear.

The third use of ἐκστάσις is different from the previous two because it does involve a revelatory experience. The apostle Peter was praying on a rooftop and became hungry. While waiting for food Peter “fell into a trance (ἐκστάσις).”\(^{213}\) Oddly enough, his vision involved eating. The mention of food and Peter’s hunger makes one wonder whether or not the trance was induced by starvation. If it was not the state of hunger it very well could be the state of prayer. Peter later relays his experience to the Jerusalem council, stating that he was praying and fell into a trance.\(^{214}\)

The final use of ἐκστάσις is in Paul’s accounting of his actions before the people of Jerusalem.\(^{215}\) Paul gives an account of his conversion and acknowledging Jesus whom he persecuted and how he received his sight back. He then states that while he was in Jerusalem praying he fell into a trance (ἐκστάσις) in which he saw and heard Jesus give

\(^{211}\) Mark 16:8; It is interesting that Mark uses ekstasis in this context because it has direct correlation with the ineffable feeling of altered states of consciousness. Contrary to Oepke, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus or the angels who announced his resurrection brought about ecstasy and fear to the extent that the disciples could not speak. See “ἐκστάσις” TDNT pg. 457
\(^{212}\) Luke 5:26
\(^{213}\) Acts 10:10
\(^{214}\) There is no indication that the Jerusalem council thought that the state of ecstasy or trance was unusual or “ungodly”. Their reaction seems to indicate that they, like Peter and others in the early church community believed that ecstasy was a valid religious experience and possibly held epistemological value.
\(^{215}\) Acts 22:15-21
him instructions. In this case, like in Peter’s, prayer was involved in the state of ecstasy.

In the second epistle to the Corinthians Paul acknowledges that he was at one time raised up to the “third heaven” in ecstasy. He claims that he was “caught up” (ἀρπαγέντω) to heaven.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

Paul claims that he was taken up to heaven and was imparted with some sort of revelation. But he later says that he should not boast about the things he saw and the experiences he had, even though they were wonderful. In an effort to keep Paul from boasting the Lord gave him a thorn in his flesh.

Paul follows a line of rabbinic ideology and mysticism in this section. Rabbis in the past and contemporary with Paul were prone to ecstatic visions and experiences. These experiences were not just for the Jewish heroes like Enoch and Elijah, but for Rabbis as well. According to the Babylonian Talmud several rabbis were caught up into a religious experience which produced divine singing, revelation of a divine banquet, angelic visitations and fire. In the same tractate there is story about four men who entered the “garden” or paradise who afterward suffered extreme consequences. One died, one went mad, the third “mutilated shoots” and the last man, Rabbi Akiba left the experience unscathed. In the Hekhalot Rabbati of the third century CE, Rabbi Ishmael ascends to the heavenly world and sees angels and the throne of God.

Paul’s experience then is not unfounded in Jewish circles. Though he does not utilize the word ἐκστασίς in this passage, he does describe a feeling of ineffability and an inability to describe what he was told or saw.

216 Acts 22:17
217 2 Cor. 12:2-4
218 Babylonian Talmud, Hagiga 14B
219 See Tabor, Things Unutterable: Paul’s Ascent to Paradise in Its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts.
The most revealing religious experience that could be classified as ecstatic is the Apocalypse of John. In this book John gives an account of a vision he experienced on the Lord’s day and how an angel taught him and showed him things in a vision. It is generally regarded as apocalyptic in nature, but the prophecies that he was given also retain a level of the present time in which John lived.

**Conclusion**

We have seen in this chapter that rather than being a strange or foreign phenomenon, ecstatic experiences were quite alive in early Jewish and Christian circles during its early period. Philo and Josephus adopted a view of inspiration that was influenced by Plato and believed that madness and uncontrollability was a sign of a true prophet. Experiences of ecstasy were found in the life of Balaam as evidence of true prophecy. In this vein early Judaism adopted the Hellenistic ideas of inspiration while adding Jewish moral distinctives between true and false prophecy.

The early Church did not employ similar standards for inspired speech and prophecy. Though early Christian authors utilized the language of ecstasy to describe some of their experiences, they distanced themselves from their Jewish contemporaries by claiming that prophecy was controllable, whereas glossolalia was not. The Holy Spirit was the only means of inspiration for the early Christian community and there is no evidence that they believed angels brought about prophecy.

Early Christian religious experience included phenomena such as speaking in tongues which is generally regarded as ecstatic outbursts in unlearned languages. Whether another person knows what is being said or not is inconsequential. For Paul what is important is that an accompanying interpretation or translations accompany this in a congregational setting.

In contrast to speaking in tongues, the manifestation of prophecy, though occurring fairly infrequently throughout the New Testament, was an important inspired utterance enabled by the Spirit. The Spirit enabled the prophet to speak an edifying word for the edification of the church. Robertson and Plummer put it best, “Prophesying was
the power of seeing and making known the nature and will of God, a gift of insight into truth and of power in imparting it, and hence a capacity for building up men’s characters, quickening their wills, and encouraging their spirits.”220

While both prophecy and glossolalia were inspired speech and Paul had no problem with either one, it is clear that the Corinthian community needed some correction in their worship. Though there is no solid evidence that the prophecy was ecstatic to the degree that one lost his/her senses, we should not rule out the possibility that the filling of the individual by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was ecstatic. Unlike pagan prophecy, in which the prophet or prophetess engaged him/herself to the point of losing consciousness, the Christian prophet had control of his/her senses. If Christian prophecy was ecstatic, then it was at a low level of disassociation in which the individual still had control of the expressions.221

We have seen that ecstatic experiences can be revelatory containing a feeling of fear or awe. Throughout the New Testament there are ecstatic revelatory experiences which two of the primary apostles, Peter and Paul, both experience. While the details of their experience are not specifically expounded upon, we know that they did engage in ecstatic behavior. In each case the revelatory experiences or ecstasies were given to individuals for their instruction or edification, which is exactly the criterion Paul lays out for prophecy and tongues.

With regard to Eusebius’ claim that none of the prophets prophesied in a manic way, I believe we have seen that some actually did engage in ecstatic behavior which altered not only their states of being, but their religious beliefs as well. Early Jewish authors such as Philo and Josephus merged the Hellenistic beliefs of ecstasy and prophecy together. Prophecy brought about loss of senses and control. Paul divided the two experiences and stated that the two were separate experiences. These changes in religious beliefs went on to alter the shape of the early church. Without them, neither Peter nor Paul would have reached out to the Gentile communities.

Eusebius’ claim against Montanus certainly does portray Montanus with pagan traits, which is probably quite accurate. Montanus stood in the balance between

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221 Ibid. 323.
Hellenistic Judaism’s ideas of prophecy and inspiration and the early Christianity’s belief that the Holy Spirit was bringing about inspiration.\(^{222}\) Montanus, Eusebius claims, engaged in prophetic ecstasy and prophesied in a trance. These behaviors were not beyond the realm of history. While there is no indication that early Christian prophets prophesied in ecstasy or in other states of consciousness, it is not beyond the realm of probability. The Corinthian community was in a state of division and spiritual chaos. Paul’s exertion of proper worship guidelines indicates that speaking in tongues was something that was ecstatic, whereas prophecy was controllable. While ecstatic experiences did occur in the church, there is no solid indication that prophecy, at least in the Corinthian community, occurred in such a manner.\(^{223}\)

\(^{222}\) This has led some scholars to believe that Montanism was an attempt to revive an aspect of Judaism. I believe this is a completely different phenomenon because Montanism does not believe an angel or “divine spirit” brought about the inspiration, but rather the Paraclete or Holy Spirit.

\(^{223}\) On this issue I must disagree with D. Aune who states, “This deliberate attempt by Christian heresiologist to paganize Montanus has led modern scholars to agree that Montanist prophecy was an intrusion of pagan revelatory ecstasy into Christianity. This view is completely false. All of the major features of early Montanism, including the behavior associated with possession trance, are derived from early Christianity.” Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* 313. n63.
Chapter 4

Prophecy and the Rules of Discernment

The final chapter will show how early Christian attitudes about prophecy and ecstatic experience established a dividing line between proper and improper worship behavior, in addition to differences between pagan and Christian understandings of inspiration and worship. This transition was grounded in the early church’s self-identification and distinction between pagan and Christian cultural development. In grappling with what it meant to be “the Church,” the early church developed certain rules and customs of appropriate behavior in order to distinguish truth from error, heresy from orthodoxy. One of these rules involved the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in an orderly fashion. We shall see that the early Church fathers reacted consistently in their response to pagan prophecy and divination, which inspired the expulsion of the Montanists.

Introduction

The early church had a lot to contend with. To begin, they had the obligation to go out and convert the Jews while appealing to the Gentiles. They then were faced with intellectual arguments from pagans and Jews which warranted lengthy responses. Furthermore, they had internal debates and confusion over which part of the Jewish law was required to be upheld and which was to be rejected. Also, they had to deal with those within the church who were proclaiming Gnostic doctrines as another means of salvation. With all this in mind it is quite remarkable that the early church even survived. This survival came at a cost. In the process of developing into an organizational unit certain rules, either spoken or tacit, were developed which caused certain members of the Church to be pushed out or to willingly separate themselves. These rules or doctrines helped preserve the church and helped to maintain order within the organization.
When rules are created and not everyone adheres to them or they are not clearly stated, some groups are marginalized and pushed to the periphery even if their claims do have some validity. This was the case with Montanism. However, the rules created were laid out much earlier than previously thought. In keeping with the Apostles’ doctrine and understanding of prophecy, Eusebius’ claims have merit. He laid down the official gauntlet with regard to prophecy in the fourth century, the impact of which changed the future of the church. Thereafter, ecstatic experiences were classified as “mystical” and prophecy waned in the church.

This chapter will examine some of the rules that were developed concerning prophets, prophecy, and apostolic authority. These rules and roles that accompany them will help give us a better understanding of Eusebius’ rhetoric as well as the means by which the early church drew the lines concerning inspiration and prophecy. It will show that in addition to an effort to distance itself from Jewish understanding of inspiration the primary reaction against Montanism was due to its identification with pagan prophecy. This chapter will explore the prophets and prophetic experience of the New Testament and early church in contrast to the reports made by Eusebius against the Montanists. It will also explore some of the rules laid down for appropriate worship and the politics of social change as a part of church development.

**Early Church Rules for Prophecy**

Throughout the New Testament and other early Christian literature there were considerations of who was a “true” prophet and who was a “false” one. The ancient world was full of charlatans, magicians, and false prophets.\(^{224}\) It was necessary to discern whether or not one was a false prophet.\(^{225}\) Discernment involves making choices and adhering to standards, or creating them if they do not already exist. Eusebius utilized as many standards as existed in his time, and created a few of his own. Montanus and his


prophets were accused of being false prophets for a number of reasons. In order to determine the veracity of this claim it is necessary to examine the standards by which the early church was to decide such a matter.

The determining factors for discerning a false prophet from a real one in the Judeo-Christian tradition changed over time. Initially, in the Hebrew Bible the true prophet was someone (1) who spoke in the name of the Lord and (2) whose words came to pass. If the prophet’s words did not come to pass he was considered a false prophet.\textsuperscript{226} The punishment was death. Similarly, if they prophesied in another god’s name they were leading the people astray and were to be put to death.\textsuperscript{227} Though this Deuteronomic standard was shown to be upheld throughout the Hebrew Bible, there is no evidence that any Hebrew false prophets were put to death by community members. In fact, those who ended up being true prophets in the Hebrew tradition often were thought to be false prophets. By the time of the early church false prophets were seen to be workers of magic and possessed by demons.

In the Matthean community there presumably were false prophets and those wishing to infiltrate the church. Jesus warns against these false prophets who outwardly wear “sheep’s clothing” though inwardly they are wolves.\textsuperscript{228} Jesus’ way of discernment was by the “fruit” they produced which is correlated with the way they think and behave.\textsuperscript{229} In a following parable, Jesus says that a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and conversely a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. It seems that the Matthean community understood the moral sense by which to discern true from false prophecy.

Paul’s earliest reference to judging prophecy and inspired speech appears in the first letter to the Thessalonians (c.51 CE). In this letter Paul exhorts the church “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise (\textit{exouqene,w}) prophetic utterances. But examine

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{226}] This was one criterion by which the early Church judged Montanus and his movement. Eusebius, \textit{Eh} 5.17.
\item[\textsuperscript{227}] David Noel Freedman, ”Between God and Man: Prophets in Ancient Israel,” in \textit{Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship}, ed. Yehoshua Gitay (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 64-65. Interestingly enough, the only prophets that were ever put to death except the prophets of Baal, who Elijah executed. Hannaniah died the same year as predicted (Jer 28:17), but this was not a community act as prescribed in Deut 15:3; 18:18-22. In fact, prophecies which did not come to pass such as Ezekiel 29:17-20 where the prophet concedes that the prophecy against Tyre did not occur as predicted earlier in Ezekiel 26:7-21.
\item[\textsuperscript{228}] Matt. 7:15
\end{footnotes}
(δοκιμάζετε) everything carefully." Presumably there were some in the community, probably the rising leadership who wanted to “quench the Spirit,” which Paul commanded should be allowed to flourish. In correlation with the Spirit’s flame, the prophecies that were given in conjunction from the Spirit were not to be rejected, despised, or mishandled. The spiritual gifts were prized among Pauline communities and challenges to what was uttered or done by the Spirit was difficult to challenge because of the authority with which they were delivered. Because of the abilities of those not in leadership, the leaders may have felt threatened and sought to suppress such spiritual gifts.

Paul does not give a criterion by which to judge the prophecies and has presumably either had already laid down the foundation or wanted the Thessalonians to judge according to ethical or moral standards. He commanded the congregation to abstain from evil, with no following clarification. This gives a sense that the Thessalonians already knew what to consider as evil and possibly who was a true or false prophet.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul lays out the rules for prophecy and inspired speech more clearly and requests that everything be done in decency and order. No one speaking by the Spirit would say “Jesus is cursed.” Paul’s primary criteria for prophecy was for the edification (παρακάλεῖ) of the church.

In the same letter to the Corinthians there is a call to judge (διακρίνω) the words of the prophets. As in the letter to the Thessalonians, he does not mention by what standard or what should the others think; presumably he had already mentioned or taught the Corinthians the standard. It could also be that they were to judge the prophet’s words according to the level of edification the community received by them. If the community

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230 1 Thes. 5:19-21
232 1 Thes. 5:22
233 1 Cor. 14:40
234 1 Cor 12:2
235 Paul also uses the word διακρίνω in an earlier chapter in 1 Corinthians concerning taking the Lord’s supper.
is built up, then the prophet is a true prophet.\textsuperscript{236} The ultimate standard by which Paul claims that one is a true prophet is whether or not the prophet accepts Paul’s standards as a command of the Lord.\textsuperscript{237} Here Paul is claiming his apostolic authority as the primary means by which one can discern true and false prophets. The true prophet edifies the church and spurs them on towards love and good deeds, and is one he is one who recognizes the source of faith as coming from the teaching of the Apostles.\textsuperscript{238}

In first Corinthians, Paul mentions distinguishing (\textit{διάκρισις}) of spirits as a spiritual gift.\textsuperscript{239} This distinguishing or judging is considered a spiritual gift by which one is able to evaluate or distinguish if a spirit(s) is present and what kind of spirit it is. This discernment is related to the ability to evaluate one who brings a “true” or “false” prophecy as well as one who brings a gospel message.\textsuperscript{240} Robertson and Plummer state, “The gift of discerning of spirits enabled its possessor to discriminate true prophets from false, and judge whether what was announced came from God or was an illusion.”\textsuperscript{241}

In the second letter to the Corinthians and in Galatians, Paul chastises each congregation and speaks against those who would preach another gospel.\textsuperscript{242} Whether they be angels from heaven or another apostle, they are not to be accepted. In 2 Corinthians Paul mentions the possibility of receiving “another spirit” which was not to be accepted. This reception of another spirit provides another standard which Paul laid out. Paul claims to be the “father” of these communities, who laid the foundations with the assistance of others such as Apollos and Barnabas.\textsuperscript{243} Hence, the claim that another spirit might be given is one which he rejects.\textsuperscript{244} To the churches that Paul established or worked in, it was impermissible to receive another gospel or another spirit, whether by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{236} The question remains, how does one measure or quantify edification? This is highly subjective and presumably would vary from person to person. Johnson, "Norms for True and False Prophecy in First Corinthians," 42.
\item \textsuperscript{237} 1 Cor. 14:37-38
\item \textsuperscript{238} Johnson, "Norms for True and False Prophecy in First Corinthians," 43.
\item \textsuperscript{239} 1 Cor. 12:10
\item \textsuperscript{240} Fee, \textit{God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul} 171-72.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Robertson and Plummer, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians} 267.
\item \textsuperscript{242} I. Howard Marshall notes that the tone in Galatians and in 2 Corinthians changes from that of 1 Corinthians. See Marshall, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earlier Christianity."
\item \textsuperscript{243} 1 Cor. 4:15; Acts 13: -14:Gal 4:13
\item \textsuperscript{244} Eusebius repeatedly uses the term “bastard spirit” in his polemics against the Montanists. This notion brings up the idea that the Montanists were preaching “another gospel” and were engaged with “another spirit” which had not been given throughout the life of the church.
\end{itemize}
“false” apostles or by angels. These agents were servants of Satan and deceived the community.\textsuperscript{245}

In 1 John the author lays down the means of “testing the spirits” in the context of prophecy. The author encourages his readers to “test every spirit” because “many false prophets have gone out into the world.”\textsuperscript{246} To test the spirit of the prophet one had to see if he accepted that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. This was presumably a test to see if the person held a Docetic doctrine which said that Jesus had no real body. Those who do not accept Jesus as coming in the flesh are from the antichrist.\textsuperscript{247} This means of discerning is quite different from the other means of discernment. This discernment is not moral, but spiritual by which one confronts the spirit of the prophet according to his doctrine.

Contrary to Paul’s teaching that every prophetic utterance should be put to the test, the Didache asserts that prophets are not to be put to the test. It is clear that there is a shift in prophetic evaluation in this community and time. In the Didache judgments about who was a true and false prophet were centered on outward behavior and ethics rather than prophetic speech. The recipients of the Didache were not to accept any prophet who took money or stayed for a given amount of time.\textsuperscript{248} There is a command not to test any prophet who speaks in the Spirit (καὶ πάντα προφήτην λαλοῦντα ἐν πνεύματί οὐ περάσετε οὐδέ διακρίνετε) which is contrary to Paul’s command.\textsuperscript{249} The author(s) further mention a prophet who “in the spirit orders a table to be spread shall not eat therefrom; but if he does he is a false prophet.”\textsuperscript{250} This statement probably considers a prophet ordering someone to make them dinner as a divine proclamation a false prophet.

In the \textit{Shepherd of Hermas} Mandate 11 there is considerable explanation concerning discerning false prophets and true prophets. The false prophets are those who

\textsuperscript{245} 2 Cor. 11:13-15
\textsuperscript{246} 1 John 4:1
\textsuperscript{247} 1 John 4:1-3
\textsuperscript{248} Did, 11.7
\textsuperscript{249} \textsuperscript{249} “The Didache,” 22. translates the “in the spirit” sections as “in ecstasy.” While the term “in the spirit” can and does imply prophecy and prophetic experience, there is no real indication of ecstatic experience in this case.
\textsuperscript{250} Did. 11.9 The reference to “in the spirit” may refer to some sort of ecstasy, but a prophet ordering a table to be prepared for a meal is self-seeking and may not legitimately be “in the spirit” at all, which is why he is deemed a false prophet. This phrase does not appear in the Coptic text.
seek out believers who wish to make consultations. Instead of receiving true prophecies they receive empty answers. Those who are double minded Christians seek after the prophet as they would a wizard. Here we have an exposition against those seeking words of prophecy as if they were consulting pagan oracles. Hermas asks the angel how to tell who is the true and who is the false prophet. Like the Didache, the issue comes down to character. The one who has the Spirit is gentle and humble and holds himself below others. He does not speak except when the Holy Spirit gives him words. He does not accept money for his prophecies. Hermas was to “test by his life and his works.”

Tertullian, a Montanist in his later career, believed in the prophetic ecstasies, but practiced them under Pauline discernment. Despite the fact that he uses the term amentia as meaning “madness” or “ecstasy” there is good reason to believe that he held to the Pauline understanding of inspiration and discernment. Tertullian believed that the Holy Spirit was working among the congregation he was a member of and he knew personally a woman who received visions and dreams during their services. He states, “There is among us a sister who has been favored with wonderful gifts of revelation which she experiences in an ecstasy of the spirit during the sacred ceremonies on the Lord’s day. She converses with the angels and, sometimes, with the Lord Himself. She perceives hidden mysteries and has the power of reading the hearts of men and of prescribing remedies for such men as need them.” He goes on to use Paul’s writings as providing legitimacy for the presence of visions and revelation.

We have seen that the process of discernment of prophecy and true and false prophets seems to be no easy task and changed over time. The Israelites had standards which related to prophetic fulfillment and idolatry. Paul issued a criteria of discernment based on edification, exhortation, moral integrity, and the acceptance of his doctrine.

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251 Shepherd of Hermas 11.1-2; The word “soothsayer” as it is usually translated in vs. 2 is the Greek word μαντις. Aune, Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World 227.
253 Witherington III, Jesus the Seer: A Progress of Prophecy.
254 Ibid. 392-95.
255 Tertullian, De Anime 9.4
256 Tertullian, De Anime 9.4
Later Christian literature such as the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* reduce the discernment process to character issues of work deeds. The prophets were to be moral and upstanding believers who were to pull their own weight in the community and to only speak when God gave him/her the words.

**Christian Responses to Divination and Pagan Practices**

The early church viewed prophecy and worship of other gods as base and idolatrous. Paul believed that the worship of other gods and sacrificing to idols was on a par with worshipping demons.  

During the time of Christianity and early Judaism demons were seen as malevolent beings and as the source of inspiration of itinerant pagan prophets and oracle centers. The early Christian fathers attack this demonic source, as well as the behavior that was induced by the demons which could include mania and frenzy. As we saw above, the Greeks’ *daimons* could be evil, but could also be good and sources of information. Socrates himself claimed he had a *daimon* who told them the future.

Other early Christian writers included the work of demons with the work of prophets and pagan oracle sites. In his *Exhortation to the Greeks* Clement drew a contrast between the traveling minstrel of the Greeks who brought with them religious rites and the new minstrel, the Word of God who was the New Song with real power to save humanity from the power of demons. Clement of Alexandria urged the Greeks to give up their pagan legends and rites in exchange for accepting the Christian faith. He states:

> And so Cithaeron, and Helicon, and the mountains of the Odrysi, and the initiatory rites of the Thracians, mysteries of deceit, are hallowed and celebrated in hymns. For me, I am pained at such calamities as form the subjects of tragedy,

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257 1 Cor. 10:19-20  
258 Plato, *Apology* 31-32  
259 Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 1.4
though but myths; but by you the records of miseries are turned into dramatic compositions.

But the dramas and the raving poets, now quite intoxicated, let us crown with ivy; and distracted outright as they are, in Bacchic fashion, with the satyrs, and the frenzied rabble, and the rest of the demon crew, let us confine to Cithaeron and Helicon, now antiquated.260

Clement later elaborates on how Orpheus and others who lead initiation rites should not even be considered as men because their music which was influenced by daimons led individuals into error.261 He commands the Greeks “Do not therefore seek diligently after godless sanctuaries, nor after the mouths of caverns full of jugglery, nor the Thesprotatian caldron, nor the Dodonian copper….The Castalian spring, at least, is all silent. So the spring of Colophon; and the rest of the prophetic streams are likewise dead.”262 The actions performed at these oracle centers and the results that occurred were hallucinations which were bound for destruction and a curse is upon those who began the rites and religious organizations of the Greeks.263 Clement like other early Christians believed that the religious behavior of the Greeks and their gods were a sham brought about by demons of deception.

Clement gives no real conception of what inspiration means to him and he does not reject Plato outright. In fact, he believes Plato and some other Greek philosophers are close to the truth concerning the existence of One God and his presence in the universe. Unlike Plato, Clement believes the characterization of inspiration and the portrayal of ecstatic behavior are that of demons. Justin Martyr (110-165 CE) also believed that demons were the source of Greco-Roman religion and the source of evil and deceit. He states in his First Apology:

Yielding to unreasoning passion, and to the instigation of evil demons, you punish us without consideration or judgment. For the truth shall be spoken; since of old

260 Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 1
261 Ibid. 1
262 Ibid. Chapter 2
263 Ibid 2.11-12
these evil demons, effecting apparitions of themselves, both defiled women and
corrupted boys, and showed such fearful sights to men, that those who did not use
their reason in judging of the actions that were done, were struck with terror; and
being carried away by fear, and not knowing that these were demons, they called
them gods, and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for
himself. And when Socrates endeavored, by true reason and examination, to bring
these things to light, and deliver men from the demons, then the demons
themselves, by means of men who rejoiced in iniquity, compassed his death, as an
atheist and a profane person, on the charge that "he was introducing new
divinities; "and in our case they display a similar activity."  

Justin attempts to “overturn the history of the Greek religion in one bold stroke.” 265  In an
effort to both legitimize Christianity by giving it ancient ties to Judaism as well as
defending against accusations by both Jewish and Greco-Roman thinkers, the early
Christian fathers had to do all they could to provide a cogent apologetic defense to their
critics. This included using pagan sources as well as Judeo-Christian scriptures and
providing a moral critique of the gods and their followers. Justin, like Clement, does
away with the source of inspiration and the behaviors associated with them by attacking
the rites as demonic. As Droge states, “the demons have successfully reduced the human
race to slavery through magic and terror …the demons have masked themselves as gods
in order to mislead men by their immoral example.” 266  

Origen (185-254 CE) was one of the primary critics of the Pythia and the means
of her inspiration. In Contra Celsum Origen argues against the pagan gods who heal and
bring about foreknowledge and criticizes their virtue, purity and moderation. Apollo was
a god of uncontrollable lust who entered into the Pythia by way of her genitals. 267  The
Pythia and the inspiration she received was by demons which drove her into an ecstasy in

264 Justin Martyr, Apology i.5.2-6.1
265 Arthur J. Droge, Homer or Moses?: Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture (Tübingen:
266 Ibid. 57.
267 Origen, Contra Celsum 3.25; 7.3
which she lost control of herself.\textsuperscript{268} In comparing the Pythia to the Hebrew prophets Origen criticizes the ecstasy which the pagans experienced. This loss of self was criticized by Origen as not bringing clarity but obscurity, which was contrary to the nature of God. “If, then, the Pythian priestess is beside herself when she prophesies, what spirit must that be which fills her mind and clouds her judgment with darkness, unless it be of the same order with those demons which many Christians cast out of persons possessed with them?”\textsuperscript{269} The ecstasy, then, is caused by demons.

The first Latin father, Tertullian (145-220 CE) believed that demons were a source of knowledge and that the soul bore witness to their existence as well as the existence of one God.\textsuperscript{270} He pays little attention to pagan oracles throughout his works, probably because of his adherence to Montanism and the belief that ecstasy could be a state produced by the Holy Spirit. He is the only church father who, according to Jerome, wrote a book on ecstasy but this has conveniently been lost.\textsuperscript{271} He believed that “For when a man is rapt in the Spirit, especially when he beholds the glory of God, or when God speaks through him, he necessarily loses his sensation, because he is overshadowed with the power of God, a point concerning which there is a question between us and the carnally-minded.”\textsuperscript{272} Tertullian is the main exception of many church fathers concerning pagan and Christian inspiration. While he held that demons existed and were a source of knowledge and even foreknowledge, he drew a line between ecstatic states brought about by demons and those brought about by God. In this he shows his Montanist beliefs. It is clear that Tertullian is aware of those criticizing the New Prophecy and he believes them to be “carnally minded” rather than spiritually minded.

Minucius Felix (160-210 CE?) gives a rather lengthy exposition on the nature of pagan oracles and demons as the source of inspiration. After statements about some who do not believe in oracles, Felix states, “Yet, once in a while, auspices or oracles have hit upon the truth. To be sure, one could believe that, among the many falsehoods, mere

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{268} Origen, \textit{contra Celsum} 7.3
\item \textsuperscript{269} Origen, \textit{contra Celsum} 7.4
\item \textsuperscript{270} Tertullian, \textit{The Soul’s Testimony} 2.1; 3.1; 6.3; \textit{Spectacles} 23:1; \textit{Apology} 27:1-7
\item \textsuperscript{271} Jerome, \textit{On Illustrious Men}, 24, 40
\item \textsuperscript{272} Tertullian, \textit{Adv. Marcion} 4.22.4-5
\end{itemize}
chance may have given the impression of methodical planning. Yet, I will approach the very source of error and depravity… there exist deceitful and wandering spirits who have lost their heavenly vigor and have been dragged down by earthly stains and lusts… these spirits were known as ‘demons’ to the poets, were discussed by the philosophers, and were recognized by Socrates, who, according to the command and will of his attendant demon, would reject or pursue a certain line of action.” According to Felix, these demons inspire prophets, dwell in idols, direct the flight of birds, and produce oracles at various locations. The demons are the cause of madness and mania related to prophecy both within temples and outside them, as well as for certain dreams.

Like Clement and Paul before him, the fourthcentury historian Eusebius believed the oracle centers of the Greco-Roman world to be a demonically inspired hoax. In his works *The Proof of the Gospel* and *Preparation of the Gospel* Eusebius builds an argument against the credibility of pagan prophetic abilities. This argument is essential to granting Christians their place in the Greco-Roman world and attempts to provide legitimacy for their existence. In *Preparation for the Gospel* Eusebius lays down a long argument against the oracle centers and pays particular attention to Plutarch and strongly criticizes Porphyry’s *Of the Philosophy to be derived from Oracles*. The oracles at Delphi lacked coherence, and there was no blessing which came from any of her oracles. Only plagues and destruction of families and people resulted from her oracles.

In *The Proof of the Gospel* Eusebius allows the possibility that pagan prophecy and oracles may have some similarity to the Hebrew prophets and that there must be some god or demon that presides over the oracular sites which provides them with their prophetic ability. But these oracles and prophecies have been of no benefit, in contrast

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273 Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 26.8-9
274 Ibid, 27:1
275 Ibid. 27:3-4
to the Hebrew prophecies which were given for the benefit of all mankind and the fulfillment of them in Jesus. Another indication that these oracles were disingenuous was the fact that they became extinct. Like Clement’s statement that the springs have dried up, Eusebius claims that these oracles neither stood the test of time nor provided moral insight.  

Eusebius’ most significant claim is that pagan prophecy causes a separation of the prophet and his/her natural reasoning faculties in contrast to the prophecy given by the Holy Spirit which gives clear reasoning and pure thought. He states:

Then, too, the evil demons, being akin to darkness involved the soul in darkness and mist by its visitation, and stretched out him who was under its power like a corpse, divorced from his natural faculties of reason, not following his own words or actions, completely insensible and demented, in accordance with which perhaps they may have called such a condition “manteia,” as being a form of “mania” whereas the truly divine Spirit, which is of the nature of light, or rather light itself, brings at once a new and bright daylight to every soul on whom it comes revealing it as far more clear and thoughtful than ever it was before, so that it is sober and wide awake, and above all can understand and interpret prophecies. Wherefore we seem rightly and truly to call such men prophets, because the Holy Spirit gives them a sure knowledge and light on the present, as well as a true and accurate knowledge of the future. See, then, if it is not a far better and truer argument which says that the Holy Spirit visits souls purified and prepared with rational and clear minds to receive the divine, than that of those who shut up the divine in lifeless matter and dusky caves, and in the impure souls of men and women…

Eusebius’ attitude with regard to pagan prophecy is similar to his predecessors. Demons are the ultimate cause of oracle centers and are in no way comparable to the

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279 Ibid. 5. pr. 17.
280 Ibid. 5 pr. 26-27
281 Plato, *Phaedrus* p 244c
282 Eusebius, *Proof* 5.209a-d.
prophecy of the Hebrews or the Christians. Prophecy by the Holy Spirit is clearly better and more refined than the pagan prophets who are temporary and bring about evil. We have recorded in the *Proof of the Gospel* not only the argument for the legitimacy of the Christian faith, but Eusebius’ attitude regarding true and false prophecy. For Eusebius, there is no ambiguous prophecy or strange speech associated with those who are inspired. Unlike the pagan prophets, the prophecy given by the Holy Spirit is clear and intelligible, not disassociated from reason. This he contends is one of the primary means that pagan prophecy is certainly inferior to the Hebrew Prophets. This strongly ties into his accusation against Montanus and his followers.

The fourth century Church father Lactantius compiled quite a bit of information on demons and their ability to orchestrate and tell the future. In his *Divine Institutes* he traces the origin of Greek thought concerning demons as angels who were sent to govern over regions of the earth who were beguiled by the devil into his service.283 This is clearly a Judeo-Christian interpretation. He continues to examine the Greco-Roman view as such: the spirits, or demons were indwelling powers which are skilled and believe they are gods. They know future events, but not everything for they do not know the future plans of God.284 For this reason, they give ambiguous answers when consulted.

Interestingly enough, Lactantius, like Eusebius, Clement and Augustine, was willing to quote the Sibylline Oracles not only as a source of true revelation, but against augury, necromancy and other forms of divination.285 The Sibyl was seen as one who promoted monotheism and prophesied the coming of Christ. Lactantius cites the Eyrthrean Sibyl as speaking against divination when she said, “Because all these things are deceiving, just as foolish men are finding out this day.”286

Athanasius, champion against the Arian heresy, wrote, “And whereas formerly every place was full of the deceit of the oracles, and the oracles at Delphi and Dodona, and in Boeotia and Lycia and Libya and Egypt, and those of the Cabiri, and the Pythoness

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283 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* II.14
284 Ibid. II.14
285 On the patristic use of the Sibylline Oracles see Thompson, "Patristic Use of Sibylline Oracles."
286 Sibylline Oracles, frg. 3.228
were held in repute by men’s imagination, now, since Christ has begun to be preached everywhere, their madness also has ceased and there is none among them to divine any more. And whereas formerly demons used to deceive men’s fancy, occupying springs or rivers, trees or stones, and thus imposed upon the simple by their juggleries; now, after the divine visitation of the Word, their deception has ceased.”287 The madness, along with the false oracles, was seen as a manifestation of demons which ceased after the coming of Jesus.

John Chrysostom also believed that soothsayers who behaved in ecstasy were possessed by demons. “For this is peculiar to the soothsayer, to be beside himself, to be under compulsion, to be pushed, to be dragged, to be haled as a mad-man. But the prophet not so, but with sober mind and composed temper and knowing what he is saying, he uttereth all things.”288 With respect to the Pythia, Chrysostom is in accord with Origen and believes that the behavior of the priestess and was shameful and caused his audience to blush.289

The final church Father we shall examine is Augustine of Hippo. In his work *The City of God* Augustine lays out an argument against the gods and divination of the pagans. The pagans had taken elements of nature and had deified them. Though some gave magical arts the dishonorable name “witchcraft” and others the honorable “theurgy,” Augustine claims that both of these arts are wrought by demons.290 He pays particular attention to Plotinus’ double-mindedness concerning theurgy as he held that engaging in divination one can see gods and angels, though this does not bring about purification of the soul.291 Augustine also criticizes Plotinus’ pupil, Porphyry, for believing the same thing as his teacher and states that theurgy is the product of demons. He states, “Oh glorius theurgy, O gospel to be cried abroad, this purification of the soul where the power of filthy malice is greater than the appeal of unstained beneficence. No, no! not so, but hateful spirits playing tricks that we must distrust and denounce, while we

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287 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 47.1-2
289 Ibid. 2
290 Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 10.9
291 Ibid.
open our ears to the teaching that saves."\textsuperscript{292} Like those before him, Augustine believed that theurgy did not produce real answers. As a result, the Neoplatonic idea of ascending to the One was prone to be a false experience since it was brought about by false informants—demons.

\textit{Prophecy and Politics}

In his assault on the New Prophecy, Eusebius uses some of the criteria for discernment that Paul and others laid down and pulls no punches in attempting to show the error and immoral character of the Montanists. These accusations shaped the way of worship for certain Christian communities for years afterwards. The politics and choices that were involved in accusing Montanus and his followers played an important role in the shaping of the experiential and epistemological understanding of religious communities in the Roman Empire. Eusebius believed that the Holy Spirit was active during the time of the Montanists and was performing miracles among orthodox congregations. In reference to Irenaeus’ work \textit{Refutation and Overthrow of False Doctrine} Eusebius claims that “divine and miraculous power” remained in some churches.\textsuperscript{293} If the miraculous power remained among some churches and the Montanists claimed that they also had the Paraclete, the question boiled down to who was truly inspired?\textsuperscript{294}

According to Eusebius the Montanists engaged in prophetic ecstasy, Montanus muttered gibberish and convulsed when he prophesied.\textsuperscript{295} Some within his community believed he was possessed by the “bastard utterances,” while others were carried off, forgetting the Lord’s distinction, presumably concerning good and bad fruit of prophecy.\textsuperscript{296} The two women followers of Montanus, Maxilla and Prisca were also filled with the same spirit that Montanus received and they spoke out of their minds (\textit{lalei/n e`kfronwj}).\textsuperscript{297} Montanus possibly referred to Plutarch’s understanding of prophecy and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[292] Ibid 10.10
\item[293] Eusebius, \textit{Eh} 5.7.1.
\item[294] Nasrallah, \textit{An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity} 171.
\item[295] Eusebius, \textit{Eh} 5.16.7.
\item[296] Ibid.
\item[297] Ibid. 5.16.9.
\end{footnotes}
inspiration when he stated “Lo, the man is as a plectum, and I fly over him as a pick.”

This notion of being “picked” and having no control over what was said ran contrary to the notion of prophecy that the church held, especially with its pagan associations.

In his denunciation against the Montanists Eusebius made many claims concerning the manners and the inappropriate behavior of the Montanists. As we have seen, pagan prophecy was often ecstatic and unintelligible. Eusebius believed or perhaps knew that Christian prophecy was not conducted in this way. He claimed that true prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit was clear and understandable, not even needing an interpreter. In Eusebius’ account we see not just one but a number of forms of prophetic discernment occurring, which is quite unusual. From this it is clear that he viewed Montanism as a serious threat to the established traditions of the church. In his polemics against the Montanists he cites a number of sources which state that the Montanists were false prophets.

His first accusation against them is that their manner of prophecy was inconsistent with the manner of prophets from the Apostolic era and even those prior to this time. This is a bit too extensive a claim and is most inaccurate. The Hebrew prophets did prophesy in ecstasy and were prone to altered states of consciousness. They were given to unintelligible forms of speech and to behave like a prophet meant to be in a state of rage. But it does seem quite accurate that the prophets of the New Testament did not behave in an ecstatic manner. While visions and altered states of consciousness did occur to individuals such as Peter and Paul, they did not appear to be prophesying in a trance state.

The second accusation was that the Montanists were immoral. Apparently, the prophetesses abandoned their husbands and called Priscilla a virgin. Whether this was figurative or literal we do not know. Apparently one of the female followers of

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298 Epiphanius of Salamis, Pan. 4.1; Plutarch De Orac 427
299 At the beginning of his book Eusebius states that the power of the Holy Spirit had not yet left.
300 Eusebius, Proof V.
301 Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel.; Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel.
Montanus proclaimed that she was a virgin after she had left her husband to join the cult. To Eusebius such a claim was absurd, for surely one having left their husband would surely be a virgin. Furthermore, the women wore makeup which in antiquity was often a sign of harlotry. It is clear that Eusebius’ source, Apollinarius, took them seriously. He also was offended that the prophets received gifts for their services. Oddly enough he calls upon Scripture to vindicate his argument that prophets should not receive gifts, money, gold, and garments, though he gives no scriptural reference.

Apollonius cited several followers of the New Prophecy who apparently lived lavish lives or had shady pasts. One such follower was Alexander who referred to himself as a martyr. Alexander was a robber who was punished but forgiven by the prophetesses. Apparently the fact that the prophets were taking up with robbers and receiving gifts from outsiders was inappropriate and revealed their true nature.

Believing that the prophecy was from demons, like all pagan prophecy, Eusebius records an instance where an exorcism was unsuccessfully performed. This shift from moral accusations to direct confrontation of the spiritual entity is a large step against the movement, from words to action.

The final accusation, which aligns with the Hebraic notion of prophetic discernment, is the fact that none of the prophecies that were spoken by Montanus or his followers came true. To date, the New Jerusalem did not descend on the town of Pepuza in western Asia Minor and the end of the world had not come about.

The oracles and statements that we have handed down to us by Christian preservation also indicate that there certainly was a stronger element of pagan influence in Montanus’ prophecies than just the trances. His notion of inspiration which stated “Behold, man is like a lyre,” says the Spirit, “and I strike it like a plectrum. Man sleeps and I wake. Behold, it is the Lord who takes the heart out of them, and gives them a new

305 No scriptural reference is given in Eusebius’ account. Matthew 10:41 states that a prophet is worth his reward. Saul brought gifts to Samuel and gifts were given to Elijah in return for healing. It is possible that he had 1 Corinthians 9 in mind.
306 Eusebius, Eh 5.18.6-10.
heart.” The reference to the plectrum recalls Plutarch’s understanding of inspiration, one which was not acceptable to the orthodox.

Harnack believed that the decline of ecstatic prophecy began with the establishment of the canon. While his argument is noteworthy, it has been refuted. Ash has argued that the rise of the bishop and the establishment of the church hierarchy produced a sociological pressure which removed prophecy and prophets from the church. The letters of Ignatius of Antioch declare that it was the bishop who was inspired. This assertion of authority certainly played a particular role in the establishment of the organization of the church and an understanding of who was “inspired.”

This institutional transition of authority coupled with heretical associations brought about the decline of prophecy in the established church. There is an inverse relationship between the establishment of the church hierarchy and Christian prophets. Ironically, just as the early church fathers claimed that the pagan oracular streams would “dry up,” the Christian oracular stream did as well on account of the role of ecstasy. The ecstatic prophecy of the Montanists drove a wedge between the Church and other Christians, but also created a new definition of “inspiration.” Upholding the apostolic rules of prophecy and behavior came at a cost of losing fellow followers. The split over charisma followed Weber’s model.

Conclusion

308 Epiphanius, Pan 48.4
309 Plutarch, De Orac. 436
312 Robert McQueen Grant, Augustus to Constantine: The Thrust of the Christian Movement into the Roman World, [1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 148. Ignatius stated “For, when I was among you, I cried, I spoke with a loud voice: Give heed to the bishop and to the presbytery and deacons… But the Spirit proclaimed these words: Do nothing without the bishop.” From this we can see that there is a shift in teaching, at least in Antioch, away from the role and establishment of the prophet to the charismatic authority of the bishop.” Ignatius, Letter to the Philadelphians 7.2.2-4
We have seen that prophecy and the interpretations of them and the discernment process is multilayered. Eusebius’ argument and his sources against the Montanists took on elements of the Hebrew Bible, elements of Christian ethics, and a Christian understanding of prophecy that Paul had laid down in order to refute his opponents. The creation of these rules and the implementation of them was based upon the difference between inspiration by the Holy Spirit and by demons.

Scholars agree that the end of prophecy within the church was due to the Montanist movement. According to Ronald Heine, in an effort to solidify its power over all churches, the Roman Church completely denied the idea of prophecy after the apostles. In an effort to preserve the Pauline doctrine of discernment and true prophecy, Eusebius upheld the standard and believed that the Montanists were too close to pagan prophecy to be accepted by the Church. Their character and the lack of prophetic fulfillment were enough to push the ecstatic prophecies and ecstasy as a whole outside of the church.

According to the scant records available it appears that the Montanists were accused of false prophecy and were thus pushed to the fringes of the church. The creation of rules of discernment and the polemics against them had some validity, but came at the cost of losing a manifestation of the Spirit which had been greatly prized within the church.


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