

The Anointing of the Prophet:

An Aesthetic Reading of Prophetic Behavior

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The idea of the prophethood of all believers forms a fundamental expectation among Pentecostal communities: with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the prophetic calling and anointing have become available to every believer who has been baptized with the Spirit. In a recent study of the Assemblies of God in Singapore, Dennis Lum reports that more than 99% of respondents stated having observed prophecy, 87% that they had given a prophecy, and 74% that their churches actively encouraged prophecy.¹ The prophetic church is the symbol par excellence of the empowered community, and the prophet is the exemplar of a paracletic mediator between God and humanity.²

At the same time, the identity of the prophet today, the rise of the new prophetic churches, the heavy dependence of the Apostolic-Prophetic Movement on personal prophecy, the close ties to the prosperity gospel, and the abuse of prophetic authority have raised concerns about the prophetic ministry among Pentecostals.³ In Asia, the problems are manifold, and accusations range from misleading prophetic declarations,⁴ exclusivist and gnostic readings of

¹ Dennis Lum, *The Practice of Prophecy: An Empirical-Theological Study of Pentecostals in Singapore* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018).

² See Max Turner, *Power From on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Mark J. Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 8 (1995): 71–88; Hagin, Kenneth E. *The Ministry of a Prophet*. Tulsa, Okla.: Hagin Evangelistic Association, 1978.

³ Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, "Consultation in New Prophetic Churches and African Traditional Religions: Case Study of Divine Healing in Assessing Syncretistic Practices in the South African Context," *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030400>; idem, "Transition from the Opium of Religion to Religion as Opioids: Abuse of Religious Teachings in the New Prophetic Churches," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (2023): 1–24; Collum Banda, "God as a Servant of Magic? The Challenge of the Impersonalisation of God in Neo-Pentecostal Prophetic Responses to Human Agency and Transcendence in Africa," *Religions* 13, no. 10 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100975>.

⁴ Michel Chambon, "Are Chinese Christian Pentecostal? A Catholic Reading of Pentecostal Influence on Chinese Christians" in *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 181–99; Sam Hailes, "The Shawn Bolz Scandal Is Horrific. But Is There More to Come?" *Premier Christianity*, 27 January 2026, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/the-shawn-bolz-scandal-is-horrific-but-is-there-more-to-come/20915.article>.

Scripture,⁵ developing conspiracy theories,⁶ attributing natural disasters to divine judgment,⁷ and encouraging syncretistic occult practices, such as mimicking secular forms of divination, conversations with the dead, or absorbing the spiritual power of deceased ministers,⁸ to the abuse of prophetic authority and leadership,⁹ including personal financial gain,¹⁰ sexual abuse,¹¹ or misuse of private information and data harvesting.¹² This essay attempts to offer a theological explanation for the challenges surrounding prophethood in the Pentecostal tradition. The goal is to clarify the nature of prophetic *behavior* as a means to respond to the problems by addressing their underlying systemic reasons without attributing the responsibility to only particular examples and select individuals or rejecting the viability of prophethood in today's world altogether.

⁵ Ministry of Home Affairs, "Investigations into Shincheonji Church of Jesus the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony in Singapore", Ministry of Home Affairs Press Release, 28 February 2020; <https://www.mha.gov.sg/media-room/newsroom/investigations-into-shincheonji-church-of-jesus-the-temple-of-the-tabernacle-of-the-testimony-in-singapore/>.

⁶ Julie J. Exline, Kathleen C. Pait, Joshua A. Wilt, and William A. Schutt, "Demonic and Divine Attributions around COVID-19 Vaccines: Links with Vaccine Attitudes and Behaviors, QAnon and Conspiracy Beliefs, Anger, Spiritual Struggles, Religious and Political Variables, and Supernatural and Apocalyptic Beliefs," *Religions* 13, no. 519 (2022); <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060519>.

⁷ Shirley English, "Tsunami was 'God's punishment'", *The Times*, 10 February, 2005, <https://www.thetimes.com/travel/destinations/uk-travel/scotland-travel/tsunami-was-gods-punishment-fk0lw0fddfm>.

⁸ Leonardo Blair, "Calif. Megachurch Accused of Practicing Occult in Use of 'Destiny Cards'", *The Christian Post*, 24 December 2017, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/calif-megachurch-accused-of-practicing-occult-in-use-of-destiny-cards-211143/>; <https://www.christalignment.org/destinyreadingcards>;

⁹ Chansamone Saiyasak, "Faith Under Pressure: Group Conformity, Spiritual Authority, and Coercion in Thai Christianity", *Theological Reflections* 2, no. 1 (2025), <https://www.thaiprotestanttheology.mf.or.th/reflections/reflection-7.html>; "Concern Over Two Cult Groups", *The New Paper*, November 23, 1991, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/page/newspaper19911123-1.1.1>.

¹⁰ Joel Guinto and Virma Simonette, "Fugitive Pastor Wanted by FBI Caught in Philippines", *BBC News*, 9 September 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c75npd1xw9qo>.

¹¹ Tim Wyatt, "Explained: Who is Mike Bickle And What Are the Allegations Against Him?" *Premier Christianity*, 6 February 2025, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/news-analysis/explained-who-is-mike-bickle-and-what-are-the-allegations-against-him/17035.article?adredir=1>.

¹² Trinity Foundation, "Shawn Bolz and False Prophets: 4 Ways Data Harvesting Has Been Used (part 1)", *The Christian Post*, 29 January 2026; <https://www.christianpost.com/news/shawn-bolz-false-prophets-4-ways-data-harvesting-has-been-used.html>; News Division, "Bethel Pastor Contradicts Bill Johnson's Narrative on the Now Infamous Practice of 'Grave Sucking,'" *Pulpit & Pen*, 19 April 2018,

<https://pulpitandpen.org/2018/04/19/bethel-pastor-contradicts-bill-johnsons-narrative-infamous-grave-sucking/>.

In this essay I argue that the day of Pentecost offers an important but often overlooked or misinterpreted understanding of prophethood: we assess the prophet initially through an aesthetic experience, that is, a behavioral evaluation of the conventional references surrounding the prophetic act that engages a range of affective, cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and psychophysiological processes. The kind of empirical aesthetics we can employ for a theology of prophethood is rooted not only in the perception of the conventional properties of the prophetic behavior but in the aesthetic response evoked by those properties.¹³ Most importantly, rather than the beautiful and sublime states typically measured by philosophical and theological aesthetics, Pentecost directs us to the *inappropriate* aesthetic state surrounding prophetic behavior.¹⁴ I am particularly interested in the physiology of attention and affection that emerges from the accusation of the crowd that the disciples are filled with new wine (Acts 2:13). I suggest that an aesthetic reading of prophecy must take seriously how human behavior both conveys and conceals God and the content of divine revelation.¹⁵ I begin with an account of the aesthetics of drunkenness operative in the ancient world that is indicative of the boundaries of prophetic behavior, followed by a contrasting account of the disciples' response and the proposal of an alternative aesthetics of prophethood.

THE AESTHETICS OF PROPHETIC DRUNKENNESS

The immediate aesthetic assessment of the disciples' behavior at Pentecost is vividly captured by Luke's description of the crowd's allegation that the Christians 'are filled with new

¹³ Cf. Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1876).

¹⁴ Cf. Emily C. Nusbaum and Paul J. Silvia, 'Unusual Aesthetic States', in *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Aesthetics and the Arts*, eds Pablo P. L. Tinio and Jeffrey K. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 519–39.

¹⁵ Cf. Colin Martindale, Kathleen Moore, Jonathan Borkum, 'Aesthetic Preference: Anomalous Findings for Berlyne's Psychobiological Model', *American Journal of Psychology* 103 (1990): 53–80.

wine' (Acts 2:13). We are not told in any detail why the disciples were seen as intoxicated. However, the usual signs of drunkenness typically exhibit often drastic personal and social behavioral manifestations.¹⁶ The public perception of this behavior has a profound aesthetic dimension.¹⁷ Intoxication is often judged by outward appearance including a staggering walk, swaying, and stumbling, or the lack of ability to sit and walk straight, while strong intoxication may be visible in extreme and sudden changes ranging from boisterous to anxious or inappropriate behavior.¹⁸ Overall, the aesthetics of drunkenness relies on expressions of a lack of self-control that expose the volatility of the human behavior and open the space for ethical judgment. That the disciples are subject to this judgment suggests that the standard identifiers of intoxication were at least in some form observable in their prophetic behavior.

In the contested environment of excessive alcoholic drunkenness, Luke is attentive to the aesthetic texture of the situation by directing the observation to the dimension of speech.¹⁹ Indeed, human drunkenness is observed substantially in its effects on wide variations of speech ranging from loud and noisy to quiet and slurred, unusually fast to very slow, incoherent, rambling, and repetitive to argumentative. Extreme behavior from excessively friendly to aggressive, from displays of boldness to boisterous and unpleasant are often judged by the manner and content of intoxicated speech.²⁰ Drunkenness displays significant problems in the ability of the speaker for syllable repetition, maintaining syllable duration, and managing

¹⁶ See Mark Jayne, Gill Valentine and Sarah L. Holloway, *Alcohol, Drinking, Drunkenness: (Dis)orderly Spaces* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 107–20.

¹⁷ Andrew Millie, 'The Aesthetics of Anti-Social Behaviour', in *Anti-Social Behaviour in Britain: Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Pickard (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 102–11.

¹⁸ E. D. Burns, M. R. Nusbaumer, D. M. Reiling, 'Think They're Drunk? Alcohol Servers and the Identification of Intoxication', *Journal of Drug Education* 33 (2003): 177–186.

¹⁹ Cf. Steven B. Chin and David B. Pisoni, *Alcohol and Speech* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1997).

²⁰ Chin and Pisoni, *Alcohol and Speech*, 24–63.

variations of speech patterns.²¹ In its extreme, excessive drunkenness is identified with madness, criminal activities, and social revolt.²² This close link between the ethics and aesthetics of drunkenness suggests that operative at Pentecost was the idea that the aesthetic properties of prophetic behavior are discernible because they are conventional and can be observed readily through what we ‘see’ and ‘hear’ (Acts 2:33). The public reason for the negative judgment is based on legitimate claims about the literal properties of prophetic behavior: it is reasonable to accept that the disciples’ behavior *is* the behavior of drunkenness because it does exhibit its conventional properties. The crowd believed intoxication with new wine to be true because this judgment is appropriately based on the observation of the aesthetic properties of prophetic speech and behavior. That the disciples prophetically proclaim God’s deeds of power (v. 11) stands not in contrast to but further aids the subsequent accusation that they are drunk with wine. The public judgment of behavioral immoderation is confirmed by the public dismissal of the disciples’ theological accountability.

Wine played a prominent role in the Jewish religious imagination of the ancient world.²³ In contrast to a purely secular virtue aesthetics, religious intoxication did not compromise virtue, even if it does not elevate character.²⁴ Prophetic speech during the time was compared to the effects of drunkenness.²⁵ Accounts in the Hebrew scriptures connect possession by the spirit of God, celebration, and wine with manifestations of ‘prophetic frenzy’ that turns the prophet ‘into

²¹ Gayathri Krishnan and Vipin P. G. Ghosh, ‘Immediate Effect of Alcohol on Voice Tremor Parameters and Speech Motor Control’, *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education* 61, no. 2 (2017): 25–39.

²² An Vleugels, ‘Drunkenness, Anti-Social Behavior, Class, Gender and Alcohol in the Making of the Habitual Drunkards Act, 1870–79’, in *Anti-Social Behaviour in Britain: Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Pickard (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 263–73.

²³ Oswyn Murray and Manuela Tecusan (ed.), *In Vino Veritas* (London: British School at Rome, 1995).

²⁴ Courtney J. P. Friesen, ‘Gluttony and Drunkenness as Jewish and Christian Virtues: From the Comic Heracles to the Christ of the Gospels’, in *Envisioning God in the Humanities: Essays on Christianity, Judaism, and Ancient Religion in Honor of Melissa Harl Sellev, ed. Courtney J. P. Friesen* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 243–61.

²⁵ Plutarch, *On the Failure of Oracles*, 432.

a different person' (1 Sam. 10:5-6; 19:20-24; Num. 11:26-30). The prophetic rage of Saul became a proverbial saying pointing to the observable behavior of unusual actions if not strange types of utterances that belong to the intoxicated state of the prophet.²⁶ Hos. 9:7 exclaims: 'The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!' In contrast, Isa. 28:7 criticizes the corrupt prophets who exhibit ecstasy flowing from literal drunkenness: 'The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment'. If this contested aesthetic environment formed the cultural backdrop for the audience's allegations, then we must take all the more seriously that the crowd is mocking the disciples' behavior by offering only natural causes for their prophetic appearance, perhaps even that by drinking their fill with new wine 'the Christians have been getting drunk as cheaply as possible'.²⁷ Limited to what the authoritative culture of the day is able to see and hear, the focus of the aesthetic judgment is directed at the sensory expression rather than the reception of divine revelation, at the power of controlled human agency rather than the inability to contain the divine, and at the individual performances rather than the prophetic community as a whole. The cultural senses are not incapable of perceiving the divine revelation, but the dominant sensory knowledge suppresses the possibility that the immediacy of the experience of the divine Spirit finds expression in the *inacceptable* display of prophetic behavior.

²⁶ Cf. Charles D. Isbell, 'Origins of Prophetic Frenzy and Ecstatic Utterance in the Old Testament World', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11 (1975): 62–80.

²⁷ Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 125. See also Craig S. Keener, *Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 137.

THE AESTHETICS OF PROPHETIC FULLNESS

The apostle Peter responds to the allegation of public intoxication by pointing out that despite the festivities, it is too early to be drunk with wine. His statement, ‘these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning’ (v. 15) has typically been understood to reject the charge of drunkenness outright.²⁸ However, while the particular judgment of the crowd recorded by Luke is that the disciples are filled with ‘new wine’, their mocking is only an indirect accusation of *drunkenness*—a term never used by the audience.²⁹ The ambiguity of the actual claim and the fact that the apostle does not ignore the accusation, or offer a more straightforward replacement, underscores that it is Peter – not the crowd – who labels this allegation explicitly as a charge of drunkenness. Hence, the apostle not only acknowledges the crowd’s mockery but accepts the observation of drunkenness by giving the behavior its proper name. Rather than rejecting the crowd’s allegation, since it is Peter who names the charge properly in the first place, the Christian response indicates that the aesthetics of drunkenness is not entirely out of place and, perhaps, that there is no immediate alternative term for the prophetic behavior.

However, Peter’s denial makes no reference to the specificity of the actual charge of intoxication with ‘new wine.’³⁰ Although Peter ‘overaccepts’³¹ the aesthetic judgment he rejects its metaphysical foundation by redefining the properties of the prophetic behavior. His response is not ‘you are wrong to think that these people are drunk’ (CEV) but ‘these men are not drunk in

²⁸ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 248.

²⁹ Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 859–61.

³⁰ Daniel R. Schwartz, ‘On Some New and Old Wine in Peter’s Pentecost Speech (Acts 2)’, in *Heirs of the Septuagint: Philo, Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity – Festschrift for Earle Hilgert*, ed. David M. Hay, David T. Runia, David Winston (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 256–71 (267).

³¹ Cf. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 127–42.

the way that you think they are (but they may be drunk in some other way)'.³² In other words, since 'drunkenness' is Peter's term, he does not explicitly deny that the disciples are, according to the crowd, filled with 'new wine'. However, he insists that the qualities of this 'new wine' and the manner of 'fullness' are of a different kind.³³ Accentuating Peter's choice is significant because by allowing the aesthetic judgment to function, the Christian response to the allegations opens room for the crowd to explore their own capacity for engaging with the prophetic experience. When we recognize that Peter deliberately avoids denying the accusation of drunkenness, it becomes clear that the Christian aesthetics of prophethood can now draw from the very imagery associated with drinking: pouring (used by Peter) and filling (used by Luke).

Luke begins his narrative of the prophetic behavior with the immediate characterization that all of the disciples 'were *filled* with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:4). It is not the crowd but Luke who insists from the beginning that the Christians are indeed 'in a state of fullness'.³⁴ For the reader of Acts this claim is not unexpected, since it originates with Luke's own account of the final promise of Jesus that the disciples will 'receive' the Spirit who will 'come upon' them (1:8), mirroring the result on the day of Pentecost that they were now 'filled' with the Spirit who had been 'poured' out.³⁵ Anticipating Peter's speech, Luke's account further overaccepts the aesthetic qualities of this coming upon and receiving, pouring and filling, by identifying Jesus' promise to the disciples as a 'baptism' with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), leaving little doubt about their condition: these Christians were not merely intoxicated in the manner the crowd supposed, but more than filled, they were immersed and oversaturated with the Spirit.³⁶

³² Schwartz, 'On Some New and Old Wine', 267.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 1, 125.

³⁵ James B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 55.

³⁶ Cf. James G. Lawson, *Did Jesus Command Immersion? An Exhaustive Study of the Word 'Baptize'* (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co., 1915).

On the other side of this aesthetics of filling and receiving stands Peter's repeated emphasis on the origin of the disciples' behavior: that the disciples appear as though they were filled with new wine is indeed the result of a 'pouring out' (Acts 2:17, 18, 33) and 'giving' (v. 38) as of a spiritual filling.³⁷ Referencing Joel 2:28, the apostle proceeds immediately to explain that the reason for the disciples' behavior is the outpouring of God's Spirit. Aesthetically, it is noteworthy that Peter's use of Joel emphasizes that the source of the disciples' fullness was not merely the result of a 'pouring' but of a pouring *out* – a more radical 'emptying.'³⁸ The excessive fullness of the disciples stands in direct correlation with an excessive outpouring, and together these images comprise the aesthetic explanation of the prophetic behavior.

The significance of the broader context of Joel for Luke is evident in Joel's passage preceding Peter's quote, where Joel speaks of a time when 'the vats shall overflow with wine' (2:24) and concludes by pointing to God's promise that 'in that day the mountains shall drip with sweet wine' (3:18).³⁹ The image of a lavish outpouring of wine may strike the reader initially as inappropriate, even excessive, and wasteful. The Gospel of Luke indeed records Jesus' unambiguous advice using the same choice of words that putting new wine into old wineskins leads the skins to burst and the wine to 'pour out' and spill (Lk. 5:37). Such a saying would have been common during the time and perhaps formed a popular parable (see also Mt. 9:17; Mk 2:22). The image deliberately points to the consequences of the fermentation of new wine which the old skins are unable to contain. The problem of this behavior is expressed by the antithesis of pouring and filling: the new wine should have never been poured *into* the old skins; filled with

³⁷ Raniero Cantalamessa, *Sober Intoxication of the Spirit: Filled with the Fullness of God* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2005), 146–61.

³⁸ Gert J. Steyn, 'Εκθεω απο του πνευματος ... (Ac 2:17,18): What Is Being Poured out?' *Neotestamentica* 33, no. 2 (1999): 365–71 (368).

³⁹ Schwartz, 'On Some New and Old Wine', 268.

new wine, the old skins burst, and the wine is poured *out* onto the ground and ruined. The behavior exhibits a failure to understand the property of the wine and its relation to the wineskins. The admonition that ‘new wine must be put into fresh wineskins’ (Lk. 5:38) consequently appears as the proper conclusion to Jesus’ parable.

Peter certainly must have been familiar with the parable, even if his term for ‘new wine’ is not the common name used by Jesus. The only literal occurrence of Peter’s term in the Septuagint is found in Job 32:18-19, which further compounds the aesthetic vocabulary of drunkenness. There, it is Elihu’s speech to Job’s friends that illustrates the parable of the wine and the wineskins with particular reference to its effect on Elihu’s own disposition: “For I am full of words; the spirit within me constrains me. My heart is indeed like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins, it is ready to burst. I must speak, so that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer.” Elihu’s metaphor foreshadows the situation of the disciples at Pentecost who appear to be filled with new wine precisely because they can no longer restrain their behavior and speech.⁴⁰ The striking resemblance of filling and bursting, the effect of the wine on the wineskins, and its clear implications for Elihu’s behavior suggest that not only Peter, but also Jesus, and the crowd at Pentecost were intimately familiar with its message. The mocking of the crowd echoes Elihu’s metaphor that these disciples were filled with words *because* they were unable to contain their hearts ‘like wine that has no vent’. The disciples at Pentecost acted prophetically because they were indeed intoxicated and oversaturated to the point of rupture.

Yet, Elihu’s imagery reverses Jesus’s parable in its central metaphor. Whereas Jesus points to a failure of *old* wineskins to contain the new wine, Elihu compares his behavior to the bursting of new wine in *new* wineskins. A second look at Jesus’ parable shows that its

⁴⁰ Ibid.

conclusion is not the admonition to put new wine into new wineskins but Jesus' unexpected, rather contradictory remark that 'no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good'' (Lk. 5:39). This conclusion could easily be misunderstood as suggesting the preference of old wine over the new to avoid the entire affair.⁴¹ Yet, Jesus does *not* commend this preference but rather critiques it as if to say: 'Stubbornly clinging to the old, one fails to see the value of the new and therefore misses what God is doing'.⁴² Jesus' conclusion indicates the problem, not the solution! The preference for the old has overshadowed the desire for the new, that is, to receive and to preserve the new wine properly. When we acknowledge this tension between the wine and the wineskins, Elihu's image now even further accentuates the problem: the new wine is so potent that it bursts even the new wineskins. The echoes of Elihu's image and Jesus' parable in Peter's message are unmistakable: neither old nor new can contain the prophetic anointing with the Holy Spirit.

Through the words of the prophet Joel, the apostle Peter brings together this aesthetic canopy to express a Christian aesthetics of prophetic behavior that is not established by customary properties of observation but by the necessary relation between moral identity and God's action. The new wine of Pentecost is the Holy Spirit 'poured out abundantly' (Tit. 3:6; see also Rom. 5:5) on old and new wineskins: young men and old men, sons and daughters, both men and women (Acts 2:17). The Spirit confronts the sensual, material, and corporeal dimensions of the public's aesthetic observation with a prophetic and apocalyptic vision that resists being absorbed by either the dominant ideas of spectacle and sensationalism or the safety of social conservatism. Instead, in contrast to the crowd's intentional disregard for a theological

⁴¹ Anders Eriksson, 'The Old Is Good: Parables of Patched Garment and Wineskins as Elaboration of a Chreia in Luke 5:33–39 about Feasting with Jesus', in *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse*, ed. Thomas H. Olbright and Anders Eriksson (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 52–72.

⁴² John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 136.

reason of the event, prophecy is host to a public behavior that elevates the significance of the divine presence to the very limits of human abilities. The passive voice used to describe the disciples' experience of 'being baptized' (Acts 1:5; 11:16) and 'being filled' (Acts 2:4) with the Spirit 'poured out' (Acts 2:17) is manifested aesthetically by the irrepressible reality of being drunk with the Spirit, being set aflame by the Spirit, and given utterance through the Spirit. The prophetic behavior at Pentecost exposes the underlying disruptive potential of Spirit-baptized and Spirit-filled prophetic behavior.

DISCERNING THE DISRUPTIVE AESTHETICS

The disruptive potential of prophetic behavior is exposed when the disciples do not conceal its reality by rendering the behavior invisible because it contains an undesirable antagonism between improper drunkenness and proper religious conduct. Although the aesthetics of drunkenness both reveals and conceals the Holy Spirit, whereas the antagonists demand moderation (or abstinence) by overemphasizing the excessive nature of the behavior but reducing it to the dominant cultural ideology, the church at Pentecost embraces the excessive nature of the behavior because it manifests accurately the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus for which they had been waiting. The Spirit-filled disciples are neither cowed by the mockery of the crowd nor subjugated by the rule of authority because their experience of being filled with the Spirit cannot be isolated from exhibiting its intoxicating exuberance.⁴³ That the cause of this drunkenness is the Holy Spirit poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17) identifies both the theological and anthropological reason for prophetic frenzy: the uncontainable God is poured out as the Holy Spirit into human vessels. Pentecost exposes the daring possibility that the human being is

⁴³ Cf. John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 326–31.

capable of being filled with God's Spirit to the point of overflow. Any attempt to suppress the behavior risks also suppressing the prophetic expression of the divine revelation. Of course, allowing any behavior to account for prophetic intoxication also opens the door for illegitimate and irresponsible behavior in the name of prophethood. Therein lies the aesthetic root of both prophetic power and abuse.

This conclusion of the brief analysis of prophetic behavior at Pentecost indicates why regulating prophetic expression remains a theological, ecclesiological, and social challenge. The task is not to discern the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior—all prophetic acts have the potential to be unacceptable to the dominant aesthetic norms, including the norms held by the church. Simply put, the problem is *not* the behavior of prophetic intoxication. A final look at Luke's description of the crowd suggests that the behavior and attitude of the audience actually mirrors that of the disciples: the crowd is *bewildered* (v. 6), Luke uses the literal phrase 'poured together', in an image echoing the 'pouring out' of the Spirit. Luke declares repeatedly (vv. 7 and 12) that the observers are *amazed*, literally 'standing beside themselves', a phrase reminiscent of ecstasy and commonly used to denote drunkenness.⁴⁴ The crowd is described as *astonished*, the same verb Luke afterwards uses to describe Moses' attraction to the epiphanic encounter with God in the burning bush (Acts 7:31). The audience is *perplexed* (v. 12), literally with 'no way through' the overwhelming aesthetic experience of the event, and emphatically *cut to the heart* (v. 37), a metaphor that conveys the state of awe, a threshold stage in aesthetic affections.⁴⁵ Peter's response, consequently, is that they *repent* (v. 38), literally 'turn around their perception' towards the true cause of the prophetic behavior. The Spirit of God, not the spirit of

⁴⁴ Philo, *On Drunkenness*, 146.

⁴⁵ Cf. Nusbaum and Silvia, 'Unusual Aesthetic States', 521–23.

wine, has intoxicated the church. Put differently, the cause of prophetic behavior is a sober drunkenness. *Spiritual* intoxication is clearly a state to be desired by the church!

We find this seemingly irreconcilable association of sobriety and intoxication frequently in the patristic commentary on the biblical aesthetics of drunkenness.⁴⁶ Origen, for example, in discussing God's command that the priests of the Lord must 'drink no wine' but be sober as they draw near to God, reflects that there are 'many ways the human mind can become drunk', and adds that there is indeed a 'holy intoxication' caused by sanctified desires that inebriate the soul.⁴⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem comments that the mockery of the crowd at Pentecost did in fact reveal the truth: 'for they are drunk, not as you suppose, but . . . they are drunk with a sober drunkenness, deadly to sin, and vivifying to the heart, a drunkenness quite contrary to that of the body.'⁴⁸ Ambrose of Milan, commenting on Psalm 36 and its foreshadowing of Pentecost, concludes that 'to be drunk with new wine' refers to 'the inebriation that follows on the infusion of the Holy Spirit'.⁴⁹ And to distinguish the different kinds of drunkenness elsewhere he exclaims, 'He who becomes intoxicated with wine staggers, but he who becomes intoxicated with the Holy Spirit is rooted in Christ. How truly excellent is this intoxication which produces sobriety of the soul!'⁵⁰ Augustine comments in his exposition: 'The human mind almost

⁴⁶ Cf. Cantalamessa, *Sober Intoxication of the Spirit*, 2–10.

⁴⁷ *One Life*, 866. In *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 310.

⁴⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis XVII*, in *St. Cyril of Jerusalem: Works*, vol. 2, trans. Leo P. Mc Cauley and Anthony A. Stephenson, Fathers of the Church 64 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 107–8.

⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on Twelve Psalms*, trans. Íde M. Ní Ríain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2000), 21.

⁵⁰ Ambrose, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 3. In *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol. 3, *From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost*, trans. by M. F. Toal (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 133.

vanishes, becoming in some sense divinized, and is inebriated by the rich abundance of God's house'.⁵¹

For the Apostle says: 'Do not be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery'. And, as if wishing to teach us how we ought to be inebriated, he adds: 'But be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing to one another hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, singing in your heart to the Lord'. Is not he who rejoices in the Lord and who sings praises to the Lord with great exultation like an inebriated person? I approve of such inebriation.⁵²

In the later ecclesiastical writings of the Roman statesman Cassiodorus, we find a similar endorsement in what is perhaps the most articulate summary of the aesthetics of drunkenness in antiquity.

'Inebriated' is adopted from the sinful habit of people afloat with too much wine, who become sluggish, when their minds are afflicted; but here it describes the role of good people. This heavenly inebriation cuts off recollection of worldly matters and this makes the things of the flesh depart from the mind, just as intoxication from wine divorces people's actions from their senses.... How very praiseworthy is that inebriation! That drunkenness should be sought in every prayer, for moderation springs from it, and integrity of mind is fully attained from it. It does not cause staggering confusion, mental delirium or blackouts; the soul is made healthier, according as it is filled with that drunkenness. So let us drink this draught eagerly, not with our

⁵¹ Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 36:14, in *Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, Part 3, vol. 16, edited by John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park: New York City Press, 1995), 85.

⁵² Augustine, *Sermon 225*, 4. In *Saint Augustine: Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney, Fathers of the Church: A New Translation 38 (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1959), 193.

bodily lips but with the heart's purest devotion. From it we do not obtain temporary happiness but seek the joys of eternal life.⁵³

These historical testimonies capture the nature of prophetic behavior while at the same time offering spiritual guidance. The history of the church reverberates with attempts to subjugate prophetic behavior because its aesthetics manifests metaphysical qualities that promise the ability to grasp God at the cost of the ability to control the human behavior. The outpouring of the Spirit is neither a magic performance nor a festival of fools, the former wishes to control the divine revelation while the latter allows for unconstrained mockery in the name of spiritual liberty.⁵⁴ As Augustine warns, the theurgic rite turns the prophetic behavior into 'a craft ... which accomplishes not only good but evil.'⁵⁵ Gaining spiritual power in the attempt to produce an inebriated state which facilitates the divine presence leads only to 'delusive appearances' that resemble physical intoxication 'which no sober judgment could attribute to any but malicious and deceitful powers' and which 'are either that spirit who is called the deceiver, or mere fictions of the imagination.'⁵⁶ Confusing the sober intoxication of the Spirit with literal drunkenness, prophecy easily turns into a parody of Christian devotion with performers 'stripped of spirit' and 'out of their mind with wine'⁵⁷ and 'adapting Christian ceremonies to their own patterns of religious expression'.⁵⁸ For the patristic writers, Pentecost holds the church accountable to a

⁵³ Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms* 36, 9, 13, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 51, Cassiodorus: *Explanation of Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–50*, ed. Walter Burghardt and Thomas Comerford Lawler, trans. P. G. Walsh (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 354, 356–57.

⁵⁴ See Max Harris, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁵⁵ Augustine, *City of God* X, 10.

⁵⁶ Ibid. X, 11.

⁵⁷ Isodore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1, 41 (47), in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 61, ed. Dennis D. McManus (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2008), 63.

⁵⁸ William E. Klingshirm, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 198–99.

moral responsibility for the discernment of spirits as much as for the discernment of human behavior.

CONCLUSION

Although no prophetic behavior is strictly identical with the divine presence, it is identical with the human ability to manifest *or* to conceal the aesthetic experience of the outpouring of God's Spirit. Human behavior is integral, not accidental, to the Christian ability to be a genuine prophetic witness *or* to mask the divine presence in the misunderstood and misappropriated human performance. Provocative and inappropriate behavior alone is therefore not a sufficient reason to discredit prophethood. Pentecostal theology can gain strategic insights from the aesthetics of drunkenness, the response of the prophetic church at Pentecost, and the reflections of the patristic writers on sober intoxication for the discernment of (prophetic) spirits:

1. Sanctified desires: the intoxicated prophet is dead to sin and the desires of the body but not to desire as such. While prophetic desire can be provocative, the zeal of the prophet is for holiness; sanctification is the presupposition for honest and responsible prophethood.
2. Integrity of mind: prophethood is rooted in wisdom and not confusion. Sober intoxication does not mislead and deceive or reject interrogation and discernment; sound logic and reason inform all prophetic behavior.
3. Lifegiving intention: prophetic inebriety is never intended to induce fear or harm. The intoxication with the Spirit always aims at proclaiming the hope, deliverance, and promises of salvation rooted in the gospel of Christ.
4. Eternal aim: prophethood is not focused on worldly concerns or temporary matters. Prophetic behavior is not an instrument for personal gain and status but an expression of

human weakness still seeking final redemption and thus accountable to the discernment of the community.

5. Exultation and praise: An aesthetic of worship is the beginning and end of all prophetic behavior; prophethood never exalts the prophet and always glorifies God.

These recommendations suggest that the discernment of prophethood lies not in the aesthetic of the prophetic behavior, that is, the problem is not the provocative nature of prophethood but the character of the prophet. The aesthetic assessment of prophethood exposes the difficulty of spiritual judgment based on behavioral observation, especially when expressed through the normative expectations of the community. The major confusion in the moral dilemma of prophetic behavior is not only the failure to discern the social and communal responsibility of the prophet but the accountability of the entire community. The greatest challenge for the correction of prophetic abuse in the Pentecostal movement is its core belief in the prophethood of *all* believers. To address this challenge will require a critical reading of what exactly is the true character of a prophet in a community of prophets that *cannot* be judged exclusively by its prophetic behavior.