

A Response to Wolfgang Vondey's "The Anointing of the Prophet:

An Aesthetic Reading of Prophetic Behavior"

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22–26 July 2026

In his paper, Dr. Wolfgang Vondey offers a thought-provoking contribution to contemporary Pentecostal theology by inviting readers to understand prophetic ministry through an aesthetic reading. He encourages readers to consider the prophetic not merely through “philosophical and theological aesthetics,” but also through “inappropriate aesthetic states”.¹ Drawing from Acts 2, Vondey suggests that prophetic behavior can be “disruptive” and appear improper, but the issue does not lie in the behavior itself.² He reminds the Pentecostal Church that unusual prophetic expressions should not be dismissed just because they fall outside “normative expectations” or conventions.³

Vondey's paper is significant in offering a theological framework for understanding why genuine prophetic movements have often been misunderstood throughout Pentecostal history. Movements such as the Azusa Street Revival, now recognized as a key moment in global Pentecostalism, were initially mocked by secular observers and criticized by fellow Christians, including Charles Parham, because of its unconventional signs.⁴ This illustrates that extraordinary prophetic manifestations may indeed accompany authentic movements of the Holy Spirit.

His paper rightly recovers the disruptive nature of prophetic behavior, and in his conclusion, he suggests that the problem may not be “the provocative nature of prophethood,” but rather with the “character of the prophet.”⁵ We largely agree with Vondey’s proposal, but in this response, we also seek to build on Vondey’s prophetic framework by arguing that prophetic acts should also be examined according to whether they remain faithful to God's revelation in

¹ Wolfgang Vondey, “*The Anointing of the Prophet: An Aesthetic Reading of Prophetic Behavior*,” paper presented during the Asia Pentecostal Summit, July 22–26, 2026, 4.

² Vondey, “*The Anointing of the Prophet*,” 13.

³ Vondey, “*The Anointing of the Prophet*,” 18.

⁴ Eben de Jager, “Who’s Your Daddy? In Search of the ‘Father’ of Pentecostalism,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 4 (2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.43>.

⁵ Vondey, “*The Anointing of the Prophet*,” 18.

Christ, edify the body of Christ, and they have to be continually discerned through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

PROPHETIC GIFTS AND PROPHETIC CHARACTER

In his closing words, Vondey suggests that authentic prophetic ministry should ultimately be discerned not by the nature of prophetic behavior but by the character of the prophet. This insight shifts the church's attention away from evaluating dramatic spiritual manifestations and toward examining the life of the one who prophesies. Rather than asking whether a prophetic act appears "powerful," extraordinary, or emotionally compelling, the more important question is whether the prophet's life consistently reflects holiness, integrity, wisdom, and faithful obedience to God. In other words, authentic prophetic ministry is not determined by outward performance but by inward transformation.

At this point, we hope to expand upon Vondey's argument. While focusing on the prophet's character is important, the Bible shows a more complex reality. Scripture gives examples of God speaking truth through people whose lives are morally or spiritually flawed. Balaam, though his character was compromised, spoke real prophetic words from God (Num. 22–24). King Saul prophesied when the Spirit of God came on him (1 Sam. 10:10–12; 19:23–24), but his later life was marked by disobedience and rejection (1 Sam. 15). These examples show that neither the authenticity of a prophetic act nor the moral character of the messenger alone is enough to judge genuine prophetic ministry.

Such cases should not be treated as normative but as demonstrations of God's sovereign freedom to accomplish His purposes through unexpected instruments. At the same time, they underscore the responsibility to exercise careful discernment. If God can at times speak through

flawed individuals, how should believers discern what ought to be received and what ought to be rejected? How can we distinguish between genuinely prophetic behavior and the fallibility of the person delivering it? Conversely, how can the Church avoid rejecting a true prophetic manifestation because of the messenger's imperfection, while also resisting the danger of uncritical acceptance when elements of a prophecy appear correct? These questions remain deeply relevant within contemporary Pentecostal ministry, where spiritual gifts and human weakness often coexist.

Rather than resolving this tension by privileging one criterion over another, we suggest that the answer lies in holding together the tensions that Vondey identifies. There is a delicate balance between exercising responsible discernment and preserving openness to the freedom of the Holy Spirit. This tension is particularly relevant in Asia. Allan Anderson observes that "Asian Pentecostalism has often flourished across diverse cultural contexts because of its openness to the dynamic and unexpected work of the Holy Spirit".⁶ Yet this openness must be balanced and not taken to an extreme. If the Asian Pentecostal church focuses solely on regulating outward manifestations, it risks suppressing genuine prophetic expression. Conversely, if every manifestation is accepted without careful evaluation, prophetic ministry becomes vulnerable to excess and abuse. Vondey's framework provides an important starting point by redirecting attention from prophetic performance to the character of the prophet and the theological purpose of prophecy. Yet the task of discernment remains ongoing. It requires believers to evaluate both the behavior and the messenger with humility before the Spirit who continues to speak. A messenger's imperfection does not automatically invalidate a message, but

⁶ Allan Anderson, "Revising Pentecostal History in Global Perspective," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, Regnum Studies in Mission; Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies Series 13 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2005), 43.

no prophetic act can ultimately be regarded as divine if it fundamentally misrepresents the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

On this foundation, we suggest three theological criteria by which believers may discern authentic prophetic ministry.

Criterion One: Faithfulness to God's Character as Revealed in Christ

Building on Vondey's proposal that prophetic behavior embodies God's revelation, we suggest the first criterion begins not with prophetic signs but with the nature of God Himself. In the Old Testament, biblical prophets often communicated through symbolic actions that challenged normal expectations. Isaiah walked barefoot and partly undressed as a prophetic sign against Egypt and Cush (Isa. 20:2-4) and Hosea's marriage to Gomer became a living symbol of God's covenant love toward unfaithful Israel (Hos. 1-3). These actions disrupted social norms and sometimes placed prophets in vulnerable or humbling positions. However, they were never done for show or personal attention. Each symbolic act seeks to reveal who God is and points to His goals of judgment, repentance, restoration, and redemption.

Therefore, one key question Pentecostal churches face is not whether God may still call His people to perform unexpected or symbolic actions. Scripture clearly shows that He may. The more important question is whether those actions faithfully reflect the holy, truthful, loving, and redemptive character of the God revealed most fully in Jesus Christ (John 14:9; Heb. 1:1-3).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul introduces guidelines in the exercising of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. In his commentary on the book, Gordon Fee argues that Paul's theological basis for giving these instructions has to do with the character of God. He asserts: "The character

of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship."⁷ Similarly, the way prophetic ministry is exercised should therefore testify of Christ to whom it bears witness. A prophetic act may be dramatic, disruptive, or emotionally powerful, but its form should not humiliate, manipulate, threaten, or demean others. Jesus exercised spiritual authority without exploiting the vulnerable, and He combined truth with compassion, holiness with mercy, and authority with servanthood.

Ultimately, we argue, the God we worship is a God of love (1 John 4:8). Therefore, this brings us back to Paul's renowned rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 13: "Though I have the gift of prophecy... and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (v. 2) At its core, our prophetic ministry must constantly reflect God's loving nature and the cruciform character of Christ.

Criterion Two: The Edification of the Church as the Purpose of Prophetic Ministry

This leads me to our second point. The New Testament consistently situates prophetic ministry within the broader mission of building up the body of Christ. Prophetic disruption is therefore never an end in itself. Instead, it serves the ecclesial purpose of strengthening God's people and edifying the church. Fee argues that edification is the "true expression of love for the saints."⁸

This emphasis is particularly clear in Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts. Writing to a church that eagerly desired charismatic manifestations, Paul does not discourage prophecy or suppress the Spirit's operation. Instead, he repeatedly reorients the Corinthians toward the

⁷Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 775, Logos.

⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 772.

purpose for which spiritual gifts are given. Prophecy is commended because it "speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3). Later, Paul reiterates, "Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (1 Cor. 14:26). Even his well-known exhortation that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40, ESV) should therefore be read within the wider context of edification. Paul's primary concern is not order for its own sake, but the flourishing of the body of Christ through the responsible exercise of spiritual gifts.

From my own (Eileen Toh's) pastoral experience, I have found this principle to be especially important. In Pentecostal ministry, there is often a sincere desire to stay open to the work of the Holy Spirit. However, openness alone is not enough if prophetic practices are not evaluated according to the purpose for which the Spirit gives His gifts. Over years of pastoral leadership and overseeing the intercessory ministry, I have become increasingly convinced that the most lasting prophetic ministries are not necessarily those characterized by the most extraordinary manifestations, but those that consistently strengthen believers, foster spiritual maturity, deepen love for Christ, and build healthy Christian communities. Frank Macchia describes this aptly, "Spiritual gifts show their authenticity in exalting Christ as Lord rather than the person sharing the gift... aligning with the practices of divine love... edifying or building up the church in love..."⁹

Criterion Three: Dependence on the Holy Spirit for Discernment

According to 2 Peter 1:20-21, prophecy is divinely inspired and requires discernment through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who inspires prophetic utterance also empowers

⁹ Frank D. Macchia, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Word and Spirit: Pentecostal Investigations in Theology and History 2 (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2023), 345, Kindle.

believers to distinguish authentic revelation from what is false. Pentecostals are no strangers to “hearing from the Spirit.” Caution must be exercised here, because the discernment of the Spirit is not merely subjective, nor should it be the sole basis for every prophetic act simply because “the Holy Spirit told me so.” This is where many Pentecostals and charismatics fall into error, and very often, are accused of elevating prophetic signs above the Word of God and replacing biblical teachings with the “work of the Spirit.”

Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth,” who guides believers into all truth (John 16:13-14). Therefore, all prophetic ministries must be able to stand up to the scrutiny of the Word. The Spirit will never contradict the truth of God’s word. Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21: “Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophecies; but test all things and hold fast to the good.” This passage urges believers to remain receptive to the Spirit’s work while exercising prudent discernment. Without the Spirit’s discernment, believers can easily mistake powerful emotions or unusual experiences for the voice of God. Craig Keener argues that “knowing God’s character in Scripture” is the most important way in learning how to recognize the leading of the Lord.¹⁰ This goes back to our first point that the Spirit will not lead us to do something that is contrary to the character of God.

The next point is often underemphasized, but according to Keith Warrington, the Spirit also leads us through “sanctified common sense.”¹¹ The Spirit can sometimes go beyond reason, but He is not against reason. One example of the danger of neglecting this principle occurred in 1996, when Leung Yat-Wah, the leading pastor of Church of Zion in Hong Kong, told his members that hydrogen peroxide is a heavenly element given by God for the healing of their

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 15–16, Proquest Ebrary.

¹¹ Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 74, Proquest Ebrary.

bodies and he encouraged them to take it for their physical nourishment. Many heeded his advice, including children, and suffered serious side effects from it; subsequently, the pastor was arrested for misleading the masses.¹² This illustrates how prophetic claims that disregard biblical wisdom and sound judgment can go against common sense.

In addition, careful discernment is needed when a prophetic experience appears degrading or humiliating to God's people, such as behaving like animals.¹³ Beyond questions of propriety, such manifestations may become a stumbling block, especially in Asian contexts where spirit possession in traditional religions is often associated with animal-like behavior. Rather than bearing clear witness to Christ, they may create unnecessary confusion about the work of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Vondey's aesthetic interpretation of prophetic behavior challenges Pentecostals to resist dismissing prophetic expressions simply because they fall outside familiar religious expectations and, instead, to remain attentive to the surprising work of the Holy Spirit. In his closing words, Vondey also offers several important qualifications on how the Pentecostal church can discern prophetic behavior. These qualifications are important, lest his argument be misunderstood as granting theological legitimacy to every unusual or degrading behavior claimed to be "of the Spirit." The challenge now for Asian Pentecostals is to develop the spiritual maturity to discern such disruption faithfully. In our response, we have proposed three

¹² “真相猜·情尋 | 錫安教會鼓吹雙氧水治病？支持者袁大明與專家隔空駁火 前信徒至今保留一習慣,” *TVB*, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.tvb.com/varietynews-c/真相猜·情尋 | 錫安教會鼓吹雙氧水治病？支持者袁大明與專家隔空駁火 前信徒至今保留一習慣—1007679>.

¹³ As cautioned in the 1996 British Methodist Conference report on the Toronto Blessing; see: The Methodist Church (UK), “The Toronto ‘Blessing’ (1996),” accessed July 18, 2026, https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-the-toronto-blessing-1996_kWh4xJU.pdf, 626-627.

theological criteria that contribute to this ongoing conversation. The prophetic is a beautiful gift from Jesus to the church; may we steward it faithfully and build up His body, until we attain to the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

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