

MARTIN LUTHER ON MIRACLES, HEALING, PROPHECY AND TONGUES

*O Föller*¹
University of South Africa

Abstract

Although Martin Luther does not evolve a theology of charismata or church development along the lines of Corinthians 12-14 and in spite of the historical difference of the questions and the awareness of life, we individualistic post-moderns may learn from his approach and, looking at his way of arguing from the centre of Reformation theology, sharpen our instruments of discernment. Martin Luther has more to say in detail on the matter of extraordinary phenomena and present-day charismatic-pentecostal piety than many of us would think. In reading how he evaluates the specific matter of charismata, we note that a theological framework is unfolded which, in the diffusion of today, may serve to strengthen protestant identity. The historical findings question current positions of both strict negations of the miraculous and overemphasis of extraordinary things. At the same time they also reveal that all human knowledge is 'in part'.

1 BASIC THEOLOGICAL DECISIONS

The article unfolds a systematic-theological discernment of spirits along the basic principles of Reformation theology and offers possible pastoral guidelines and criteria on how to handle extraordinary spirit phenomena.

1.1 Priesthood of all believers

Starting from soteriology and justification Luther, in contrast to Roman Catholic separation between clerics and layman, emphasises the commonness and equality of all believers in their relation to God. On account of faith and baptism each Christian has been consecrated as a 'priest'. In principle there is an equality of authority between office bearers and non-office bearers. Classical references are 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelations 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. In addition Luther frequently quotes John 6:45 and 1 Corinthians 14:27ff in order to show that, in the same manner, all believers have their share in the Spirit. In principle each Christian has the right and duty to preach the Word and to judge doctrine, just as the congregation has the right of vocation into

ministry. Yet in practice these principles are limited by stressing the point of order (1 Cor 14:40). Directly opposite to Anabaptist itinerant preachers, Luther stresses orderly vocation in the ministry.

Since the monarchic form of ministry was familiar to Luther, he viewed it as the normal type of ministry. The result was the development of a monopoly of ordered ministry for any public spiritual exercise. This was slightly moderated by the notion of commission and representation, but common priesthood of all believers, the right and practice of general 'charismatic' participation was limited to the situation of emergency and non-Christian surroundings.

1.2 Characteristic of the grace of justification: 'Totality' - characteristics of the gifts of sanctification: 'Partiality'

The ethical dimension appears in Luther's differentiation of grace and gift (*gratia* and *donum*) in his *Introduction to Romans* (1522). Grace is the gracious, justifying total attention of God towards man for Christ's sake. The gifts are partial manifestations of the Spirit in the life of the Christian which, in an increasing process, find their eschatological fulfilment in Christ. They step into the position of the works of the flesh. Yet because in this life they never completely prevail against the flesh, there is always something relatively inherent in them. That is why Luther devotes himself minimally to gifts. His main interest is in grace, which as total justification comprises time and eternity. Irreversibly Luther gives priority to the one indivisible grace of salvation in comparison with the manifold partial charismata (WA 18, 136, 13; 26, 506, 5). In fundamentally binding gifts back to justification and in differentiating between justification and sanctification, whenever speaking of gifts as presents, Luther emphasises the gratitude of the recipient and the use to the glory of God and for the good of one's neighbour.

1.3 Charismata in the Christian community - charismata in the secular realm

Luther sees the special charismata of 1 Corinthians 12 in the church on nearly the same level as Spirit gifts in the worldly realm. The only difference is that they are related to the public preaching of the Gospel and therefore to the work of the Spirit in salvation. What they have in common with gifts in the secular realm is that they cannot tear their bearer away from the last judgement. The sharp distinction between the solely saving charis of God and the charismata of the Spirit also applies to the secular realm.

1.4 'Charis' and 'charisma' - 'saving faith' and 'wonder-working faith'

The relationship between 'charis' and 'charisma' and the different assessment made by Luther may be clarified from his remarks on 'saving faith' and 'miracle faith' in the context of his exegetical efforts around 1 Corinthians 13:2; 12:9. The wonder-working faith that is mentioned in these verses shows itself as an outward expression which, according to Luther, can also be found within heretics and godless people, just as, in the same way, can all gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. For example, he does not question the fact that Bileam has miracles with his prophesying and blessing. Luther interprets the tension of Mark 9:39 and Matthew 7:22 in this way that originally a

genuine relationship of faith that was marked by love was given out and from that the miraculous deeds arose. In the course of time the people in question fell away from faith, abandoned love and became high-handed and presumptuous. The enthusiastic adoption of the Gospel was not followed by perseverance in faith. The original clinging to the Word turns into religious presumption. This is how Luther understands the Corinthian situation. Other examples of the same occurrence in Luther are: Bileam, Saul, Ananias and Saphira, Thomas Müntzer. All started in true faith and worked well, but later changed. One still boasts of faith, although one no longer possesses it. The given gift of miracles, the *donum fidei*, in spite of the lost faith (*fides*) may still be active (WA.DB 7, 8, 10-18). These viewpoints also recur in his Disputationes. All references in Paul's, James's and John's epistles, that call for mere faith to love, according to Luther apply to those, who boasted their faith and their gifts, but at the same time were self-seeking, unloving and proud (WA 8, 105, 36-108, 18; 126, 21-32; 8, 106, 38). Like 1 Corinthians 13:2 indicates they have a 'faith', with which they are able to do miracles, but this faith is untrue, empty, imaginary, 'dead', because it does not rely on Christ and is not active in love. That such dead faith may produce living works stem from effectiveness of the public office (which is true for the church realm as well as the political realm). Together with the public office and because of and for the benefit of this office in service to others, God grants the authority to do works and miracles. This authority is not granted to the private individual as such, but to the individual as office bearer. Here, in an anti-donatistic way, Luther differentiates between person and office, as he differentiates between the administration of the sacraments and the government of the church by the godless.

The differentiation between saving faith, belief in Christ's foreign justice and wonder-working faith can also be found in the Disputationes. A person who works miracles, in view of salvation, may be unbelieving and therefore be lost. Nevertheless the miraculous deeds may be done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Luther sees the Spirit at work not only in the realm of the church, but also in the worldly reign in the great works of world history. The Holy Spirit and his gifts may be granted and be present without faith in Christ and love. Gifts of the Spirit may also be found among heathens (WA 39 II, 235-237; Theses 1-32; 51, 207, 21-210, 21; 240, 7-254, 12).

Fides, faith in Christ, and the *donum* to work miracles, have a distinctly different significance. The gifts, offices and workings of 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 according to 1 Corinthians 12:7 serve for 'the common good', and are being used by God in the best interests of the church and the peoples (WA 17 II, 161-171; 34 I, 162-170; 49, 25-29; 49, 351f; WA.DB 7, 8, 10-21). In contrast to miracle faith, which is granted because of the (public) office, saving faith in Christ initially does not emerge publicly. It is related to justification before God, to a person's own salvation. Whereas wonder-working faith is primarily active, saving faith is active only in a secondary way. 'Miracles' that are brought about by this saving faith that works through love are in no way inferior to the signs of wonder-working faith. Saving faith enables people to do things, which wonder-working faith is not able to bring about: it overcomes the sin of not loving and in obedience to justice triumphs over sin, world and devil. To continuously love God and one's neighbour willingly and without reward may

indeed be called 'raising the dead'. Compared to this faith of working in love, the charismata (according to Luther), is not to be overestimated. Sanctification of life presupposes the charismata.

1.5 Restriction to what is essential for salvation and to God's ordinary means of revelation

In Luther's treatment of extraordinary charismatic manifestations, one constantly comes across the basic figure of restriction to what is fundamental and essential for salvation as well as the reference to the ordinary ways of God, without excluding (on principle) the possibility of the extraordinary. But undoubtedly the emphasis and the main interest is on the fundamental things and the ordinary means of revelation. These may in no way be missing, whereas the field of the extraordinary is subject to the possibility of error, deception and therefore to ambiguity. Thus the matter of the assurance of salvation is affected, and Luther cannot but react in a subdued way and insist on the fundamental word of Scripture. The extraordinary must not question or dissolve the fundamentals; rather one should abstain from it. It only has a right to exist as far as it is 'according to faith' and, by this, Luther means, if it is according to Christ, according to the Gospel and according to Scripture (WA 39 I, 280, 1).

1.6 No refusal of the possibility of extraordinary revelations on principle

Luther speaks a straight 'No' to the abundance of dream-visions and special revelations of medieval piety. Increasingly these visions of saints and Mary and *colloquia maiestatis* (private conversations with the holy majesty of the Father) were outnumbering the revelations of the Lord. In the course of the development of his reformation findings Luther resolutely turned away from mystical revelation experiences (WA 39 II, 236, 8), most radically from the unification mystic of Dionysius Areopagita. The intention to climb up to, even above, the Son of God, the Spirit and even above the Father into the one essence of God he judged as satanic deception that leads to presumption or despair. With harsh criticism Luther also fights against appearances of the dead and against the teaching of purgatory that grew out of those, and against the practice of requiems. He judges these phenomena as massive haunting by the devil (WA 39 II, 237).

Even though Luther in the interests of the basic findings of reformation here draws a sharp dividing line here, he does not contest the possibility of special revelations in principle. He reluctantly concedes, as exception, the incidence of genuine, immediate revelations from God, dream visions and Spirit leadings (WA 39 II, 236, 16f). He only dares in retrospect to form a judgement of true appearances on the basis of their outcome (WA 39 II, 236, 22-29).

1.7 Messages in the form of dreams

In his interpretation of Genesis (1535-1545) Luther offers longer expositions on the different kinds of dreams, and admits that there are dreams that are caused by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in general he remained reserved and rather sceptical about dreams.

Luther knows of three kinds of dreams:

- those that are godly and have prophetic quality
- those that have physical-psychological, natural causes
- those that are false and are caused by Satan.

Even though not all dreams are to be disparaged, nevertheless Luther has no desire to receive such and urges them to be scrutinised. He urges that first the study of Scripture should be studied so that it is really learned and rightly understood, because on the basis of Scripture all dreams, visions and prophecies, good and bad angels easily might be judged. As an example for a godly dream, he mentions the dream of Monica with its strong effect on Augustine (WA 34 I, 534, 3-537, 14). Godly dreams can be detected by the fact that they really prove to be true, work towards everlasting life and redemption and are useful to humankind; in contrast the outcome of satanic dreams is the darkening of truth through their destructive effect. A retrospective judgement is possible from the results. When the Holy Spirit causes dreams, he simultaneously gives their interpretation and works out their fulfilment.

1.8 Abstinence as regards himself

Because discernment of satanic seductions turns out to be very difficult, Luther wishes no special revelations for himself. Augustine made a similar pact with God and beseeched Him several times not to send him dreams, visions or angelic messages. Jesus Christ, his word and sacrament are enough to him. Beyond these sure signs there is no need of any revelations until the end of the world. In contrast to dreams etcetera, the Word is infallible and a sure refuge (WA 44, 246, 1-252, 31; 386, 37-390, 5; 41, 606, 24ff). Luther wants his attitude of abstinence to be understood as private decision which he does not want to impose on others (WA 44, 387, 39-42; 27, 5-8, 9-12).

1.9 Restraint from direct revelation

All in all, Luther also tries to restrain the direct element in his exposition of Scripture. For example he explains the calling of Abraham as having happened indirectly, perhaps through his forefather Sem. This interpretation can be found in connection with expositions on the fact that God also speaks to us through people to whom we are related and who are superior to us (WA 44, 387, 4-16). A general guideline with Luther is that nowadays God no longer wants to speak without mediation. Even if in his liberty he is doing so here and there, we should stick to his ordinary working. Luther refers to the proverb: "What is above us is none of our business!" (WA 44, 248, 35-249, 1).

1.10 Particular relevance for this life

Not only for himself, but also in relation to the church he downgrades the weight and importance of extraordinary phenomena. They are only relevant to the things of this life. They have particular significance and do not concern the whole church. If God wants to address him in a dream or in sleep or would send him signs and warnings concerning temporal things, Luther would accept that. But in view he is suspicious of special revelations of eternal thing (WA 44, 249, 25f).

1.11 Battle and cross as distinguishing marks of divine promises

Marks of diabolic pseudo promises, according to Luther are the following: enter they are received with lust; they make people self-confident and impertinent so that they do not fear the wrath and judgement of God; they tally with reason so that they are accepted easily and without doubt by reason. In contrast, divine promises involve a battle, because human reason and natural sense consider them to be impossible. Divine promises point directly to the cross and only promise blessing afterwards. Reason gets annoyed about them, because it despises the invisible, and things that lie far ahead, seeing them as nothing and abhorring the cross and fleeing from it as if it is an endless misfortune.

1.12 Subordination to the ordinary means of revelation

Luther subordinates the whole field of special phenomena to the basic endowments of Gospel preaching, baptism, Holy Communion, confession and the fundamental orders in the secular realm (WA 44, 246, 15-23). God's attention and his real love and attention manifested in these are just as real and friendly and, above all, as daily accessible as the extraordinary experiences of Abraham for example. Compared to us, much less was given (WA 42, 667, 23-29; 44, 97, 37-40; 25, 120, 7).

1.13 The necessity of testing

A thorough testing of extraordinary phenomena according to the analogy of faith and the fundamental meaning of Scripture is indispensable (WA 42, 359, 15ff; 455, 27ff). If they are not in accordance with faith and are opposed to the revealed Word, they must be rejected. Prophets are to be rejected, even if they do signs and miracles (Dtn 13:1ff) - (WA 42, 452, 5f. 9f. 28-30; 453, 5-9). Quite crudely Luther says: "You ought to listen to the Word; spit at the whole ghastly business and say: 'You are the devil!'" (WA 42, 666, 13-16; 667, 2-5; 43, 443, 5-12; 43, 444, 4-9).

In *De servo arbitrio* he explains that the testing of the spirits should be carried out with Scripture in context of the church (*in facie Ecclesiae*). This includes the norm of the creeds of the early church. Furthermore it implies that Scripture ought first of all to be heard from the perspective of the church and not to be steered too hurriedly towards individual experiences. As a third objective element, Luther names the office of preaching. In contradiction to the 'creepers and secret-corner preachers' he emphasises the public command and vocation, because otherwise the church is in danger of falling apart (WA 42, 667, 18; 42, 668, 21).

1.14 Authorities of testing

Accordingly Luther knows a graded inter-related togetherness of several authorities of testing: Scripture - Creeds - Office. Fundamental orientation is the testimony of Christ in Scripture, summarised in the creeds, coming to humans through called and ordained ministers via preaching, teaching and administration of the sacraments. The positive aim of this stern linking is to secure the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit and the eschatological assurance of salvation.

1.15 Confirmation through miracles

In addition to the above-mentioned three authorities Luther, referring to Deuteronomy 18, launches another outward criterion: the confirmation of each new prophet by signs and wonders (WA 29, 376, 14f; 43, 3-9). This is what he demands from all who came to him referring to direct revelations. And he advises others to do the same. The new teaching should in no way overrule the old one nor be in any kind of conflict with it. It may merely deepen or broaden. But even in this case confirmation by miracles is needed (WA 42, 667, 20-22; 15, 552, 33-553, 26). But even when accompanied by miracles, new teaching must be weighed and tested according to the *analogia fidei* (WA 46, 476, 12ff). Only in cases of careful testing God in his faithfulness, will He not allow false prophets to perform miracles. If we do not test their teaching before Christ, God rightly will allow them to perform them and we will be deceived and will perish (WA 18, 653, 28; 30 III, 520, 34).

2 MIRACLES, HEALING, PROPHECY AND TONGUES

Luther does not present a systematic treatment of charismata but, in his sermons and writings, various annotations to partial aspects can be found.

2.1 Working of miracles

Depending on the context, varying accentuations can be found in Luther's writings: in statements that wonders are no longer necessary because nowadays we have more certain signs; in admonitions to pay attention to miracles and to avoid the danger of mingling with false teachers; in the encouragement to have faith and in very comprehensive statements that even today every Christian is able to work miracles wherever and whenever it is necessary - especially in a missionary situation. Luther cannot be used to back up position of total negation of the possibility of signs and wonders for today. Only a qualifying assessment starting from the unique situation of salvation history of the beginning, respectively coming from the unique fundamental miracle of redemption and the central things and the imparting of salvation.

There are numerous and basic assessments of signs and wonders as manifestations addressed to the senses, and these have been given especially to Jesus during the times of the apostles in order to affirm the Gospel. They mark the new beginning of salvation history and are of passing importance. Having fulfilled their purpose in assisting the establishment of the church and of Holy Scripture, after the offices and baptism had been institutionalised and were at work, those performing signs and wonders had to step back from what they testified to. They were no longer necessary. The Holy Spirit had been given once at Pentecost with his gifts, speaking in tongues, exorcising the devil(s), healing the sick etcetera to the apostles visibly, in order to announce the dawning of the new era of salvation. "But now until the end of the world He gives the Holy Spirit and the gifts secretly and invisibly to his Christians" (WA 18, 304, 10; 14, 647, 25ff; 684, 21ff; 664, 31ff). In the present eon the Holy Spirit has divested himself completely of his divine majesty and is now fencing with Word and sacrament against Satan, so that faith may expand (WA 14, 647,28ff).

As with the categories of 'partial' and 'total' aspect, Luther differentiates between physical and spiritual miracles (WA 17, 356-359, 359, 31f) between temporal and eternal effects. Greater than physical wonders, which seldom happen, is what happens when a person grasps faith (WA 14, 684, 35ff). God works physical miracles with the objective of building up our faith, but he is not doing this constantly. Compared to faith and Gospel, the real wonders in God's sight, miracles are like lead against gold.

Present-day miracles must be turned down and rejected as works of the devil, if they are used to back up teaching that is contrary to the Gospel (WA 23, 721, 4; 20, 394, 12-20). The apostolic teaching, which once and forever has been confirmed by God through signs, transcends present-day occurrences and judges them (WA 23, 192, 15). So, to Luther, miracles are no sure indicators of the presence of the Holy Spirit (WA 41, 21, 14; 27, 420-432; 46, 493-495; 22, 121, 5-10; 16, 301, 22-31). If they are not accompanied by the Word, they are actually a sign for the opposite. Luther judges most of the cases of the many miracles reported by monks and from places of pilgrimage as diabolic deception and sorcery. At the same time Luther does not delude himself about the fascinating effect of this seduction upon humans, which God allows because of the rejection of sound teaching. In contrast to the power of God and the permanent wonders of the maintenance of the church, of Word and sacrament, in contrast to all attempts of the devil to wipe out the church, and in contrast to the fundamental occurrence of a person's coming to faith, Luther describes extraordinary miracle-signs as weak, earth-bound and slight, yes, nothing more than 'childish' (WA 39 I, 391, 12).

On the one hand, Luther may say that in the present time, miracles are no longer necessary, because the Gospel has already been proclaimed everywhere and the church has been established; on the other hand he holds onto the truth that the same power and impact of Christ is forever in existence in Christendom and miracles may happen whenever they are required (WA 45, 260, 18-264, 19; 45, 261, 27-262, 2). They were necessary when the Gospel first entered the world. But, from his own time, Luther regarded this as not necessarily required and he viewed miracle signs as warnings of

unauthorised action. But in times of extraordinary pressure it might again become necessary. In such cases without exception each Christian would have the power to perform miracles. Especially in missionary situations where the Gospel is first announced, God will provide affirming miracles. The deciding category, in Luther's view is the question of necessity. According to Luther God tends to show his power through a miracle, where ordinary means of keeping up the *oikonomia*, the worldly reign and the church are too weak.

Luther's attitude towards signs and wonders is similar to his attitude towards special revelation and Spirit leadings. Although, in principal they are possible, he is cautious and does not desire the gift of miracles for himself. He prefers to stick to the Word of God and to contemplate it and be instructed by it, because in this way he will avoid going astray. More important than the physical miracles are the spiritual ones. More important than fragmentary signs are the fundamental miracles of salvation, cross, resurrection and Ascension of Christ, as well as faith, the salvation of the sinner symbolised as spiritual raised from the dead and in his future resurrection. More important to Luther than the miraculous, external work of the Spirit, is the hidden, inner work. The effects of miracles that are partial and temporal fade beside the miracle of salvatoric faith in its total aspect, which comprises time and eternity. That the early church, after its establishment, also experienced extraordinary signs of the last days, in the light of his deep experience of repentance and his central discovery of salvation, did not impress him with sufficient significance. Against the background of his struggle to receive final assurance regarding salvation, he emphasises the point that the Holy Spirit is constantly calling us away from ourselves towards Christ and the Word of God. On the other hand, the evil spirit causes humans to trust in their own strength and works, knowledge, visions and experiences.

A critical assessment will question Luther's tendency to 'spiritualise' the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit which, however, is already driving back the power of death now in end times miracles, even if only partly and temporarily, also in the physical sphere. Another critique concerns his evaluation of the situation of his times and his perspective that the Gospel has been proclaimed everywhere and with it the connected categories of signs and wonders whether necessary or unnecessary. In Luther's time one might have come to completely different conclusions depending on different preliminary decisions pertaining to worldview, ecclesiology and missiology. One could at least comment that in specific circumstances such as the missionary situation it may be necessary, to do miracles. His statements, some of which are far-reaching, need to be seen in perspective because his general assessment that miracles are not necessarily being required, Luther shows himself to be more open to miracles than one would expect of him. As long as the fundamental truths of salvation and the reformation discovery are not called into question, one may positively conclude, that despite all scruples there is room for accompanying signs and wonders, especially in times of persecution and in missionary ventures into new ground.

2.2 Healing prayer (WA 40 III, 141, 38-142, 21)

Looking through Luther's remarks one gets no indication of the idea of an ongoing charisma of healing the sick in the present time. What are most frequent found here are the references to the Gospels and the early period of the church and the significance of healings as extraordinary signs to confirm the Gospel message in the beginning. Luther's understanding of sickness and healing is strongly determined by his 'theology of the cross', which makes him cautious about visible miracles and makes him view sickness and suffering as an inevitable part of life, as a means of education and almost indispensable to knowing God (WA 3, 543, 10f; 20, 385, 1-26). Here, too, Luther gives greater weight to spiritual and eternal things than to temporal goods. Faith is directed mainly to eternal and invisible things, which we do have (*non in re, sed spe*), in hope. The life of the renewed shows itself *sub contraria specie* and is therefore marked by suffering, humiliation and bearing one's cross. Healing prayers that have not been answered belong to the concealed character of the Kingdom of God.

Besides the strong markedness of this general line, which emphasises endurance and persevering in a situation, other statements show that he quite clearly expected healings through prayer. His belief in the omnipotence of God, in the possibility of sovereign intervention and the reality of the power of prayer was strong. So, for example, Luther reports on three miraculous healings when faced with deadly danger. They concerned himself, his wife Käthe and his fellow campaigner Melancthon, who, in answer to Luther's urgent supplication, was brought back to life in 1540.

In 1545, one year before his death, Luther gives important instructions for healing prayer in a private setting and in the congregation according to James 5:14ff. The letter to pastor Severin Schulze draws a vivid picture of the practice of home visitation of sick people and prayer for healing by the laying on of hands in Wittenberg (WA 4, 332, 3ff; 40 II, 24, 6f; 3, 301, 11f).

2.3 Prophecy

In his interpretation of John 16:13 Luther distinguishes two kinds of prophecy. The first kind concerns the secular reign and temporal things and can be found mainly in the Old Testament (WA 43, 672, 33f; 44, 109, 38ff; 3, 646, 20ff) and less frequently in the New Testament. Because it does not concern the spiritual matters of Christians, Luther does not consider it to be necessary. "He who has it, may use it, like other gifts from God. He who does not have it, may well do without it." The second kind of prophecy concerns the Kingdom of Christ, its essence, flourishing or thriving, falling away and maintaining of faith and the church. These prophecies are revealed only to Christians and, above all, were given to the apostles. Even with its dark words and illustrations, the Book of Revelations is this type of prophecy. Luther mentions the possibility that other fathers in early Christendom situations have spoken in the same way prophetically, but there is no written account of this.

On the one hand, Luther may say: "This spirit of prophecy still remains within Christendom, yet however not to the same extent as with the apostles", thus indicating that prophecy is not restricted to biblical times. On the other hand he considers the element of immediacy found in the biblical prophets has receded in post-biblical times. We may prophesy in so far as "we have taken it

from them and have it out of their books, however, to a lesser extent” (WA 46, 60, 34-40). Like Paul (1 Cor 4:8) and Moses (Num 11:29) Luther also wishes that all Christians should be spirit-taught, spirit-filled and prophets, “for, where this would be the case, one would have an easy time in preaching and governing, and everything would go smoothly, harmoniously and properly” (WA 46, 61, 16-24). But these notions are largely hypothetical. Unfortunately in reality things are different and many only think that they have the Holy Spirit and the right understanding. Nowadays, inspiration no longer takes place directly as in the times of the apostles, but is mediated through the reading of and listening to the Scriptures. Luther advises spiritualists, in particular, to link their work to Scripture (WA 46, 61, 25-27).

Besides differentiating between secular and spiritual prophecy Luther also distinguishes between prophecy as prediction of future things and prophecy as interpretation of Scriptures from which preaching arises (WA 16, 110, 24-32). Because the Gospel is the final and completely sufficient revelation, no new (and this means: direct) teaching is to be expected. Hence Luther explains prophesying in 1 Corinthians 14 as interpreting Scripture. The gift of interpreting the Scriptures is to be valued much more highly than the gift of telling the future, because it teaches and improves the Christian faith. To predict future events is one of the least gifts from God and, on top of that at times it comes from the devil. Luther says that he has the gift of preaching, but not of predicting future things. Those who come from Wittenberg are ‘prophets’ in the sense of correctly interpreting Scripture.

Even if only marginally, Luther himself seems to concede a certain degree of immediacy respectively to other forms than interpreting Scriptures, when he explains that prophecy may also happen through visions and dreams (WA 29,375,32-376,15). Because each kind, but especially visions and dreams, carries the threat of satanic deception, prophecy must always be examined. It must be ‘according to faith’, ‘similar to faith’, which in content means the Gospel of Christ in the sense of justification by grace through faith, as he sees it declared in Scripture. In the end all prophecy is preaching Christ (WA 40 I, 571, 12-572, 5). From John 16:13 Luther takes “the proper norm according to which one should examine the spirits”. The Holy Spirit can be recognised by the fact “that he will not speak of himself (like the spirit of lies, the devil and his followers), but from what he will hear”, that is, he will only speak of Christ and glorify him, in order that men will believe in him (WA 15, 602-609). Everything that contradicts this Gospel of Christ and Gospel of grace respectively leads away from it, is seductive preaching - it is ‘Anathema’.

As far as his own vocation is concerned, in contrast to Müntzer for example, Luther did not see himself as an extraordinarily called and directly inspired prophet. What had happened to him was a re-revelation of the old Gospel, of the original apostolic teaching. That is why no miracles of confirmation were necessary (WA 26, 434, 30; 27, 498, 4).

Basic to Luther’s teachings is the completed salvatoric revelation of Christ which, confirmed by signs and wonders, was given directly by God to the prophets and apostles. Current ‘prophecy’ is related to this definite revelation,

which is captured in the Holy Scripture. In other words it is a spirit-worked interpretation of Scriptures.

Besides this, there seems to be some scope for present-day prophecy of future events and a certain element of immediacy as a concession to the secular reign. But this is a rather marginal and significant note. In any case it must be subordinated to the central testimony of the Holy Scriptures and be examined from there. Luther shows a certain openness to a 'free', relatively direct working of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

2.4 Speaking in tongues

From his short remarks it becomes fairly clear that Luther does not consider glossolalia as direct spirit-worked speech in an unintelligible language as present-day possibility. Without deeper elaboration on the phenomenon as such, he mentions it in his interpretation of Galatians 3:2 as God-given outward sign of the reception of the Spirit in addition to other gifts. The main consideration is that the Spirit has been given to the heathens in recognition of their faith by listening to preaching without the benefits of the law and circumcision. Luther obviously views speaking in tongues as a unique manifestation of the beginning. In commenting on Galatians 4:6 he differentiates two kinds and times of receiving the Spirit, one visibly in the early church and a later invisibly. Referring to 1 Corinthians 14:22 Luther maintains that the first outpouring with visible signs was necessary because of the unbelievers. After this direct confirmation of the Gospel by God and the establishment of the church, a visible manifestation of conferring the Spirit was no longer necessary. Now the Holy Spirit is given without visible form through the Word and sent into the hearts, where he creates new life.

In his marginal notes on the Bible, Luther interprets tongue speaking in 1 Corinthians as plain reading or singing biblical texts without explaining (WA.B II, 423, 61ff). In his treatise "Against the heavenly prophets, on images and sacraments" (1525) he applies tongue speaking to the use of Latin as foreign language during mass and in preaching (WA.B II, 424-427). In Acts 2 he assumes preaching of the apostles in different national languages (WA.B II, 443, 4ff). Luther says that the gift of interpreting tongues means explaining a text or expounding preaching or translating foreign languages.

One may assume that, even if Luther had been better informed about the phenomenon of present-day glossolalia, he would have applied the same fundamental categories as he did to the other charismata. Like Paul, he would have downgraded them in comparison with the central issues of salvation, faith, love, hope, and compared with prophecy, interpretation of Scripture and preaching.

3 FINAL REMARKS

Luther's main interest is not in the great variety of charismata, but inwards the one charis, which is indispensable for salvation and comprises time and

eternity. From here he forms his judgements. Besides the soteriological work of the Spirit, the aspect of sanctification of life emerges. Here and there Luther mentions the idea of a restriction of the gifts to early Christianity, but he did not make a principle of it. Rather he maintains an openness to present-day occurrence as well. All in all, he is cautious about miracles and future prophecy, but he does not exclude them on principle. However, they are not fundamental and indispensable like interpreting Scriptures. He did not give an exhortation to discover new charismata. The criteria for the judgement of all charismata are faith in Christ and preaching Christ with the emphasis on justification by faith alone.

Inherent in Luther's strong emphasis on orderly vocation, lies a tendency to link charisma with the public office which, in the course of time, took place to an even stronger extent. The 'we' aspect of the church in form of its different limbs charismatically living, working and serving together and each other is not unfolded. Luther does not grasp 1 Corinthians 12-14 as a model of Christian church life which is worthwhile striving for today.

In contrast to the testimony of the New Testament, Luther's restraining of *revelationes speciales* and the exclusive attachment of God's communication with man to Word and Sacrament is a limitation. Paul in his service also receives direct leadings by the Spirit (Acts 16:6f; 19:21; 20:22f; 23:11; Gal 2:1), whereas Luther replaces this element with listening to the word of Scripture and by referring to the duties of each person's estate as a God-given position and the place where one is proved (tested).

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ENDNOTE

1 Guest researcher for the Pentecostal project, at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria.