Affirming Diversity:
God's People as a Community of Prophets

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The theme of this Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies is affirming diversity. In keeping with this theme, I will affirm the fact that there are diverse paradigms by which the people of God have been described, and give a narrative theology of one of these paradigms. This paradigm is Luke's portrait of the people of God of the new age, who, by virtue of having the Holy Spirit poured forth upon them, have become the eschatological community of prophets upon whom Jesus, himself the eschatological prophet, has poured forth the Spirit of prophecy—both for their own generation, for their children's generation, and for each succeeding generation. This paradigm distances Luke from Paul's all-too-dominant paradigm of the people of God as the body of Christ and also from the traditional Protestant paradigm of God's people as the priesthood of all believers. These two paradigms—the Pauline and the Reformed—have not only overshadowed Luke's, but have over time, and until this century, snuffed out the practical belief that God's people are a community of prophets, or, in other words, the prophethood of all believers. This prophethood paradigm is, however, Luke's distinctive vision of the people of God and is an important dimension of his contribution both to the New Testament and to the ministry of God's people in the twentieth century.

In the discussion which follows, I will trace the portraits of God's people as a community of prophets through its three stages of redemptive history. The first stage is to be found in Moses's earnest desire that all of God's people would be prophets, the second in the inauguration of the prophethood of all believers through Jesus and among his followers, and the third in its partial recovery in the twentieth century, functionally, experientially and theologically.
Earnest Desire:

*Moses Desires a Nation of Prophets* (*Numbers 11:24-30*)

The concept of the prophethood of all believers is rooted in the redemptive history of Israel as a nation. At Mt. Sinai God covenanted with his people to make them, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). While God was faithful to his redemptive purposes, Israel, especially the generation of the Exodus, often proved to be disloyal. Moses, Israel's leader, quickly discovered that not only was the nation rebellious and disobedient to God, but that it was difficult to lead. In this time of leadership crisis for Moses, God instructed him to delegate leadership responsibilities among the seventy elders of Israel. With this transfer of leadership there was also to be a complementary transfer of the empowering Spirit. This transfer happened at the Tabernacle and is reported in these words:

> He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied (Num. 11:25).

But two of the elders had remained in the camp, and they also prophesied. When this fact was reported to Moses, Joshua, his attendant urged: "Moses, my lord, restrain them" (Num. 11:28). With a wisdom born out of his struggles as a leader of a stubborn nation, Moses replied with the earnest desire: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29b). Thus, the ideal for Israel was that in addition to being a kingdom of priests it would also be a kingdom of prophets.

Moses's earnest desire that Israel would be a nation of prophets remained unfulfilled across the advancing centuries, until God himself raised up the eschatological prophet like Moses, who, in turn, became the fountainhead of a community of prophets.

Inauguration:


A millennium and more would pass before Moses's earnest desire that God's people would be a nation of prophets would be fulfilled. It was fulfilled in the life and ministry of a Galilean peasant, Jesus of Nazareth, and through the transfer of the Spirit of prophecy was extended from him to the small company of his followers.

The Restoration of Prophecy

When Jesus was born to Mary, a young peasant girl from Nazareth in Galilee, Rome ruled Palestine with a grip of iron, the Pharisees and the synagogue vied with the priesthood and the Temple for the religious affections of the people, and, with a few exceptions, the prophet and prophecy had been silent in Israel for four hundred years. Into this environment God restored prophecy suddenly, dramatically and