THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PROPHECY: "WORD-GIFTS" OF THE SPIRIT AMONG CATHOLIC PENTECOSTALS

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Abstract

For Catholic pentecostalism, a recent middle-class group-movement, the element of prophecy takes on special significance. It is the "gift of the Holy Spirit" by which God communicates directly with the prayer group through the voices of certain members. For this theological reason, the giving of prophecy and related roles—glossolalic prophecy, interpretation, confirmation, and discernment—become central to prayer meetings where these gifts are exercised. These speech roles, together with the roles of hearers and controllers of speech, are significant in developing and maintaining a common definition of the situation. The orchestration of these diverse roles enables the group leadership to maintain firm control of the prayer meeting, while creating the semblance of spontaneity and egalitarianism—two ideals of the movement.

Seven Catholic pentecostal groups were studied by participant observation and interviewing between 1971 and 1975. The specific aspect of language use was analyzed, and norms and patterns of speech roles were recorded. The speaking of prophecy and related "gifts" serve important social functions for the prayer groups. They work to foster an atmosphere of expectancy, a sense of the immediacy of God, and a feeling of mystery. Further, they promote the unity of the prayer group and enhance the feeling on the part of members that their group is "chosen" for God's revelations of Himself. The use of prophecy and related speech serves to embody lines of stratification in the prayer group and to promote control by the leaders. Finally, it serves as a source of authoritative teaching, fulfilling in part for many members a felt need for such strong authority, and thus constituting part of the appeal of the movement.

Studies of language use among pentecostals have focused upon the glossolalia which is one of the definitive characteristics of these groups. Glossolalia, or the "speaking in tongues," is one of the most spectacular aspects of pentecostal behavior, and has led to many questions about the language of tongue-
speaking itself (Goodman, 1972; Hine, 1969; Kildahl, 1972; Samarin, 1972). Nevertheless, glossolalia is only one (at times, relatively small) part of pentecostal practice. Far more significant in the Catholic pentecostal belief system is the speaking of prophecy. Prophecy to Catholic pentecostals is God speaking directly to the prayer group through one of its members' voice, and constitutes one of the most important events of any prayer meeting. This analysis of the element of prophecy is part of a larger research project on the “non-linguistic” aspects of pentecostal language use, in which tongue-speaking was viewed in the context of the total speech community of which it is a meaningful part.

Because it focuses on Catholic pentecostalism, a developing middle-class movement in American Catholicism in contrast to the lower-class Protestant prototype of pentecostalism, this research differs from previous studies. Other authors have analyzed some aspects of prophecy, especially among classical and neo-pentecostal Protestant groups (Samarin, 1972; Willems, 1967; Wilson, 1959). Comparison with Catholic pentecostals' use of prophecy may prove fruitful in showing how much of the functions of prophecy and related roles is characteristic of that form of interaction in general or only peculiar to one variant of pentecostalism. On the other hand, because many Catholic pentecostal practices were borrowed deliberately or not from Protestant pentecostals, points of comparison may represent only learned behavior.

The Catholic pentecostal movement, also called the “charismatic renewal,” began in 1967 in the immediate influence of Vatican II and has expanded steadily since then. This movement is of special sociological interest because (1) it recruits largely from a stable, middle-class, well-educated population of traditional church members; and (2) the pentecostal type of religiosity is a major departure for Catholics from the style of religion into which they had been previously socialized. Definitive characteristics of pentecostal prayer-groups in the “charismatic renewal” are their focus on “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” as a discrete spiritual experience, their emphasis upon the concomitant “gifts” of the Spirit (speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and so on), and finally, a strong sense of “community” among charismatic Christians.

Seven Catholic pentecostal prayer groups in northern New Jersey were studied from 1971 to 1975. Two of the groups were relatively large (over 100 regular participants); two groups were of average size (25-60 participants); and three were relatively small (under 20 participants). One of the large and one of the small groups were student-oriented prayer-groups; the other five groups studied had few, if any, student members. The research included participant-observations over the four-year period, primarily in prayer-meetings, which were followed up by unstructured interviews with key members. In addition, 63 prophecies and interpretations were recorded verbatim as were several other speech events.

The following discussion is organized around the division of labor in the reception of prophecy. Such a division of labor is not unlike that discussed by Shibutani (1966) in his analysis of rumor. Like the audiences described by Shibuta-
tani, the prayer groups were engaged in a process of seeking a satisfactory common definition of the situation in the face of the fluidity of a developing movement and the ambiguity inherent in the very nature of prophecy. In fact, as Samarin (1973: 254) points out, the history of such movements (as the new pentecostalism) is “a study in the socio-linguistic aspects of the institutionalization of religious roles.” Following a brief description of the Catholic pentecostal movement’s distinctive understanding of the nature of prophecy, the social context of prophecy is analyzed. The division of labor in this larger context is described in terms of the general structure of the prayer groups and the roles of speakers of prophecy, glossolalic prophecy, “interpretation” of tongues, and confirmation. Social roles involved in the reception and control of these speech elements are also analyzed: the formal group leadership, prayer meeting leadership, the “core” membership, and the role of persons with the gift of “discernment.” Last follows a discussion of the themes of prophecies and an analysis of the social functions of prophecy in Catholic pentecostal prayer-groups.

BELIEFS ABOUT PROPHECY

For Catholic pentecostals, prophecy is one of numerous “gifts” or “charisms” given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Christian community. The focus upon these “gifts of the Spirit” has its foundation in several references in the New Testament, especially the Pauline letters, including mention of prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy, apostleship, evangelism, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, healing, miracles, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues (Ranaghan and Ranaghan, 1969: 158). In practice, the Catholic pentecostals observed gave greatest attention to the more dramatic and public gifts: tongues, interpretation, prophecy, discernment, healing, and evangelism.

To Catholic pentecostals, “prophecy” refers to “moments” of prophetic utterance rather than to a generalized lifetime prophetic role. Nevertheless, the use of these prophetic utterances often became a distinct role within the prayer group. For example, one movement spokesman explained (Ranaghan and Ranaghan, 1969: 173):

Yet in this instance we are referring to prophetic utterance, to a word-gift given for a moment to an individual. The individual is not necessarily a prophet therefore, but he sometimes exercises a decided gift for prophecy, a gift for speaking out in the Lord’s name as he is prompted.

The idea of prophecy among Catholic pentecostals is that it is a “forth-telling” rather than a “fore-telling.” One group member described this gift:

Prophecy is the forth-telling of the mind of God to his people. God had things he wanted to say to us as a community, like tonight when he used me to speak his message. There was a certain phrase that kept coming through my mind, and I knew I needed to start speaking that.

The understanding that this practice of prophecy is believed to be direct communication from God is sufficient to explain its centrality in the prayer meeting. The mystery and awe which surround this speech act also serve to account for the centrality of such a relatively brief event. The “success” of the event depends
entirely upon the satisfactory management of the social context of prophecy such that it "comes across" as being "truly from God." The ambiguity, however, lies in the fact that whatever words are spoken are, in fact, spoken by humans. Thus, the prophecy has meaning—or lacks meaning—as human communication. Also, the persons taking up key roles (speaking prophecy, interpreting glossolalic prophecy, discerning valid prophecy, and the like) are well-known to fellow members as ordinary people rather than "prophets" or special personages. Furthermore, there is continually the built-in possibility that the communication may not be from God, but rather from the Devil or merely from the speaker's own imagination. All of these problems must be overcome in the management of "successful" prophesying.

Management of the definition of the situation is further necessitated by the fact that the "forthtelling of God's mind" is highly controlled and orchestrated by the leaders of the prayer meeting. The leadership's control over prophesying is more important than control over any other element of the prayer meeting because prophecy has the inherent potential to undermine their authority in the prayer group. Leaders take care that only "responsible" members are allowed to prophesy. Nevertheless, such strong elements of control run counter to the desire for spontaneity and egalitarianism. Thus, the management of the social context of prophecy must create the semblance of freedom and equality while maintaining the firm control.

How, then, is the social context of prophecy arranged to promote that desired common definition of the situation—that the "mind of God" be spoken to the prayer group?

Social Context of Prophecy

First, it is necessary to outline the structure of the prayer meetings within which the element of prophecy was observed. The seven groups studied exhibited a rather wide range of group structures, and the type of structure was strongly correlated with the use of prophecy and other speech roles in the prayer meeting. These structures may be visualized on a continuum between "open" and "closed" types of groups (McGuire, 1975). The terms "open" and "closed" refer to the degree to which the leadership of the group allowed the membership and other participants to influence or speak up in the prayer meetings. Both "open" and "closed" groups utilized the element of prophecy in their prayer meetings, but the two types differed in the degree of control they exerted over the exercise of this type of speech.

In the introductory remarks of the prayer meeting, participants were told what to "expect" to experience. For example,

God will speak through the body gathered here. We would ask you to just relax, enjoy being able to sit back and just let the Lord speak in any way he wishes to you. . . . You should hear the voice of the Lord in prophecy. If someone speaks in prophecy (which is first-person) it's a time to be very attentive and listen—it's a special message. Sometimes it will happen with tongues, sometimes without. In either case, be very sensitive, very alert and listening hard. The Lord may speak to us in silence, too, and we should be comfortable with silence as well as with scripture. Or with spontaneous prayer (which is somewhat new)—a particular prayer welling up in your own words. If you do hear speaking in tongues, we ask you to wait and listen. It is the Lord's way of get-
ting our attention. We should be silent until we know what it is that he has to say to us.

Opening statements also served to specify the limitations of speech in the relatively “closed” groups, for example:

Let our core community, that has been here for months, do the hard part of the work, doing the praying and the praising aloud. This would be particularly true of the music. We'd ask you to let the music ministry select the songs so that the fabric of our prayer will be a real unity. Also, let the core community choose the scripture selections.

There were two basic forms which prophecy could take: prophecy and speaking (forth) in tongues. Prophecy by definition was always in the form of a first-person pronouncement. That is, God himself was believed to be speaking directly through the person. Most prophesies were very brief—only a few relatively short sentences. The general form of the prophetic statement consisted of a greeting (e.g., “My children”), several somewhat repetitive statements on one or two themes, closed by a single final statement.

“Speaking (forth) in tongues” was considered to be another instance of prophecy, different only in that it was given in “tongues” rather than the vernacular. This use of tongues is to be distinguished from regular “praying in tongues” in which the gift of tongues was used for personal prayer and praise. Glossolalic pronouncements were prophecies, but required someone (usually someone other than the tongue-speaker) to have the “gift of interpretation.” Glossolalic prophecy was spoken loudly, like prophecy in the vernacular. Typically, however, less inflection in speaking was observed, perhaps a reflection of variations of skill in tongue-speaking. Examples of prophecies sung in tongues and in English were also recorded, although these were relatively rare.

The role of speakers of prophecy is very important in the prayer meeting. This primacy is partly due to the fact that the whole group desires to receive prophecy, communication from God. Therefore, it is very desirable to be the one through whom this important communication comes. The primacy is in large measure also due to the borrowed authority which the speaker gains in prophesying. His words have great importance but not as his words. It is for this reason that the leaders control the element of prophecy; the speaking of prophecy then serves as a validation of their authority in the prayer group. This use of prophecy is directly connected with the egalitarianism-authoritarianism conflict in the movement's ideals. As Willems points out (1967: 253):

> the closer a sect comes to the egalitarian model, the more its leaders feel the need to validate their authority by seeking supernatural sanctions for their decisions.

One pattern of use of prophecy seems to contradict these generalizations about authority. The exception is that, while women were virtually unrepresented among the key leadership of prayer groups, they were frequently speakers of prophecy. Nevertheless, this use of prophecy did not represent a usurpation of the powers of the male leadership. Indeed, the women's frequent exercising of prophetic roles may actually have functioned as a safety-valve device by making them feel as though they shared the prestige and power in the prayer meeting indirectly. In reality, however, the prophecies given by women were more likely than those of men to be
vague, unspecific, and expressive rather than directive. As such, they constituted no challenge to the male leadership’s control. The overall frequency of purely expressive prophecy appeared to be increasing in the Catholic pentecostal movement. This may be related to the consolidation of authority in the leadership. The developing patterns retain, even encourage, the element of prophecy because it fulfills other important functions; but the element is increasingly divested of its authority-challenging potential.

Prophecies spoken in tongues posed a problem for the groups because they must be interpreted. In the Bible verse upon which pentecostals base this practice St. Paul said (I Cor. 14:27):

If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God.

Immediately following a glossolalic pronouncement, there was an intense silence as the group waited for an interpretation. Like the vernacular prophecy, the interpretation was believed to be directly from God, spoken through the interpreter as the result of a special “charism.” None of the groups studied had an individual who was singled out with the specialized gift of interpretation although respondents explained that this was common in other groups. Instead, different persons provided interpretations from meeting to meeting. Yet, in all “closed” and “open” groups, prophecies and interpretations came from members of the core group. These gifts were seldom exercised by more than a few (e.g., two or three members in a medium-sized group).

In one group (medium-sized, with few leaders), a sense of crisis developed one night when the chief leader spoke in tongues and no one gave an interpretation. The group waited a very uncomfortable thirteen minutes, very serious in a group with no periods of silence of more than four minutes ever before, after which the same leader “received” the interpretation to his own pronouncement. As Samarin (1972: 171) points out, such failure to provide an interpretation can sometimes be wielded as a tool to invalidate the authority of the tongue-speaker. Thus, the role of the interpreter is a powerful one.

There appear to be two very different patterns of group attention to interpretations. One common pattern is to treat interpretations as equal to prophecies. In this arrangement, the role of interpreter is very powerful and authoritative—comparable to the role of speaker of prophecy. The prestige of the interpreter is somewhat diminished in this model, however, by the fact that the prophecy was actually pronounced by the tongue-speaker. The person who speaks forth in tongues attracts considerable group attention, and his role promotes a sense of awe and mystery that enhances this special type of prophecy. Theoretically, a tongue-speaker of stature could deny the validity of the interpretation (Samarin, 1972: 166); but this was never observed among Catholic pentecostals. The authority emerges through the interpretation. As such, the role of speaker of glossolalic prophecy poses little threat to group leaders; it is the interpretation which is the more powerful element.

The other pattern, which seems to be increasingly common among Catholic
pentecostals, results in the diminished importance of interpretation. In this mode, the content of the interpretation is less important than that something of an interpretation be given (compare Samarin, 1972: 166). Accordingly, the speaking of glossolalic prophecy is highlighted, and the interpretation is a dénouement—something to be gotten out of the way in order to proceed. Concomitantly, this pattern results in interpretations which are more expressive or affective. As such, neither the glossolalic prophecy nor the interpretation pose much challenge to the leaders' authority, except that they still constitute prestigious types of speech.

When it comes, "interpretation" is in the same form as prophecy—usually in the first-person. However, interpretations are often shorter in length than the vernacular prophecies. The interpretation of tongues is considered to be a separate "charism." The interpretation is not a translation, nor does the interpreter purport to "understand" the literal meaning of the tongues. Rather, "he receives a distinct inspiration about the meaning or sense of what was said, without having understood the words themselves" (Ranaghan and Ranaghan, 1969: 128). Often there were several different interpretations of the same glossolalic utterance. For example:

(1) I have come to save you, my people. I have come to save you this night . . . [long pause] . . . I have come to save you.

(2) The word the Lord has given to me is very similar: You have been saved for something special.

(3) Trust in the Lord your God with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding.

(4) Of this you can be sure, heaven and earth will pass away, my word abides with you, lives in you.

The second interpretation above was stated in the form of a "confirmation," a statement to the effect that God had communicated a similar message as had just been spoken by another member. Almost every kind of public pronouncement was "confirmed" at one time or another in the various prayer meetings observed. Hymn selections and Bible readings were frequently confirmed. For example:

I want to confirm that reading and the prayer. I opened to Jeremiah, at the end of Jeremiah.

Confirmations of prophecies and interpretations of tongues were received with much enthusiasm as a sure sign that the prophecy was a true one from God.

The supportive role of the confirmer was a very simple, yet important one. It was frequently assumed by one of the "regulars" who seldom spoke up in any other capacity. The public pronouncement of a confirmation, however, was very potent because it served to validate a prior assertion of authority. Confirmations were relatively common in the "open" groups and rather rare in the "closed" groups. When given, they were pronounced only by members of the core group. In one group which had a separate "meeting of discernment" to sort the input of each previous meeting, there were far fewer public confirmations given. Whether this was due to actual control over confirmations or to the simple absence of interest in that element could not be observed. Nevertheless, the absence of public confirmations made it easier for that group's leaders to filter the public pronouncements; whereas if they had been publicly confirmed, they would have been harder to contain or repudiate.
The roles of the speakers of prophecy and related word-gifts are directly related to the roles of the *hearers*, the rest of the membership of the prayer group. Rather than view the hearers as a passive audience, it is important to see their role as bound up with the task at hand of constructing an acceptable definition of the situation. Usually, the hearers of prophecy at prayer meetings are “believers”—that is, they, too, define the content of prophecy and interpretation as directly from God. By their tacit consent, then, the speaking of prophecy is supported and encouraged. This supportive role of the audience is especially evident in a situation in which a member of the audience challenges the definition of the situation which the group members are co-producing (cf., Goffman, 1959: 77ff.). A dramatic instance of this kind of challenge occurred during one meeting observed. The group responded spontaneously by foregoing all spoken “gifts” and praying intensely in silence for the entire remaining ninety minutes of the meeting. Thus, the role of hearer of special pentecostal speaking has considerable complicity with the roles of speakers.

A far more powerful role was that of the *controller(s)* of the meeting in handling the interpretations and prophecies. It should be emphasized that these controllers also were believers; that is, they, too, defined prophecy as being “from God.” Thus, their management of events needed to be such that they, too, were convinced the prophecy was truly from God. The leaders of the meeting frequently used the “floor” to react to prophecies and other input. The effect of these commentaries was to reinforce or restate favorable input and to soften or redirect what leaders felt was misguided or over-stated input.

Further control was exerted by the leadership in the function of “discernment” which was characteristic especially of the “closed” groups. *Discernment* is the evaluation of speech acts of the previous meeting, deciding which were validly “from the Lord.” In one group, this was done by prayers asking the Lord to confirm to the leaders the major events of the previous prayer meeting. This private discernment meeting also included discussions of various members’ contributions relative to their spiritual progress, their emotional stability, and their closeness to “main themes of group interest.” If a member’s speech was considered “problematic,” he would be “counseled” and asked to refrain from speaking out.

In another group, the central leader was believed to have the “gift of discernment,” and his “sense” of the matter was accepted because of this gift of the Holy Spirit. Describing this gift, one core member said:

Father ——— has the gift. He is very sensitive about who is real or false and who is within the community. If he feels at the meeting there is a kook or someone speaking out in a way that is disruptive, he will take one of us (other leaders) aside and tell us to get to that person and tell him to be quiet. If that person will not conform, then he is asked to leave and not return.

In groups which had the practice of discernment, the role of discerner was the single most-powerful role in the reception of prophecy. Exercising this role was the ultimate validation of authority, and was therefore frequently invested in the central leader (compare Wilson, 1959: 498). Even in groups where discernment was practiced by a
group of leaders, the role clearly carried the power to invalidate the authority of the speakers of prophecy, glossolalic prophecy, interpretation, or confirmation. Discernment was directly tied to the exercise of controls and sanctions over the interactions of the prayer meeting.

In dramatic cases, sanctions were applied during the prayer meeting itself. More typically, however, the discerner(s) was not likely to exercise this “gift” immediately during the prayer meeting; but the knowledge that he would eventually do so altered the quality of the prayer group’s input. In groups in which the role of discerner was actively practiced, members were more cautious about what they spoke during prayer meetings and less likely to contribute when they were not completely sure of themselves. This reaction further ensured that virtually only the core leadership would speak the more important input of the prayer meeting. A related result was that, because they were confident that the discerner would evaluate prophecies and the like, members of these prayer groups were less likely to attempt evaluations themselves. Thus, the active practice of the specialized role of discerner successfully consolidated authority and control.

There were additional means for controlling prophecy and related speech—mostly by way of guidance, “advice,” and encouragement for the inexperienced. This teaching of supposedly “spontaneous” speech is not inconsistent with Catholic pentecostal understanding of the practice of these word-gifts. Members believed that the Spirit offers the prayer group many such gifts and that, due to inexperience, misinformation, or fear, these gifts are not used or are used improperly. The purpose of “how-to” instructions on prophecy and speaking forth in tongues is to encourage the use of the gifts and to attempt to clarify their “proper” use. Such guides communicate group norms regarding what should be considered prophecy, when it should be spoken, and how it should be spoken. One guide, for example, explained that an important sign that a person should prophesy, give a message in tongues, or give an interpretation, was the “anointing of the Spirit,” which is described as a sense of urgency or expectancy. Even with this “anointing” the member is counselled to seek direction from the Lord whether to prophesy and when is the appropriate time. It is suggested that if one is supposed to prophesy, he will feel a “sense of peace from the Lord” indicating that he should speak. The guide also cautions members to wait their turn, not to interrupt, and to wait for the appropriate atmosphere for their prophesying. Specific advice about the act of prophesying is given (Cavnar; 1974: 23-25, emphasis added):

Administering the word of prophecy or interpretation is very important to its effectiveness. The prophet should speak loudly enough for all to hear, but not so loud as to frighten everyone. He should speak the word in a way that is appropriate to God. Also, a prophetic word should be in ordinary English.

These various roles in the social context of prophecy—prophecy, speaking forth in tongues, interpretation of tongues, hearing, controlling, and discerning—all contribute to the successful “event.” Without the necessary functions of the various roles, it would be impossible for the group to achieve the
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desired definition of the situation—that God himself is immediately present and directly communicating to the group. One further element is needed—the orchestration of the event. The various roles must be integrated and managed in order to make sure the event is successful.

In other varieties of pentecostalism, such as many classical pentecostal groups, this orchestration is less difficult because the preacher or minister himself performs many of the crucial roles. In the Catholic pentecostal movement as well as other neo-pentecostal groups the combination of the ideals of spontaneity and egalitarianism have resulted in these roles being spread among several different members of the core group. Thus, the orchestration of roles becomes a greater problem for the group and for the leaders. Nevertheless, as the above descriptions show, most prayer meetings, especially in the more “closed” groups, are neither totally spontaneous nor egalitarian. In effect, in Catholic pentecostal prayer meetings the division of labor among a larger number of persons makes the meeting appear spontaneous and egalitarian! In practice, however, the actual assignment of roles is such that the resulting efforts are carefully controlled and managed by the core leadership.

THEMES OF PROPHECIES

The content of the prophecies is seen by participants as directed to the building up of the entire prayer community in addition to the enhancement of personal inspiration or instruction. In “closed” groups this focus was further intensified and the content of prophesies was believed to have meaning only for that prayer group and could be understood properly only by members fully immersed in the life of that group. This belief is part of the reason they firmly restricted the act of prophecy to group members only. Nevertheless, the prophecies recorded from the seven groups follow a pattern remarkably similar in form and content. The themes in the prophecies recorded were very general. For example, one common theme was the presence of God:

My people,
Know that I am Lord, that I am God.
I will move in power and majesty among you this night.
Be ready both in listening to my voice.
Hear me as I call to you.
Hear me as I speak to you.
I am in your midst.

Another recurring theme was surrender:

My children,
I want to be part of your world.
Surrender your home to me.
Surrender your heart to me.
Surrender yourselves to me.
Let me work in you.
Let me pray through you.
I will need to take over your lives.

The idea of surrender is very significant to Catholic pentecostals and is the concept used to refer to the necessary condition for Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Combined with the theme of surrender was the theme of security and trust:

My child,
I would speak a word to you.
Do not be afraid of my presence.
Do not look away, but to me . . . [pause].
For I wish to pour out my speech [?] upon your heart.
You can trust in that.
You can trust in me.
For I love you.
For I am your God.
And I want you to experience that God.
Open your arms wide, my child,
And let me come in.

These themes—immediacy of God,
self-surrender, security and trust—are directly related to the basic appeals of the movement for members (cf.: McGuire, 1975). The content of prophecies observed was never strongly negative and never urged or predicted specific action. Instead, it was usually vague, soothing, or only mildly urging. Samarin (1973: 255) suggests that this vagueness is because prophecy is used affectively, thus diminishing its potential as a challenge to the authority of group leaders. This explanation is especially plausible for the "closed" groups observed. Such affective use of prophecy is particularly significant for Catholic pentecostals because such prophecy is not likely to challenge the authority of the hierarchy of the Church.

All of the prophecies observed and recorded were directed toward personal interior spirituality, and occasionally there were prophecies referring to interactions within the prayer group. None of the themes of prophecies ever involved statements about the condition of the larger society or about the necessity of action or involvement in that larger society. These themes were consistent with the movement's focus on interior concerns and personal religiosity and devaluation of social activism (Fichter, 1974; McGuire, 1973, 1974).

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF PROPHECY

Sociological analysis of the element of prophecy must, of course, bracket the crucial issue: its status as communication from God. Whatever its religious validity, however, prophecy can be shown to fulfill several important social functions in the life of the prayer group. These functions have significance not only for the cohesion and interaction of the larger prayer group but also for the individual. These functions account, in part, for the appeal of the charismatic movement to many of the members.

Three such inter-related elements are the atmosphere of expectancy, the sense of mystery, and the immediacy of God. Prophecy serves to heighten or create all of these elements in the context of the prayer meeting and, thus, contributes to the desired definition of the situation within the prayer meeting and to the "success" of the event. At the same time, prophecy serves to heighten these same elements on a personal level for each participant. The atmosphere of expectancy is directly related to the group's belief-system that communication from God will be forthcoming. Silence and glossolalia are especially important in fostering such an atmosphere (cf.: Samarin, 1972: 56). The idea of the "anointing of the Spirit" expresses theologically the feeling or mood which can also manifest itself in sociologically observable behavior at such junctures in the prayer meeting.

Prophecy, with its characteristic use of the first person, impresses the hearer with a sense of the immediate presence of God and with a feeling of one-to-one, highly personal, communication. Furthermore, the specific content of most prophecies enhanced this sense of immediacy. Over half of the prophecies recorded contained some statement to the effect that God was immediately present.

Both the atmosphere of expectancy and the sense of immediacy of God promoted the other element, mystery. The quality of mystery was created primarily by the interpretation of the speech acts as being "from God" rather than the result of purely human action.
This approach sensitized the participants to endow all behavior during the prayer meeting with possible "special" meaning communicated by the mysteries of the Holy Spirit. Thus, for example, the choice of a hymn or scripture reading could become endowed with supernatural meaning. Glossolalic pronouncements were especially forceful in promoting this sense of mystery. Speaking in tongues is mysterious simply by its unintelligibility to the hearer—and to the speaker, as well. For Catholics, changing the language of the liturgy to the vernacular de-mystified much of the Mass; the pentecostal emphasis upon glossolalia constitutes a re-mystification of worship (McGuire, 1975). Finally, all the word-gifts—prophecy, speaking forth in tongues, interpretation, among others—were felt to originate outside the speaker. This attitude toward speech is a major departure from everyday conceptions of human speech; and it accounts for the awe, mystery, and a different manner of "listening" in the prayer meeting.

The element of prophecy fulfills additional social functions for the prayer group. It enhances the unity of the group, their feeling of being "chosen"; and it promotes the stratification and reinforces lines of authority within the group. The unity of the group was developed largely by the whole setting of prophecy. When preceded by an intense silence, the moment of interpretation or prophecy was one of the most unifying experiences of the prayer meetings observed. While such moments were not very common, they were characterized by an almost tangible sense of group unity. In addition to this sense of group unity, the element of prophecy enhances the feeling of the chosenness of the group. By extension, the individual (speaker and hearer alike) also feels especially selected by God for His revelation. This attitude is particularly important for Catholic pentecostals as a legitimation of their new style of religiosity. This sense of chosenness is further related to Catholic pentecostalism because of the recentness of changes in their mode of religiosity. For Catholics in particular, pentecostalism represents the discovery of the democratization of the power to be the vessel for the divine. The role of the speaker of prophecy is an especially important example of this change.

The stratification of the prayer groups was very evident in their patterns of language use. The ranks of real authority, power, and prestige were clearly defined by observing: who controls the content, volume, pace of the meeting; who is permitted to speak publicly and who does speak publicly; who speaks which elements, especially the more desired speech; and who has the power to limit others' speech. Because of the centrality of prophecy and because of the unpredictability of non-core members' use of it, the prayer groups' leaders were especially careful of the use of this gift. Leaders had and used the power to limit who was allowed to prophesy, to discern who was validly prophesying, and to interpret, redirect, or soften "mis-guided" prophecies. The spread of major roles among several members of the prayer group, however, contributed to the appearances of egalitarianism and spontaneity.

Finally, prophecy should be seen as contributing to the believer's assurance of the authoritative teaching of the
prayer group. If it is God who is speaking directly, his word is hardly subject to the change or disconfirmation which befalls human teachings. This function of authority is especially significant for Catholic pentecostals. Elsewhere it is suggested that the felt need for a strong authority is one of the major appeals of the movement for Catholics (McGuire, 1975). The debunking of religious authority and norms resulting from Vatican II and its aftermath, together with the ambiguity of societal norms and authority resulting from rapid social change and unrest, have contributed to or caused a desire for an authority—such as the Holy Spirit—which is outside the influence of all of the change. For the pentecostals, this authoritative order is communicated by God to the individual or group in such a highly personal and subjective way that it is relatively safe from debunking and disconfirmation. The element of prophecy is the paramount source of this kind of authority and order.

CONCLUSION

For Catholic pentecostalism, a developing middle-class group-movement, the element of prophecy takes on special significance. It is the "gift of the Holy Spirit" by which God communicates directly with the prayer group through the voices of certain members. For this theological reason, the speaking of prophecy and related roles—glossolalic prophecy, interpretation, confirmation, and discernment—became central to prayer meetings where these gifts are exercised. These speech roles, together with the roles of hearers and controllers of speech, are significant in developing and maintaining a common definition of the situation.

In addition, the prophecy and related "gifts" serve important social functions. They serve to foster an atmosphere of expectancy, a sense of the immediacy of God, and a feeling of mystery. Further, they promote the unity of the prayer group and enhance the feeling on the part of members that their group is "chosen" for God's revelations of Himself. The use of prophecy and related speech serves to embody lines of stratification in the prayer group and to promote control by the leaders. Finally, it serves as a source of authoritative teaching, fulfilling in part for many members a felt need for such strong authority, and thus constituting part of the appeal of the movement.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Language is considered in a broader sense than verbal communication; also included here are non-verbal communications such as gesture and silence.
2. This article is a greatly-revised portion of a paper presented at the VIII World Congress of Sociology, Research Committee on Sociolinguistics, Section on Language and Religion. The author thanks James Richardson and Peter Freund for their helpful comments on this revision.
3. These groups were selected for accessibility. They represent no formal sample, although they do include examples of various size and age ranges. It is interesting to note that only one of the seven groups resembled the moderation, theological consideration, and the carefulness described as characteristic in the national literature (O'Connor, 1971; Ranaghan and Ranaghan, 1969, 1971). This problem of representativeness of groups studied is a serious one (i.e.,
were all of the groups studied atypical?). This author would suggest that the version of pentecostalism presented in the literature of the national movement should be considered as somewhat of an idealization, not necessarily representative of what actually happened in the ordinary prayer group. The findings of this research suggest that the differences between the groups studied and the idealizations described in the literature are due to sociological variables. For example, the national movement is centered around universities with theologians as contributing members or critical colleagues; local groups studied are isolated from the national movement and consist mainly of housewives, businessmen, blue-collar workers, and the like. The most important factor, however, is that the very nature of the pentecostal movement itself is to be open to all kinds of possibilities, as the influence of the Holy Spirit. With this kind of highly-individualized openness, it is difficult to put a fence about the phenomenon and to define what is "valid" Catholic pentecostalism early in the movement. A variety of types of groups consider themselves members of the same movement. All of the groups studied considered themselves "Catholic pentecostals" and all but one were listed in the movement's Directory (published by Charismatic Renewal Services of Notre Dame, June, 1973). For the purposes of this study, that definition of membership was sufficient.

4. Median size of groups listed in the national Directory of Catholic pentecostal prayer groups was 20.

5. Different groups gave some attention to the less spectacular gifts and emphases did shift from time to time during the period of observation. On the whole, however, the general membership of all groups observed focused almost exclusively on these more unusual gifts. See note 3, above, for an interpretation of the differences between the practice of the groups observed and the theological moderation of the movement spokespersons.

6. This quotation and subsequent quotations not referring to a written source are taken from verbatim transcripts of prayer meetings or interviews.

7. When silence is a form of communication, it must be considered along with verbal language. Silence was very significant to the prayer groups observed, especially in "closed" groups as part of their style. For example, in one group a woman had requested a hymn, and the leader of that group said, "No. The Spirit wants us to be silent and listen to His word now!" An intense silence followed, and a prophecy occurred after about four minutes of silence. In "closed" groups, all observed glossolalic and vernacular prophecies followed periods of extended silence (three to ten minutes). In relatively "open" groups, such pronouncements were more likely to follow other speech activities. For example, it was common for glossolalic prophecy to emerge from quiet glossolalic prayer.

8. These meetings of discernment were not open to the observer (or to other members of the prayer group, for that matter); but the descriptions given here were obtained from respondents who were members of the core groups. These descriptions are similar to descriptions in the movement literature (O'Connor, 1971).

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