

## Foreword

“Prophets” and “prophetic speech” — until just a few years ago I accepted these expressions as substantively appropriate only with regard to the prophetic books of the Biblical traditions. By contrast, the general notion of “prophecy,” especially of contemporary “prophecy,” seemed to me always to smack of pretentiousness, moral self-righteousness, or even soothsaying. I was first challenged in this opinion by studies in the theology of law, which made two things clear to me. First, classical prophecy oriented itself on the basis of complex, systematic interconnections of law and wisdom: that is, on the basis of religious and normative forms that can at least in part be clearly reconstructed even today. Second, the great prophets were astute analysts and diagnosticians of the processes of social development and decay in their day. Taken together, those two points mean that classical prophecy combined substantive theology and substantive cultural and social criticism in ways that are, at least in principle, clear and comprehensible, even to us today.

In doing preparatory work for my book *God the Spirit*, it became clear to me that we must not content ourselves with understanding and interpreting the complex of “the prophetic” as a phenomenon of past cultures. According to key texts of both Testaments, the “pouring out of the Spirit” is connected with a complex interplay of experiences of God and perceptions of reality on the part of diverse people and groups of people. This “proclamatory” interaction is characterized both directly and indirectly as “prophetic speech.” This means that anyone who wants to grasp the forces at work in the creative and critical spiritual interaction of women and men, of old and young, and of persons from diverse

social and cultural spheres, will have to try to work out a clear understanding of "the prophetic."

In this situation, I came upon the dissertation of Thomas W. Gillespie, "Prophecy and Tongues." I was very impressed by the insistence, persistence, and clarity with which the work poses the question, "How did Paul understand 'Christian prophecy?'" The version now before you, reworked and significantly expanded, shows the same questioning insistence: "What were the function and location of the prophets in early Christianity? What were the nature and authority of their prophesying? What were the form(s) and content of their prophecy?" Gillespie uses clear structural articulations, anticipatory observations and conclusions, to illuminate the many-faceted interconnections of "the prophetic" with the Gospel, confession, the Spirit and the activity of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, wisdom, and the kerygma.

As in the earlier version, Paul's theology provides the decisive theological and historical field of reference. Using Paul's theology as a focus, Gillespie draws in and discusses a broad spectrum of European and North American positions. He is aware that the complex phenomena and the corresponding "loaded" concepts that he relates to each other require a special navigational art. Between the Scylla of reductionistic generalizations and trivializations and the Charybdis of unresolved ambiguity and withheld judgment, Gillespie steers toward the coast of a "typology of early Christian proclamation."

The book does theology as exegesis carried through to its logical conclusions (Karl Barth's *konsequente Exegese*). But the book also speaks to practical and systematic theologians concerning the issues of their disciplines. Gillespie wants to work out standards with regard to "early Christian prophecy" that enable theology in general to recognize its task and obligation as well as its freedom and dignity. Theology demonstrates itself to be a prophetic power inasmuch as it aids in interpreting the "inherent implications of the kerygma" — indeed, inasmuch as it aids the recognition of those implications and helps them to become public.

MICHAEL WELKER