

## **Was Martin Luther a Charismatic Christian? A Method for Probing a Burning Question**

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### **Abstract**

The rapid growth and near dominance of the Charismatic movement world-wide has inevitably raised the question as to its organic relationship with the Protestant Reformation. Answering this question is important not only for assessing Martin Luther's five-hundred-years-old legacy, but even more so for defining the nature, and predicting the future direction, of the movement. After critically evaluating two common approaches that are adopted for answering the question, namely, the historical and theological approaches, this article argues for and defends an exegetical methodology which enables Luther's expositions of Bible passages that are foundational to the Charismatic movement to more precisely direct such an investigation. As a validating test-case, it further engages Luther's expositions of Romans 12:3–8 to establish the extent of continuity, if any, with the Charismatic renewal. Even though not fully conclusive, as it only focuses

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

on a single passage, the findings nevertheless demonstrate the significant advantages of the proposed method.

## 1. Introduction

Would Martin Luther feel perfectly at home in today's Charismatic pulpit or would he instead be issued with a twenty-first-century equivalent of the *Exsurge Domine*<sup>2</sup>? This hypothetical question has been put in an admittedly playful and perhaps frivolous manner, but the implications of its answer are no laughing matter. For a start, there is a clear indication that allowing even for a rigorous definition of the term (cf. Barrett 1988, 119–129)<sup>3</sup>, the complexion of Global Christianity in the coming decades, if not already, will be Charismatic. As Hackett and colleagues (2011) have demonstrated, Charismatic Christianity, defined by Lugo and colleagues (2006:1) as characterized by 'lively, highly personal faiths, which emphasize such spiritually renewing "gifts of the Holy Spirit" as speaking in tongues, divine healing and prophesying', constitutes almost a third of the world's 2 billion Christians. In any case, it has the fastest rate of growth by far among the denominations, especially in the Global South where the 'centre of gravity' of the religion now resides (Jenkins 2011, 4; Johnson and Chung 2004, 166–181). Thus, the question goes to the heart of contemporary Christian self-expression. Would Martin Luther fit in?

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<sup>2</sup> *Exsurge Domine* (Latin for 'Arise O Lord') was the incipit of the papal bull issued by Pope Leo X on 15 June 1520 refuting Luther's 95 theses and threatening him with excommunication if he didn't recant. The bull itself was titled *Bulla contra errores Martini Lutheri et sequacium* (Bull against the errors of Martin Luther and his followers), but it has traditionally become known by its incipit.

<sup>3</sup> Despite minor criticisms as to the reliability of some of the data he employed and further subtle differences within sub-groups, Barrett's three wave taxonomy of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is nevertheless universally accepted by scholars as

The answer is even more pertinent given the significant trans-denominational influence of the movement leading to the transformation of all the major denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church (Botha 2007:295; Robeck Jr and Yong 2014; Synan 2012). This globalising phenomenon, which Fischer (2011:95; cf., Coleman 2000) labels as the ‘charismatisation of worldwide Christianity’, certainly raises the question of Luther’s legacy. Is the Charismatic renewal a natural outcome, or even, as some have concluded, a progression of the Protestant Reformation? Or, as others by contrast have opined, is it a dangerous perversion of the Protestant Reformation, which will potentially undermine its gains and incipiently replace it with a pseudo-sacralised ritualistic religion not unlike the medieval Roman Catholic Church of Luther’s time?

Neither is the answer merely hypothetical, for the question has played a major role in fuelling no small amount of disputations in some denominations. A case in point is the several decades of wrangle within the world-wide Lutheran federation as it agonized over how to handle its encounter with the Charismatic renewal (Berger 2012:45–50; Grislis 1981:3–25; Missouri Synod 1972; Riley 2013; Simojoki 2002:269–287; Vondey 2016:324–333; Wilson 2016a:25–32)<sup>4</sup>. Even more pressing in practical relevance are the concerns being expressed in the Global

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providing sound foundation for a pragmatic definition of a rather nebulous phenomenon (cf. Adogame 2010:498–518).

<sup>4</sup> The difficulties with Charismatic renewal within modern Lutheranism centres around three key foci, namely, (a) the mechanism of the Spirit’s work in Christian experience, an issue which on the surface appears to some to hack back to Luther’s arguments with the ‘spiritualists’, (b) the apparent contradiction between the perceived ‘theology of glory’ in some Charismatic circles and Luther’s ‘theology of the cross’, and (c) whether in the light of the above it is possible to construct a Lutheran pneumatology which is compatible with Charismatic pneumatology. For a review of the history of this internal wrangle, see Wilson (2016b).

South regarding the potential links between the Charismatic renewal and the re-emergence of sacerdotalism and apparently Christianized magical practices in some Churches (Anderson 2002:167–184; Csordas 2007:295–314; Robbins 2009; Vásquez 2009:273–286). Even if the suggested links were tenuous, they nevertheless demonstrate that the question has profound practical implications, as it places the Charismatic movement in the dock. Would Martin Luther have embraced or would he have rejected the movement?

Nor is such an internal critique restricted to the Global South. Patterson and Rybarczyk (2007) have, for example, raised admittedly different sets of questions regarding the future of Pentecostalism in the United States, an issue which inevitably dovetails with the question of the denomination's organic relationship with the Protestant Reformation. Thus, this is a fair question to ask: after half a millennium of the Protestant reformation, would Martin Luther get on with today's Charismatic Christianity?

While not aiming to fully answer this question in a definitive manner, the present article seeks to make a contribution towards identifying a transparent methodology for its investigation. Using a selection of examples, I shall first of all critically evaluate two common methods of investigation that are adopted for answering the question, namely, the historical and theological approaches. I then set out and defend an exegetical approach which directly engages with Luther's expositions of passages that are foundational to the Charismatic movement. Particularly, I argue that this would have been Luther's preferred approach. I devote a final section to test this proposal by engaging with Luther's expositions of Romans 12:3–8, a passage which is foundational to the movement. Though not fully conclusive, as it

focuses on a single passage, the exercise nevertheless demonstrates the method's superiority.

## 2. The Historical Approach

It was inevitable that the Charismatic movement should be analysed in terms of its historical precedents, antecedents, and heritage, given its rapid transformation of the complexion of contemporary Christianity. What was equally predictable, considering the sometimes imprecise and anachronistic tendencies of historical enquiry, was for that approach to yield two conflicting judgements, namely, (a) Luther was proto-Charismatic, and, (b) Luther's opponents were proto-Charismatic.

### 2.1. Luther the proto-Charismatic

A common historical approach places Luther and Charismatics in the same pedigree by identifying parallels between them. Often, this argument goes that the aims, emphases and results of Luther's reformation boil down to restoring Christianity to its New Testament form and practice, and in that sense the Charismatic movement is fulfilling, or even upgrading Luther's programme to its logical conclusion. It is certainly in this sense that the Charismatic renewal has been labelled by some as 'the New Reformation' (Botha 2007:295), or the 'third Reformation' (Lindberg 1983) or even 'the New Pentecost' (Knitter 1991:32–41).

The genesis of this argument, however, goes far back to the very beginnings of the Pentecostal movement when its foundational leaders identified their heritage and self-understanding in Luther's mould, even though they rendered their arguments in different forms. Crawford (1906:1; cf., Jacobsen 2003:64), one of the pioneers of the Azusa Street

Revival<sup>5</sup> who went on to found *The Apostolic Faith Church* denomination, for example, argued that, what she called, ‘Pentecostal baptism’, was a natural progression of the historical restorationist movements going back to Luther:

All along the ages men have been preaching a partial Gospel. A part of the Gospel remained when the world went into the Dark Ages. God has from time to time raised up men to bring back the truth to the church. He raised up Luther to bring back to the world the doctrine of justification by faith. He raised up another reformer in John Wesley to establish Bible holiness in the church. Then he raised up Dr Cullis who brought back to the world the wonderful doctrine of divine healing. Now he is bringing back the Pentecostal Baptism to the church.

The same sentiment is expressed by another Azusa Street Revival pioneer, McPherson (1919:396), who defined her devotees’ experiences of rejection by the wider Church as following in the tradition of Luther. Interestingly, McPherson asserts that Luther received the doctrine of justification by faith through a vision. So, after recounting her own visionary experience in which she received Joel 1:4 and 2:25 as setting out a dispensational pattern for Church history, she proceeds to argue that Luther fulfilled the first part of that pattern (1919:395):

Martin Luther one day was walking up the steps of the cathedral on his hands and knees over broken glass, endeavouring to do penance, thereby seeking to atone for his sins. As he was toiling painfully

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<sup>5</sup> The Azusa Street Revival, which began with a meeting in Los Angeles on 9th April 1906, is commonly identified as the inaugural session of the Charismatic renewal. A few scholars, however, assert an earlier beginning of the movement in the Bethel Bible School led by Charles Fox Parham in Topeka, Kansas on New Year’s Eve 1900 (Synan 1971:101). For recent analyses of its place in the history of the Pentecostal movement, see Robeck (2017) and Liardon (2006).

and laboriously up the steps in this manner, blood trickling from his hands and knees, cut by the broken glass, he heard a voice from heaven saying: ‘Martin Luther, the Just shall live by Faith’. At the words, a great light fell from Heaven. It banished the darkness and doubts, it illuminated the soul of Martin Luther, and revealed the finished work of Calvary and the blood that alone can atone for sin.

The veracity of this uncorroborated account is, at best, uncertain (cf., Wilson 2016b:76). Yet, it evidently served the rhetorical function of legitimating the movement by locating its self-understanding in the mainstream of Protestantism, certainly at the initial stages, when the movement was being rejected. All the same, the story illustrates the hermeneutics of some of the founding leaders of the Pentecostal movement. To them, and certainly within the earliest publications of the Pentecostal movement, Luther was the arch proto-Charismatic whose reforming programme was being naturally progressed through the renewal (Atter 1976; Dayton 1987). Coulter (2012:298–319) has also argued that this characterisation by pioneer Pentecostals as Luther’s heirs was one of the main factors that ensured that Pentecostalism became trans-denominational, as it enabled the movement to form a pliable self-understanding.

Not all of today’s Charismatics will repeat these claims of the Azusa Street pioneers, certainly not with as much confidence. Even so, the notion that Luther was proto-Charismatic continues to be advanced even if in nuanced ways. So, for example, Botha’s (2007:295) claim that the Charismatic renewal ‘is perhaps the most significant development in the Christian church since the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it certainly has changed the face of Christianity irrevocably’ is deliberately evocative of this sentiment. Similarly, in his account of the earliest experiences of the Charismatic renewal within certain Episcopal Churches in the US, Christenson (2010; cf., Burgess

2011) draws a historical trajectory linking its beginnings with Luther's posting of the 95 theses. It is with an identical assumption also that Kay (2017:1–13) conducts a comparative study of Lutheran and Pentecostal spirituality with the aim of identifying commonalities between them. Thus, even those in this category who don't trace a direct lineage between the Charismatic movement and Luther nevertheless see a significant number of parallels for the reformer to serve as its forerunner.

## **2.2. Luther's opponents as proto-Charismatics**

In direct contradiction to the above self-understanding of some Charismatics are those of their critics who see the exact opposite, that in fact the more suited historical antecedents of Charismatic Christianity were Luther's 'other' opponents, namely, the spiritualists, 'enthusiasts' and particularly, the 'heavenly prophets' of Zwickau. The nature of the arcane debates between Luther and these particular reforming opponents has been so well researched (cf. Burnett 2014; Loewen 2015; Windhorst 1977:339–348) that revisiting it may hereby be dispensed with. What is of interest is the line of argument which postulates that these opponents directly anticipated the Charismatic movement. Luther, it is thus argued by some critics of Charismatics, would have denounced the Charismatic movement just as much as he denounced these 'heavenly prophets'.

Frequently, the parallels are claimed to boil down to their shared untrammelled emotionalism, which Luther deplored. But it is sometimes also argued that the two share similar theological outlooks. An example of this line of thinking is expressed, for example, by Berger (2012:47–48), who, while explaining why as a Lutheran cessationist he dissented from Pentecostalism, compares Pentecostals with Luther's opponents by asserting: 'Luther himself had serious disagreements with

the “spiritualists” (*Schwärmer*)<sup>6</sup> of his time, who evinced many of the characteristics associated with Pentecostalism’.

A more extensive example of this argument is offered by MacArthur (2013) in his broad-brush and somewhat intemperate denunciation of the Charismatic movement. After setting out an argument linking Charismatic worship with the unauthorized fire offered by Nadab and Abihu before the Lord in Leviticus 10, MacArthur argues for a historical lineage of the ‘enthusiasts’ of Luther's time through the post-reformation and modern era to the Charismatic movement. He states: ‘the fanatical fringes of the reformation, in particular, shared a number of characteristics in common with the charismatics: including various ecstatic experiences, and an insistence that they were receiving new revelation from the Holy Spirit’ (2013:79). Charismatic Christianity in his view therefore belongs to a succession of dangerous but failed expressions of perverted worship going back to Luther’s opponents.<sup>7</sup>

Not all who associate Luther's opponents with the Charismatic movement, however, have expressed it with vituperative polemics as MacArthur does. While some, (e.g. Foller 2005, 333–351; Linberg 1983:109) accept that the similarities between Luther’s opponents and the Charismatic movement are circumstantial, they nevertheless argue

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<sup>6</sup> The term *Schwärmer*, or ‘enthusiast’ was first used by Luther to characterize Karlstadt who had expressed the view that the Spirit sometimes spoke to the believer in the immediate situation without the believer having to hear God's word proclaimed. Luther's objection was that this view placed too much confidence in the human spirit which to him was too corrupt and unreliable to be a channel of God's direction.

<sup>7</sup> Videos of the *Strange Fire Conference*, which preceded the publication of MacArthur’s book, offer similar arguments by Sproul (2013) and Lawson (2013). For a book-length rebuttal of MacArthur’s arguments, see Brown (2015). See also Jungkuntz’s (1977:166–167) argument that mistranslations of sections of Luther’s *Smalcald Articles* have played no small part in fuelling the common equation of Charismatics with Luther’s ‘spiritualist’ opponents.

that Luther would have disapproved of the Charismatic movement because like the ‘heavenly prophets’, the movement’s emphasis on experiencing the Holy Spirit lacks Luther’s stress on objectivity in relation to justification by faith.

### 2.3. Assessment of the historical approach

It is evident from the above that the historical approach delivers a sharply conflicting and irreconcilable verdict on the nature of the continuities or discontinuities between Luther and the Charismatic movement. The situation is, of course, not helped by the amorphous nature of the Charismatic movement itself, a fact which enables its defenders as well as detractors to pick and choose which bits of history suit their view. But even with a more rigorous definition, the historical method is bound to prove inadequate, as it is amenable to anachronisms and biases of investigators. History, as Malak (1989:182) has quipped, ‘is in the eye of the beholder or projector: we do not have one history but histories’.

A more serious fault with the current historical approaches is their tendency to inadequately consider the effects of the socio-cultural and political contexts within which the historical anecdotes and especially Luther’s debates with his opponents developed. An obvious example of this error is the simplistic equation of the ‘enthusiasts’ with modern Charismatics based on the presumption of shared pneumatology.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Luther’s (2000:8.3) definition of ‘enthusiasm’ was the attitude that one can ‘have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word’. In accusing his opponents of being ‘enthusiasts’, therefore, Luther was making a precise theological point about the conditions under which the Spirit directs an individual believer. He argued that the Spirit’s direction occurs only as the ‘external’ word of God was being proclaimed, while his opponents countered that the ‘internal’ word of God was also viable in guiding the believer. Clearly, this was a narrow and arcane debate which does not easily transfer to a modern dispute over pneumatology. This is not to say that the two

Indeed, as Linberg (1983:110) argues, Luther's opponents were 'not as obsessed with pneumatology but more concerned with the contrast between the "outer" and the "inner" Word'.

Moreover, Luther's own tendency to sometimes exaggerate the positions of his opponents, or even pass judgement on their presumed errors without adequately acquainting himself with the details of their arguments means that he is not an entirely reliable historical source for understanding the viewpoints of these opponents. Zahl (2010:341) has, for example, argued that Luther prematurely labelled the theological arguments of the enthusiasts as stemming from their naïve anthropology, a judgement which, if correct, undermines scholarly construction of the theological positions of the historical 'enthusiasts'.

These considerations jettison the conclusions that could be made through historical comparisons of Charismatics with Luther's opponents. A similar pitfall afflicts the superficial equation of Luther's reforming instincts with Charismatic Christianity, certainly, without due considerations for the precise nature of Luther's critique of the Church of his day. Clearly, the historical method is useful in adding colour and flavour to our understanding of the context of Luther's more considered judgements, especially in relation to the interpretation of passages foundational to the Charismatic renewal. On its own, however, the method is flawed by its proneness to subjectivism.

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parties were not as entrenched. All the same, the bone of contention is definitely different from the common impression that for Luther, 'enthusiasm' represented 'over-realized eschatology, civic disorder and subjectivistic theological error' (Zahl 2010:342).

### 3. The Theological Approach

The theological approach attempts to locate continuities or discontinuities between Luther's theology, as may be reliably constructed by contemporary theologians, on the one hand, and Pentecostalism on the other hand. Unsurprisingly, this approach often focuses on comparative pneumatology, after all, 'Pentecostalism is a movement of the Holy Spirit' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2008:9). However, as I shortly also show, there are significant continuities between Luther's apocalyptic demonology<sup>9</sup> and Charismatic Christianity.

#### 3.1. Luther's pneumatology and Charismatic Christianity

After centuries of neglect, Luther's pneumatology has of late received substantial attention, undoubtedly in response to the Charismatic renewal's growing influence (Bloomquist 2008; Dabney 2000:511–524; Fischer 2011:95–111; Krueger 1974; Lugazia 2010; Mann 2007:111–116; Maseko 2015; Silcock 2014:394–309). Yet, several factors have turned this comparative enterprise into a tricky business. To start with, though there are widespread references to the Holy Spirit in Luther's writings and discourses, most of these ideas were framed in the service of his more pressing theological concerns, namely, the three *Solas*: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fides*. This sharply contrasts with the foregrounded pneumatology of Charismatics.

Furthermore, and perhaps apart from the mentions in his Catechisms, in those situations where Luther enunciated his applied pneumatology, these were articulated during his debates with the 'enthusiasts'.

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<sup>9</sup> Apart from pneumatology and demonology, a few scholars have also pointed to a significant discontinuity between Luther's theology of the Cross and what is perceived to be triumphalistic tendencies of the Charismatic movement's eschatology (see Courey 2016).

Accordingly, his contribution to these debates was limited to constricted and nuanced issues. By contrast Charismatic pneumatology is existentially framed.

Besides, though Luther insisted on mystical Christian experience from encounter with the objectively proclaimed word, he was, like many in medieval German enlightenment circles of his time; wary of ‘subjective experiences’ that may be wrongly attributed to the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> This again sharply contrasts with Charismatic experiential pneumatology which, much influenced by postmodernism, is mistrustful of overly cognitive and intellectual emphases, and certainly thrives in popular ‘grassroots’ circles (Johnson and Chung 2004; Johnson 2009:479–483; Johnson 2014: 265–288).

Given these apparent divergences of contexts, emphases, and practical applications, it was inevitable that some scholars would conclude that Luther’s pneumatology was incompatible with Pentecostalism. But three phases of nuanced assessments of this incompatibility are discernible in the literature. One of the first<sup>11</sup> comprehensive and systematic theological assessments was by the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod 1972:29 cf., Bloch-Hoell 1964;

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<sup>10</sup> Luther’s (1958:73) accusation that the ‘heavenly prophets’ wished to ‘swallow the Holy Spirit feathers and all’ is one example of his sometimes trivialising polemics betraying his caution.

<sup>11</sup> Even before then, some Charismatics had tended to put Lutherans on the defensive by their critique of the perceived ‘coldness’ of non-Charismatic worship and general ineffectiveness of witness by other Christians. The following statement by Bennett (1963:16), one of the pioneers of Episcopalian Charismatics, was not uncommonly expressed by some charismatics: ‘The church is in a mess, organized Christianity a failure. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has not had a fair chance to work experientially in the church... It is time to stop relying on intellectual analyses and to start relying on spiritual experience. After all Christianity is not an intellectual matter at all. It is a purely personal and spiritual matter’. Thus the conclusions of non-compatibility were shaped by mutual polemics.

Krueger 1974:7; McDonnell 1980) in which it essentially concluded that the two pneumatologies were incompatible. Appealing to Luther's debate with the 'heavenly prophets', the report for example posits:

The emphasis of our Lutheran heritage on the external Word as the instrument of the Holy Spirit helps prevent a subjectivism that seeks divine comfort and strength through an interior experience rather than in the objective word of the Gospel. To accent the former rather than the latter as the basis of Christian certainty can easily lead either to pride or despair instead of humble trust in the Gospel promises.

This view went through several revisions over the years to a second stage in the 1990s to 2000s in which some Lutheran scholars became less dismissive of Charismatic pneumatology. So, for example, the conclusion of the 2008 study by *The Lutheran World Federation* led by Bloomquist (2008) is more nuanced and dialogical to the point of agreeing that Lutheran pneumatology had a lot to learn from Charismatic pneumatology.<sup>12</sup> This dialogical approach is, however, not universally held, as some scholars (e.g. Berger 2012:45–50; Foller 2005:333–351; Petersen 2011:133) continue to maintain that the two pneumatologies were incompatible.

With the growing confidence of Pentecostal scholarship, a third phase seems to be emerging in recent years in which some Charismatic scholars are criticising Luther's pneumatology, thus turning the table somewhat on Luther. So Zahl (2010:341–363) for example asserts that

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<sup>12</sup> One way in which scholars have explored such dialectical intersections was to broaden the traditional understanding of Luther's pneumatology to include other considerations which logically dovetail with it. So, for example, it is evident that Luther's mysticism which is inevitably bound up with his pneumatology finds parallels with the Charismatic renewal, leading some scholars to posit far more closer intersections than previously envisaged (e.g. Courey 2016:148; Loewen 2015:166; McGinn 2015:50–65; Strier 2007:271–303).

Luther allowed his ‘bleak anthropology’<sup>13</sup> to weaken and undermine his pneumatology as it over-shadowed and inhibited his understanding of the transforming effect of the Spirit on the human being’s reception of the Spirit’s inner direction. A related critique has also been made by Dabney (2001), who asserts that Luther sometimes expressed views of the Spirit which were more anthropological than fitting for the third Person of the Trinity.

How far this latest phase will go in reversing the gains of the second phase of rapprochement remains to be seen. All the same, it seems to me that given the generally different emphases of the two pneumatologies, the best result that could be achieved in the comparison between Luther’s and Charismatic pneumatology is accommodation, and perhaps complementation. Wilson’s (2016b) recent conclusion in her assessment of Luther’s place in Global Pentecostalism is thus insightful in highlighting the nature of the intersections between the two: ‘The encounter of Lutheran theology with Pentecostalism suggests that both sides need to develop more comprehensive accounts of Christian experience and its role in doctrine, piety, and church life’. It is certainly difficult to determine the degree of fit between the two without direct engagement of their respective interpretations of pneumatological passages.

### **3.2. Luther’s demonology and Charismatic Christianity**

A second example of the theological approach to assessing the compatibilities between Luther and Charismatic Christians focuses on

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<sup>13</sup> Luther’s anthropology is receiving several critical evaluations, not only with regard to how it influenced his general theological outlook (Gaebler 2002:115–132) but also how it has shaped European civilization for the last half-millennia (Muhlhan 2012; Pedersen 2017:213–234). I am at present unable to adequately judge the anthropology of the Charismatic movement so as to be competent at comparing it with Luther’s.

Luther's apocalypticism, and specifically his theological views and praxes on demonology and exorcism,<sup>14</sup> even though this area is not adequately explored by scholars. The fact is, on the face of it, Luther's writings evince features similar to Charismatic demonology that would have made him comfortable at a Charismatic deliverance service. The following statement was originally made by Luther in his commentary on Galatians (Cameron 2010:166), and evidently reflects not only his cosmology, but more specifically, his demonology. It might as well have been uttered from today's Charismatic pulpit:

For it is undeniable that the devil lives, yes, rules, in all the world. Therefore witchcraft and sorcery are works of the devil, by which he not only injures people but sometimes, with God's permission, destroys them. But we are all subject to the devil, both according to our bodies and according to our material possessions. We are guests in the world, of which he is the ruler and the god. Therefore the bread we eat, the drinks we drink, the clothes we wear—in fact, the air and everything we live on in the flesh—are under his reign.

This demonology and its supporting cosmological framework are commonplace not just in his writings, but also in his theological praxes (Batka 2014:233–253; Cording 2003:474; Oberman 2006). In his *Table Talk* for example, Luther (1883:580) vividly describes, in a manner that indicates his belief in the reality of demonic and satanic influences in his world, how demons tormented a husband to murder his wife. He also expressed the view that his frequent ailments were attacks by devils, and in some situations acted in consonant with that belief. The famous incident in which Luther threw an inkwell at the devil while in

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<sup>14</sup> This is evocatively represented by his famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God* (German: *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*). For a recent examination of Luther's demonology in the light of Magic and Occult of his medieval times, see Edwards (2017).

seclusion at the Wartburg Castle is another example of how demonology permeated his theology and praxes (cf. Oberman 1990:75–79).

Luther's albeit extremely unfair characterization of his reformation opponents as demon-inspired is another evidence of his acute awareness of demonic activity against his work and ministry.<sup>15</sup> In his letter to Bernard Wurzelmann on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1535, Luther employs his own exorcism ministry as example to encourage Wurzelmann:

The first thing you and your congregation ought to do is this: Pray fervently and oppose Satan with your faith, no matter how stubbornly he resists. About ten years ago we had an experience in this neighbourhood with a very wicked demon, but we succeeded in subduing him by perseverance and by unceasing prayer and unquestioning faith. The same will happen among you if you continue in Christ\*s name to despise that derisive and arrogant spirit and do not cease praying. By this means I have restrained many similar spirits in different places, for the prayer of the Church prevails at last.

These examples, together with the humorous self-report of Luther 'farting at the devil' (Allen 2010), might resonate well with many Charismatics who frequently 'rebuke' and even, like Luther himself,

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<sup>15</sup> He writes regarding the 'enthusiasts' in his *Smalcald Articles* (Luther 2000:VIII.5-6; 9–11): 'All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualising and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words... In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomed. Therefore, we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments'.

practise ‘laughing at the devil’ (LW 41.185; cf., Westhelle 2003, 1–27). To Luther, as would later be the case with today’s Charismatics, practical Christian existence was a spiritual warfare in which the devil constantly seeks to frustrate the Christian.<sup>16</sup> The believer’s response must be to claim the victory of Christ over these powers. That, Luther frequently did. And this would resonate reasonably well with Charismatics.

It is true that in this respect, Luther was really a son of his generation and reflects a cosmology that gave prominence to evil spirits in the world. In fact, this point is sometime invoked in attempts to tone down or effectively demythologize Luther of his demonology (e.g. Berger 2012; Edwards 2017). But it must be countered that even though Luther’s demonology was admittedly influenced by the cosmology of his time, its pervasiveness in his theological discourse and praxes indicates his belief that he regarded such an outlook as compatible with Scripture and not just with his culture. As argued by Oberman (2006:104), Luther ‘distinguished sharply between faith and superstition’ of his time. Indeed, as is evident in his qualifications in *Table Talk*, Luther often dismissed some myths of his culture as fanciful and certainly different from the spiritual realities of evil spirits.

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<sup>16</sup> Luther (1883) records this account about his encounter with the devil in his letter to Jerome Weller in *Table Talk*: ‘When I awoke last night, the devil came and wanted to debate with me; he rebuked and reproached me, arguing that I was a sinner. To this I replied: Tell me something new, devil! I already know that perfectly well; I have committed many a solid and real sin. Indeed, there must be good honest sins—not fabricated and invented ones—for God to forgive for His beloved Son’s sake, who took all my sins upon Him so that now the sins I have committed are no longer mine but belong to Christ. This wonderful gift of God I am not prepared to deny [in my response to the devil], but want to acknowledge and confess’. On recent studies on Luther and the Reformers and Spiritual Warfare, see Edwards (2017), Loewen (2015) and Ristau (2010).

Accordingly, attempts to expunge Luther of his demonology merely yield not the historical Luther, but a twenty-first-century European Liberal theologian. Luther's demonology played such an important role in his theology and praxes that no theological assessment is complete without due consideration of this element. As Oberman (2006:105) astutely puts it, 'There is no way to grasp Luther's milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the devil: without a recognition of Satan's power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ'. These examples would suggest the potential for significant commonalities between Luther's and Charismatic demonology.

The matter is, however, not helped by the vestigial nature of Charismatic demonology (Collins 2009; Csordas 1997; Haustein 2011:534–552). Thus for now, the comparison can only remain at the superficial levels. All the same, even after accounting for differences in socio-cultural contexts spanning the 500 years between them, one can readily detect several areas of potential convergences. For instance, both Luther and Charismatics take Satan and demonic attacks against Christians seriously. They both emphasise spiritual warfare as a reality in the believer's daily life, even though Luther's concerns focused more on the devil's schemes to undermine scripture, while for many Charismatics today, demonology is framed in existential terms. And they both underline the victory of Christ's death over the evil powers, even if, as noted earlier, some sections of Charismatic Christianity exhibit features of triumphalistic over-realised eschatology that would be incompatible with Luther's theology of the cross.

### **3.3. Assessment of the theological method**

Compared with the historical method, the theological method inheres less glaring deficiencies. Even so there are important weaknesses. To

begin with, because much of Luther's pneumatology is constructed by historical theologians without adequately precise recourse to his exegetical practices, the conclusions tend to mirror the theological leanings of the writers. It is thus unsurprising that scholars of liberal persuasion tend to read Luther's pneumatology in overly intellectual terms stripped of ideas that might emphasise the experiential aspects of the Spirit's work.<sup>17</sup> Such studies inevitably yield outcomes which find significant discontinuities between Luther's and Charismatic pneumatology.

Furthermore, even those theologians who consider the experiential aspects of the Spirit's work tend to sometimes do so in a negative fashion by linking such ideas to the 'enthusiasts'. This results in skewing the evidence to the extent that it is difficult to compare with Charismatic Christianity. It is thus evident that the same contextual exigencies which shaped some of Luther's specific pneumatology in his debate with the 'enthusiasts' are reflected in some contemporary Lutheran assessments of Pentecostal pneumatology.

As argued above, examination of the intersections between Charismatic and Luther's demonology is likely to yield significant fruit in both directions. Even so this will prove inadequate for answering the questions about their compatibilities without precise examination of their exegetical and hermeneutical practices. Put together then, it must

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<sup>17</sup> The notion that Luther disavowed experiential religion is a complete figment of the modern liberal imagination, for if Luther achieved anything at all it was his resolute insistence upon an 'intensely personal understanding of religion' (Thompson 2008:25), an emphasis which he framed in direct opposition to late medieval Christianity. Luther of course was right in insisting that the affective experience of the Spirit must be validated by the external Word of God, a doctrine that many Charismatics today would affirm. Even so, the indirect critique of Charismatic Christianity by recourse to the argument that Luther would have rejected their emphasis on experience is incorrect.

be concluded that what the theological method gains on the one hand, it loses on the other. I next argue for a method which lacks these disadvantages.

#### 4. The Exegetical Method

Given the deficiencies of the historical and theological methods, I propose an exegetical method which is guided by Luther's own expositions on passages which are foundational to the Charismatic movement. This method involves three steps, namely, (a) cataloguing bible passages that are foundational to the Charismatic movement, (b) close analyses of Luther's expositions of these passages, and (c) evaluation of the compatibilities between Luther's expositions of the passage with the Charismatic perspective.

The advantages of this method are evident. For a start, it lacks the inherent biases of the historical and theological approaches, as it is grounded by specific passages which have received Luther's close and in some cases, extended attention. Secondly, it limits the effects of the socio-cultural contextual exigencies which sometimes skewed Luther's theological debates with his opponents. This advantage is not completely without fault, for it cannot be claimed that Luther's expositions were without due consideration of the socio-cultural exigencies of his time. As we shall see, his expositions do reflect his dogged commitment to relating scripture to real life experiences. All the same, the expositions on biblical passages tend to lack the intense diatribes and polemics against opponents. They are accordingly more likely to reflect Luther's balanced views on the subjects.

Thirdly, the seamless intersection of Luther's bibliology with his pneumatology makes it imperative that the two subjects be examined

together. In other words, because Luther believed not only that the Spirit is the supreme interpreter of the Word, but conversely that the Spirit is given through the ministry of the Word, any investigation of one will have to be dependent on Luther's formulation of the role of the other. Indeed, it has been argued (e.g. Minto 2005:256–272; Nel 2015:1–21) that this close combination of bibliology with pneumatology is one of the commonalities between Luther and Charismatics.<sup>18</sup> Thus the best way to compare their pneumatologies is to examine how they both expounded particular pneumatological passages.

But by far, the most important advantage of the exegetical method is that Luther himself would have preferred this method for assessing a Christian movement as flexible as the Charismatic renewal. For, there is no doubt that for Luther, scripture, and specifically plain exegesis of Scripture, must be the foundation of the Christian life in its entirety. So, for example, when he was confronted by the question of marriage vis-à-vis celibacy, Luther instinctively performed an exegetical commentary of 1 Corinthians 7 for the answer. So also, on the shocking death of the Elector in August 1532, Luther resorted to a series of seventeen exegetical sermons on 1 Corinthians 15 to help address the question of the Christian and death. It is evident that for Luther, the answer to

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<sup>18</sup> Even though they were uttered by Luther, the following statements as catalogued by Wood (1969:160) might as well emanate from a Charismatic pulpit: 'God gives His Word and the interpretation through the Holy Spirit'. 'The Spirit is none other than the Interpreter Spirit' [LW 13.16]. 'Without the Spirit, there is no revelation or any interpretation' [LW 7.112]. 'The Holy Spirit must be the Teacher and Guide' [LW 13.87]. It was 'the work of the Holy Spirit alone' to illuminate the heart of Joseph so as to be able to explain Pharaoh's dreams: it is His function to expound the Scriptures [7.150]. The disclosures of God 'require the Holy Spirit as an interpreter'. Scripture's 'divine and heavenly doctrines' of 'repentance, sin, grace, justification, worship to God' cannot enter a man's heart 'unless they be taught by the great Spirit' [LW 12.203].

practical and non-practical questions related to Christian existence can only be found through careful exegesis of relevant passages of scripture.

It was, in fact, by no accident of history that three days after his doctorate in October 1512, Luther was appointed as ‘*Lectura Biblia*, (Lecturer in Biblical Studies) in the University of Wittenberg, a post in which he remained until he died’ (Tomlin 2012:24). He wrote in the *Table Talk* (1531:6): ‘I have grounded my preaching upon the literal word; he that pleases may follow me; he that will not may stay. I call upon St Peter, St Paul, Moses, and all the Saints, to say whether they ever fundamentally comprehended one single word of God, without studying it over and over and over again’. His whole life experience was built upon this principle.<sup>19</sup>

This attitude towards God’s word also governed how Luther assessed the patristic tradition inherited from the past, the dogmatic rulings of the papacy and Church Councils, and his own Christian existence and praxes. He asserted, ‘When anything contrary to scripture is decreed in a council, we ought to believe scripture rather than the council. Scripture is our court of appeal and bulwark; with it we can resist even an angel from heaven - as St. Paul commands in Galatians 1:8—let alone a pope and a council’ (LW. 32.81; Quoted in Wood 1939:126). If

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<sup>19</sup> As assessed by Wood (1969:7): ‘Luther’s essential contribution lay in the realm of faith. He was the instrument of God in recalling the Church to the truth of the gospel. It is as the progenitor of the Protestant Reformation that he is to be assessed today. And it is recognised that the renewal he initiated was in the first instance theological rather than either ecclesiastical or political. It arose, moreover, from his own encounter with God in the Scriptures. It was because he thus experienced divine grace in Christ, through the medium of the written Word, that henceforward the Bible was to be central in the Reformation. Throughout his career as a remodeller of the Church, Luther occupied the chair of biblical exegesis at the University of Wittenberg. As he himself often explained, it was simply as he fulfilled his academic function of expounding the Word of God that the Reformation was effected. The title he most cherished was Doctor of Sacred Scripture’.

Luther were therefore to attend a Charismatic Church today, his immediate reaction would be to open his Bible to see if what was being done and said accorded with his interpretation of scripture. We can do no other.

This proposition is built upon two assumptions which have the potential to undo it. In the first place, it assumes that the phenomenon of the Charismatic renewal could be reduced to a set of foundational Scriptural passages, something that may prove elusive. The fact is, the movement is rather amorphous, varied, rapidly self-transforming and sometimes internally contradictory. The hermeneutical practices of some of its sections are also not always grounded on scripture.

Indeed, some may argue that to speak of a ‘canon’ of passages fundamental to the Charismatic renewal is a caricature, as the movement, at least at its historical inception, was founded upon, and continues to thrive on a hermeneutic which is more praxes-based than primarily scripture-derived. This charge harbours a large element of truth even though it is noteworthy that contemporary Charismatic scholars are redressing the balance even if the enterprise is hampered by the amorphous nature of the movement leading to mixtures of hermeneutics (cf. Keener 2011; Martin 2013; Oliverio 2012). Even so, it would appear that a few Bible passages are foundational to the movement’s theology and can provide strong basis for implementing the exegetical method. I am here thinking of passages such as Acts 2, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12–14, and Joel 2.

The second assumption is that Luther extensively expounded all the passages that are foundational to the Charismatic renewal. This is far from the case and thus somewhat poses as a delimiting factor. However, careful consideration of Luther’s general approach to evaluating social phenomena in the light of scripture should serve as guide. Luther’s

exegetical test of any phenomena, as demonstrated in his arguments with the Anabaptists and the radicals, was inclusivism rather than exclusivism (cf. Tomlin 2012:136–137). In other words, Luther was much more generous and willing to grant the validity of a theologically sound external phenomenon if the scriptures did not explicitly denounce it. By contrast, it was the radicals who objected to phenomena or practice if they were not explicitly sanctioned by scripture, even if that phenomenon appeared theologically sound. This general factor must be considered in assessing Charismatic teachings that are based on passages for which Luther did not provide significant expositions.

## 5. Exegetical Engagement with Luther on Romans 12:3–8

To test the viability of the exegetical method, I hereby engage Luther’s expositions of Romans 12:3–8. The passage has been chosen for this purpose for two main reasons. First of all, it addresses one of the distinctive features of the Charismatic renewal, namely, that God continues to grace his Church with the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit so as to edify its members and empower them for his service. Examining it goes, therefore, to the foundations of the movement. As Dunn (1988:720) astutely puts it, in Romans 12:3–8, ‘Paul speaks as a charismatic to charismatics’. The passage in particular gives prominence to the gift of prophesying, a *charism* which receives significant attention among Charismatics. How do Luther’s expositions of the passage compare with the Charismatic perspective?

Secondly, the passage is located in one of Luther’s most important and enduring theological outputs, namely his lectures on Romans. Having been converted through studying that epistle, Luther certainly viewed his work on Romans as centrepiece of the ‘purity of the doctrine’ (1531) and complained that interest in that letter had previously been missing

even among the Church Fathers. He thus commended his work to be closely studied. Luther would therefore likely approve of the choice of Romans 12:3–8 as test case.

Thankfully, there are at least two occasions in his works in which Luther extensively exposit Romans 12:3–8, namely, (a) in his Lectures on Romans from Spring of 1515 to Autumn of 1516 (Pauck 1961)<sup>20</sup> and (b) his two sermons on Romans 12:1–16 on the first and second Sundays after Epiphany (Lenker 1988). Luther also very briefly comments on Romans 12 in his later *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* in 1546 where he uses a paragraph to generally set out his understanding of the role of the *charismata* in demonstrating Christian conduct that is ‘governed by the Spirit’ (1966 [1546]). While that paragraph does not offer much in terms of detailed exegetical explanations, it nevertheless gives a flavour of Luther’s mature thoughts on the passage coming as it does three decades after his lectures.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It is surprising that unlike the Psalms and Galatians, Luther did not return to write a full commentary on Romans, having written these lecture notes quite early in his professorial career even though admittedly the notes were extremely elaborate and certainly treasured by him. Pauck (1961:xxi) speculates that one possible reason for this apparent omission might be that a couple of years after completing the lectures, ‘Philip Melancthon established the tradition of lecturing on this book of Scripture’ in the same university, benefitting no doubt from Luther’s notes. This is plausible because due to his excellent abilities in the Greek language, Luther allocated most of the lectures on the New Testament in the University to his friend Melancthon (Herrmann 2017:1). Luther might have judged therefore that updating the lectures into a commentary was redundant.

<sup>21</sup> The paragraph reads: ‘In chapter 12, St. Paul teaches the true liturgy and makes all Christians priests, so that they may offer, not money or cattle, as priests do in the Law, but their own bodies, by putting their desires to death. Next he describes the outward conduct of Christians whose lives are governed by the Spirit; he tells how they *teach, preach, rule, serve, give*, suffer, love, live and act toward friend, foe and everyone. These are the works that a Christian does, for, as I have said, faith is not idle’ (added emphases). Of interest is Luther’s omission of direct reference to prophecy in the list

Moreover, the passage shares extensive cross-references with 1 Corinthians 12–14 and even though Luther does not intensely exegete 1 Corinthians 12–14, the cross-references enable an assessment of his general attitude to the operations of the *charismata*. These sources provide ample opportunities for an engagement with Luther’s views on an issue central to Charismatic Christianity.

As Luther himself acknowledged in his lectures,<sup>22</sup> the passage lends itself to be sub-divided into three, namely, (a) Paul appeals for sober self-judgement—Romans 12:3, (b) Paul employs the body imagery to underscore unity in diversity of the Church—Romans 12:4–5, and (c) Paul cites seven *charismata* as examples of this diversity and appeals for appropriate attitude in their exercise for the benefit of the Church—Romans 12:6–8. I shall now examine how Luther explicates the passage and reflect on its intersections with the Charismatic perspective. But prior to that, a brief comment on Luther’s translation of Romans 12:3–8 is in order.

### 5.1. Engaging Luther’s translation of Romans 12:3–8

Luther’s translation practice has become an area of intense research interest, as it reflects the complexities of his internal hermeneutical and theological wrestling with the text, his external conflict with the Church

of the seven *charismata*, but this might be of little significance as he also omits a few other gifts in the list and mentions preaching as one of the gifts.

<sup>22</sup> He indeed berated the framers of the lectionary readings for arbitrarily and wrongly dividing Rom 12:1–16 into Rom 12:1–6 and Rom 12:6–16. He begins his sermon on Rom 12:6–16 thus: ‘This lesson begins in a way that would seem to call for a portion properly belonging to the epistle for the preceding Sunday, and terminates short of its full connection. Evidently it was arranged by some unlearned and thoughtless individual, with a view simply to making convenient reading in the churches and not to its explanation to the people’.

authorities and also the linguistic influences of his translation on the subsequent development of the German language. As Methuen (2017:146) asserts, ‘Luther was indeed concerned to produce a fluent and coherent German translation of the biblical text, but that he wished also to produce one that was theologically unambiguous. Not only linguistic considerations, but also Luther’s theological priorities, and his definition of theological unambiguity, determined his definition of a good translation’. This assessment is borne out in Luther’s *Open Letter on Translation* (1530) in which he underlines his self-consciousness and reflective methodology during translation.

Yet, it must be noted that, for the most part, Luther used the 1509 Basel Edition of the Vulgate for his Lectures on Romans (Pauck 1961:xix). Any assessment of his translation, therefore, needs to take account of possible influences of the Vulgate translation. Even so, and with reticence, some useful conclusions regarding Luther’s hermeneutics and theology may emerge from analysis of his translation (Francis 2000:75–94; Hasty 2009:457–468; Methuen 2017:146–163; Noya 2017:47–55).

Table 1: Comparative translations of Romans 12:3c

Greek NT	Vulgate	Luther's German
<p>ἐκάστω ὡς ὁ Θεὸς ἐμέρισε μέτρον πίστεως</p> <p>to each according as God divided measure of faith</p>	<p><i>unicuique sicut Deus divisit mensuram fidei</i></p> <p>to each according to God divided measure of faith</p>	<p><i>ein jeglicher, nach dem Gott ausgeteilt hat das Maß des Glaubens</i></p> <p>any man according to which God hath divided the measure of faith</p>

Table 2: Comparative translations of Romans 12:6b

Greek NT	Vulgate	Luther's German
<p>εἴτε προφητείαν, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως</p> <p>whether prophesy according to the proportion of faith</p>	<p><i>est nobis differentes sive prophetiam secundum rationem fidei</i></p> <p>Whether prophecy, in proportion to faith</p>	<p><i>Hat jemand Weissagung, so sei sie dem Glauben gemäß.</i></p> <p>If any man has prophecy, let it be according to faith.</p>

Thankfully, Luther's translation of our passage is straightforward and largely non-controversial. All the same, two points are worth noting about the translation in Luther's German Bible.<sup>23</sup> In the first place, Luther's translation of Romans 12:3c, a clause which is in any case fraught with interpretive difficulties, results in what would initially appear to be a reduced emphasis on the universality of the *charismata*. As table 1 above shows, he opts to translate *unicuique* (each) as *ein jeglicher* which has an ambiguous range of meanings from 'any one' through 'everyone' to 'each one'. It is tempting to surmise that this is of theological or hermeneutical importance. As will be seen, however, Luther's comments on the verse suggest otherwise.

Secondly, Luther's translation of Romans 12:6b (table 2 above) drops the equivalent of *rationem* (proportion), thus simply rendering Paul's point to be that prophesying must be 'according to faith'. As will shortly be addressed, the clause itself, with its evident linkage with Romans 12:3c is difficult to comprehend. Even so Luther's omission in the translations raises four possibilities which can only be resolved after closer examination of his expositions.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Citations of Luther's German Bible are taken from (Luther 2002 [1534]). Unless otherwise stated, English translations of the Greek NT are from the NRSV.

<sup>24</sup> Firstly, did Luther find the clause to be an unnecessary repetition of the concept of *Maß des Glaubens* (measure of faith) which the Apostle refers to in 12:3c? Secondly, was Luther seeking to balance Rom 12:6a *mancherlei Gaben nach der Gnade* (various gifts [given] according to grace) with Rom 12:6b—*dem Glauben gemäß* (according to faith)? Thirdly, was he seeking to balance the phrasing of 12:6b with Paul's rendering of the manner in which the other *charismata* were to be exercised in 12:7–8? And fourthly, did Luther have a complex theological understanding of the operation of the *charismata* which is reflected by this omission?

## 5.2. Engaging Luther’s expositions on Romans 12:3

In Romans 12:3, Paul begins what is an apparent transition, from his general exhortation to the Romans to offer themselves as spiritual sacrifices to God in response to his grace (12:1–2), to setting out specific instructions on their conduct towards one another in the household of God (12:9–15:33). He devotes this transition to explicate the ‘unity in diversity’ of the Church as ‘one body’ and the individuals in it as members of that body. As Bruce (1987:214) insightfully puts it, ‘Diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God’s handiwork. It is so in nature; it is equally so in grace, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community’. This imagery and the potent ideas it connotes no doubt lays a solid foundation for the rest of the letter.

The transition is itself couched as an authoritative instruction, from the one who has been graced with the *charism* of apostleship, to believers each of whom have also received *charismata* to function appropriately within the body. Dunn (1988:719; cf. Fee 1994:604; Moo 1996:759; Osborne 2010:322) is therefore right in describing Romans 12:3 as placing the exhortation in the context of ‘the mutuality of charismatic ministry within the body of Christ’. Certainly, the repeated stress on individual believers being uniquely gifted in the first half of our passage <sup>25</sup> matches the fundamental emphasis by contemporary Charismatics on the indispensability of the *charismata* for the spiritual growth of Christians within the corporate Church.

Paul emphasises that the *charismata* must be exercised within a code of practice of ‘sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith

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<sup>25</sup> Mainly, παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν (12:3a, everyone among you), ἐκάστῳ ὡς (12:3c, to each as), μέλη πάντα οὐ (12:4b, not all members), and εἰς ἀλλήλων μέλη (12:5b, individually one another members).

(μέτρον πίστεως) that God has assigned'. The hortatory element of the passage is certainly reflected in the manner in which Paul proceeds to list seven *charismata* evidently as illustrations of how individual believers contribute to the unity in diversity of the fellowship through exercise of the gifts God has given each believer.

As intimated above, the interpretation of μέτρον πίστεως (measure of faith) is fraught with difficulties. Two possibilities are mooted by commentators. The first takes this phrase as expressing the divine standard of faith that God has set so believers would measure themselves by. In Moo's (1996:761) words, it refers to 'shared faith as the standard by which Christians are to regard themselves'. Or as Osborne (2010:323) puts it, 'we look at ourselves on the basis of that common faith God's grace has allotted to each of us'. The second view takes μέτρον πίστεως as referring to each individual believer receiving his or her own specific measure of faith so as to function appropriately in the gift to which they have been called. In Bruce's words (1987:215; cf. Dunn 1988:721), 'it denotes the spiritual power given to each Christian for the discharge of his or her special responsibility'.

Even though I lean towards the latter view, and I assume that most charismatics also do, it seems to me that a binary choice between the two options is generally unnecessary. It is true that the context suggests that Paul naturally had the second view in mind. All the same, it is impossible to imagine him rejecting the first view and so patently asserting that God has no universally applicable standard by which believers were to exercise the *charismata*. The whole passage in any case blends the two concepts of the uniqueness of the individual believer within a corporate outlook of the Church. Thus it could be said that God's standard of faith is gifted to the whole Church. But according to Romans 12:3, this universal standard finds its unique

expression in each believer in the manner in which God apportions the *charismata*. It will be interesting to now see how Luther approaches this verse.

Indeed, in his lecture notes on the passage, Luther naturally focuses on explaining the difficult *Maß des Glaubens* (measure of faith) phrase.<sup>26</sup> Admitting its difficulty, he rejects the first option of interpretation above, arguing that ‘the apostle plainly states that different gifts are given according to this measure’. For Luther, the diversity of the gifts means that the ‘measure of faith’, which forms the basis of God’s gifts, is also varied. This would seem to equate the gift of faith with the *charismata*, but as Luther clarifies, faith in itself is God’s gift and so co-terminus with the *charismata*. The Apostle’s explicit link between faith and the exercise of the gifts is crucial to Luther, for, as he argues, one cannot operate without the other:

[F]aith is nothing else than the obedience of the spirit. But there are different degrees of the obedience of the spirit. For one of us exercises his obedience and faith here and another there, yet, we are all of one faith. Just so there prevails in a town one obedience to the prince, yet there are diverse ways of practising this obedience; nobody can presume to adopt someone else's way and neglect his own responsibility, for then confusion, sedition, and rebellion would develop in the commonwealth.

A similar interpretation is adopted in his sermon on the passage on the first Sunday after Epiphany, even though unlike in his earlier lectures, Luther also gives attention to other elements of the verse. So for example, he asserts that the passage lays the grounds for humble

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<sup>26</sup> In his lectures, Luther separated his comments on each verse into two parts; the *Gloss* was essentially translations of the text and occasional textual comments, and the *Scholia* in which Luther focused on particular phrases or clauses of relevance for extended commentary.

expression of the gifts as they are to be exercised within what he calls ‘limits of faith’:

The believer should not esteem himself above others, nor attach to the gifts conferred upon himself greater value than he accords those conferred upon another. Otherwise he will be inclined to despise the lesser gifts and emphasize the more exalted ones, and to influence others to the same practice... every man should estimate his own goodness by his faith. Faith is something all Christians have, though not in equal measure, some possessing more and others less.<sup>27</sup>

Luther’s expositions of Romans 12:3 therefore throw up no new surprises, certainly to the contemporary Charismatic Christian. He evidently believed in the universal distribution of the gifts of the Spirit, and also asserted the primacy of their operation within the bounds of faith. Regardless of the interpretation of the difficult clause ‘measure of faith’,<sup>28</sup> Luther underlines, as Paul does, that the gifts must be exercised in sober self-judgement induced by faith, which is itself God’s gift.

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<sup>27</sup> Luther repeats this idea later in his Second Sunday after Epiphany Sermon: ‘Paul’s peculiar choice of words here, referring to all gifts as the grace of God and the measure of faith, is meant to teach that no man may regard his individual gift as a peculiar instance in that respect, as do they who are not of the common faith’.

<sup>28</sup>In a further comment in his Second Sunday after Epiphany sermon, Luther resists an overly anthropological interpretation of this difficult clause by asserting how the faith so referred to has nothing to do with the human will or merit: “‘Measure of faith’ may be understood as implying that God imparts to some more of faith itself; and to others, less. But I presume Paul’s thought in employing the expression is that faith brings gifts, which are its chief blessing. These are said to be according to the measure of our faith, and not to the measure of our will or our merit. We have not merited our gifts. Where faith exists, God honours it with certain gifts, apportioned, or committed, according to his will’.

### 5.3. Engaging Luther's expositions on Romans 12:4–5

In Romans 12:4–5, Paul employs the imagery of the body<sup>29</sup> to illustrate the concept of unity in diversity of the Christian community undergirded by proper operation of the gifts of the Spirit. In adducing this imagery, Paul is insisting that individual believers who are consecrated to God in response to his grace ought to function appropriately with the correct humble self-judgement of the gifts, so as to maintain this unity in diversity. The body imagery of Romans 12:4–5 therefore lays a strong foundation for explaining the operation of the gifts. This resonates well with the Charismatic ethos of egalitarian ecclesiology which pays attention to the indispensability of each believer in the Christian community.

In his lectures on Romans, Luther takes the lessons of the body imagery as self-evident, and so does not dwell much on its source. Instead, he criticizes the lack of interest in humility and piety within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the time as counter to the spirit of this passage. After censuring the inordinate focus on external activities such as Church properties and ostentatious displays of wealth by priests and monks, Luther asserts: ‘We practise all our piety in activities of this kind and are not a whit concerned about what the apostle here

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<sup>29</sup> Some interpreters are preoccupied with identifying the source for this imagery in Pauline discourse (e.g. Engberg-Pedersen 2010; Gupta 2010:518–536; Miller 2014; Sandnes 2002). However, the parallels that Paul adduces are so self-evident that if even he borrowed from a specific usage, the source would not have exerted any significant influence in his explication of the concept of unity in diversity in Christ's Church. This is not to dismiss the theological relevance of the imagery as Paul himself draws attention to it by his exhortation in Rom 12:1 to *παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν* (present your bodies as living sacrifices). Even so his subsequent reference in Rom 12:5 to *οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σωμᾷ ἕσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ* (we who are many are one body in Christ) indicates it is the referent of the imagery which concerns him more than the source.

commands. And I have not even mentioned the monstrous display of pride, ostentation, greed, dissipation, and ambition that is connected with all these enterprises’.

The body imagery received far more extensive attention in his Second Sunday after Epiphany sermon calling it, ‘an apt and beautiful simile, one [Paul] makes use of frequently... It teaches directly and clearly the equality of all Christians; that one common faith should satisfy all; that gifts are not to be regarded as making one better, happier and more righteous than another, in the eyes of God’. The body simile, Luther argues, demonstrates how immensely interdependent believers are:

The eye has not attained its place because of its power of seeing — not because it has merited its office as an organ of sight for the body. In the very beginning it derived its existence and its peculiar function of sight from the body. It cannot, therefore, boast in the slightest degree that by its independent power of seeing it has deserved its place as an eye. It has the honour and right of its position solely through its birth, not because of any effort on its part. Similarly, no Christian can boast that his own efforts have made him a member of Christ, with other Christians, in the common faith. Nor can he by any work constitute himself a Christian.

Luther interacts with 1 Corinthians 12 to further argue that the body imagery underlines the mutual service that members ought to render to each other. This discourse leads him in a sort of digressive criticism against ‘good works’ but one that is crucial for his subsequent explication of the passage. Moreover, evidently conditioned by increased divisions among Christians at this time, Luther asserts that lack of understanding of the body imagery is a major contributory factor for the divisions. Those who assume self-importance because of their spiritual gifts are not only undermining the Gospel of grace,

claiming for themselves that which only comes from God and functions as God grants grace. But they also pervert the teaching of the Gospel in order to suit their own ambitions thus fomenting divisions. By contrast, what Paul teaches with the imagery of the body is the equality of all believers: ‘It grants all members equal participation in the body. Likewise, all Christians, whether strong in faith or weak, perfect or defective, share equally in Christ and are equal in Christendom’.

As with Romans 12:3, Luther’s exposition of 12:4–5 does not contradict an average charismatic ecclesiology, especially in its egalitarianism and emphases on the *charismata* as the bases of this egalitarianism. However, it is worth reflecting on Luther’s criticism of those of his contemporaries who do not heed the evident lessons of the body imagery. This has important corrective to some sections of the Charismatic movement who are inordinately succumbing to hierarchical sacerdotal impulses, and glory in the possession and practice of the spiritual gifts. Osborne’s (2010:324) warning should be well taken by Charismatic Christians: ‘The tendency to arrogance is especially seen in the area of spiritual gifts, for they bring attention to the individual and can lead to false pride’.

#### **5.4. Engaging Luther’s expositions of Romans 12:6–8**

Paul proceeds to concretise his exhortations by citing seven *charismata* in sequence. On each occasion, he further applies his earlier injunction that believers must function within the Church with correct sober self-judgement. In other words, the list of *charismata* in Romans 12:6–8 serves two epistolary purposes. They firstly demonstrate the diversity of membership and their functions in the unity of the church fellowship. And secondly Paul uses it to exhort them on the proper exercise of these *charismata* in the spirit of humble self-judgement.

Three issues raised by these verses are of particular interest to Charismatic Christians. First of all, it is instructive that Paul chose to highlight the *charisms* as the prime expression of the diversity in unity of the Church as body (Fee 1994). He could after all have chosen other expressions of this diversity, for example the different ethnicities in the Church, or the genders or classes, something which he admittedly does in passages such as Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:14, and Colossians 3:11, and is indeed reflected in his greetings to the Roman Church itself (Rom 16). This is even more remarkable as there is no suggestion that the gifts were being abused in the Church in Rome.

Paul's focus on the *charismata* as the marker of the diversity in the unity of the Church indicates that they play a fundamental function in his ecclesiology. This attention shows that the Church is essentially charismatic by nature, at least in Paul's conceptualisation. Dunn (1988:725) is therefore correct to assert: 'That Paul's description of his vision or "in principle" ideal of the body of Christ as charismatic community has prescriptive force is no doubt the case'. In other words, the Christian community cannot but be charismatic, in the sense that it needs the *charismata* in order to function as one body of Christ and so fulfil the mission of God in the world.

The second issue of relevance to Charismatics relates to the meaning and contemporary applicability of Romans 12:6b: εἴτε προφητείαν, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως (12:6b; whether prophesying, according to the proportion to faith). Two questions in particular are raised, namely, what is the exact nature of prophecy in today's church, and secondly what does it mean to prophesy in 'proportion to faith' (ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως)?

With regard to the first question, it is traditional for writers to categorise two types of prophecies, forth-telling (proclamation) and foretelling

(prediction). Non-charismatic writers (e.g. Grover 2015; MacArthur 2013; McDougall 2003:177–213), including some who believe that most of the other gifts are still operational today, postulate that the predictive element of prophecy in the post-canonical period is, at best problematic, as this might potentially be practised in exclusion or even contradiction to scripture.

By contrast, charismatics (e.g. De Arteaga 2015; De Klerk 2013:1–8; Elbert 2004:181–215; Haslam 2012; Huckle 2009:72–86; Löfstedt 2013:126–138) routinely take it that Paul had both predictive and proclamatory elements of prophecy in mind in Romans 12:6b, and so they see no reason why any aspect of this *charism* would have ceased. They also take it that while prophesying may involve spontaneous extempore speech, it may also involve carefully rehearsed speech. However, among charismatics, there is disagreement over their expectations of the relative proportions of either element of prophecy today. Some, but not all charismatics view the predictive element of prophecy as extremely rare, even though they regard it as not having completely ceased to be operational in the Church. It will be interesting to see what Luther thinks about this particular dispute.

The second question regarding the interpretation of the phrase, ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως (proportion to faith), raises several problems, not the least of which is its possible relationship with μέτρον πίστεως (measure of faith) in 12:3c (see Fee 1994:607-610 for a thorough discussion). The interpretation that ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως of 12:6b basically repeats the idea of μέτρον πίστεως in 12:3c appears to me to be the most straightforward option and so to be preferred. In other words, prophesying ‘in proportion to faith’, means prophesying based on the gift of faith that God has apportioned the believer (cf., Dunn 1988:728; Moo 1996:766). However, and as with Romans 12:3c, the

interpretation of the clause as referring to ‘prophesying in agreement with the Gospel or Christian teaching’, in other words in an objective manner, is patently correct in the general sense. Most Charismatics today would certainly subscribe to the view that the gift of prophecy is to be exercised by faith that is gifted by God, but only under the remit and in subjection to the authority of scripture.

What does Luther say with regard to this important passage? Well, in his lectures on Romans, Luther takes Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:6b regarding prophesying as ‘according to the rule of faith’. However, he interprets it as polemically intended to condemn false prophets ‘who prophesy on the basis of human thought or according to conjectures of probability derived from actions and signs of the creature, as, for example, by people who foretell God’s plan by the stars or some other guess of probability that they may have’. In other words, Luther takes the clause as laying down a marker for true prophecy—it is false if it is not exercised according to the ‘rule of faith’. In this sense even ‘true prophets became false precisely when they forgot to prophesy “according to the rule of faith”’.

Luther stresses the importance of faith again and again, opting for the interpretation suggested above, that prophecy must not be dependent on one’s intellect or human experience but on faith as gifted by God: ‘one may prophesy something new but, in doing so, one must not transcend the characteristic nature of faith. In other words: what one prophesies must not be provable by experience; it must only be a token of things that are in no way apparent either by signs or other indications’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> There is little evidence to support the notion that this polemical reading was Paul’s primary intension, as no such abuses were known in the Roman congregations of the time, even though it is possible that Paul’s anxieties while writing Romans in Corinth could have conditioned him to think of abuses of the prophetic gift. Even so Luther’s interpretation is essentially correct, for Paul’s qualifying exhortation indicates that any

Luther's understanding of prophecy in his early lectures thus does not dismiss operation of predictive prophecy in general, but only that which operates without subjection to the 'rule of faith'.

However, in his later Second Sunday of Epiphany Sermon on the passage, Luther is at best ambivalent about the predictive aspects of prophecy. In the first place, he exclusively focuses on prophecy in his time as proclamation, that is, explanation of scripture. So he defines prophecy in this sermon as being of two kinds 'One is the foretelling of future events, a gift or power possessed by all the prophets under the Old Testament dispensation, and by the apostles; the other is the explanation of the Scriptures'. Whether Luther regarded this definition as his final word is hard to say, as it manifestly omits predictive prophecy by non-apostles during the New Testament dispensation (e.g. Agabus in Acts 11:28; 21:10–11, the Antiochian prophets Acts 13:1, and Judas and Silas Acts 15:32).

Be that as it may, in a subsequent paragraph Luther indicates his wariness of predictive prophecies, underlining their rarity, but even so noteworthy that he does not suggest their cessation:

Now, the Gospel being the last prophetic message to be delivered previous to the time of the judgment, and to predict the events of that period, I presume Paul has reference here simply to that form of prophecy he mentions in the fourteenth of 1 Corinthians— explanation

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prophecy not so exercised in the spirit or 'proportion to faith' would be false. Luther further writes: 'To faith everything must bow. By faith must all doctrine be judged and held. You see whom Paul would constitute doctors of the Holy Scriptures—men of faith and no others. These should be the judges and deciders of all doctrines. Their decision should prevail, even though it conflict with that of the Pope, of the councils, of the whole world. Faith is and must be lord and God over all teachers'.

of the Scriptures.<sup>31</sup> This form is common, ever prevails, and is profitable to Christians; the other form is rare. That reference is to this form, Paul implies in his words, “Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.” Doubtless he means the Christian faith then arising. No other faith, no other doctrine, is to be introduced. Now, when he says prophecy must be according to the proportion of faith, it is plain enough he does not refer to the foretelling of future events.

Exactly what Luther means by the Gospel ‘being the last prophetic message’ is not clear. It will certainly be premature to label him as a cessationist, for he proceeds in his sermon to acknowledge that there were some predictive prophets around whose output he viewed with suspicion, even though he accepted that ‘this form of prophecy may be regarded as among the least of God’s gifts’.<sup>32</sup> Indeed there are historical indications that Luther himself, and certainly his colleague Melancthon, believed in some predictive prophecies (cf. Hoppmann

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<sup>31</sup> Luther’s appeal to 1 Cor 14 in support of this interpretation is clearly problematic as that passage speaks in general about extempore prophecy and not only ‘explanation of the Scriptures’.

<sup>32</sup> The full quote: ‘Paul, you will observe, does not attach so much importance to the prediction of future events; for instance, the prophecies of Lichtenberger, Joachim and others in these latter times. Such predictions, though they may gratify the curiosity of men concerning the fate of kings, princes and others of prominence in the world, are unnecessary prophecies under the New Testament dispensation. They neither teach the Christian faith nor contribute to its strength. Hence this form of prophecy may be regarded as among the least of God’s gifts. More, it sometimes proceeds from the devil. But the ability to explain the scriptures is the noblest, the best, prophetic gift’. In direct reference to Lichtenberger’s prophetic ‘art’, Luther (Warburg 1920:19) writes: ‘What are we then saying about Lichtenberger and his like? This is what I say. Firstly, I consider the rational basis of his celestial art as right, while the art itself is uncertain. That is, the signs in heaven and on earth do not fail. They are the work of God and the angels, sent to warn us, and it is nothing to make an art out of it and to attribute such connections to the stars. Secondly next to this it nevertheless might be that God or his angels have moved him [Lichtenberger] to make many forecasts which have come true, but to let him understand that the art is uncertain God has let him fail many times’.

1997:49–59). In other words, Luther was not categorically opposed to predictive prophetic *charismata*, even though he regarded them to be inferior to proclamatory prophecy and certainly prone to abuses.

It may be reasonable to surmise therefore that Luther regarded predictive prophecy with wary scepticism rather than keen embrace. While this view may appear to cut against contemporary grassroots Charismatic notions of prophecy, my hunch is that most theologically-trained Charismatics would share Luther's wariness towards predictive prophecy, as determining its direct relationship with Scripture is sometimes problematic.

However, the validity of my impression will need to be tested. A study conducted among some European charismatic fellowships by Huckle (2009:72) found that 'a large proportion of Pentecostal and charismatic fellowships use prophecy for general edification (89.5%) and a reasonable proportion (65.8%) for general guidance'. Luther may perhaps therefore feel perfectly at home with the 34.2% of fellowships in this particular cohort who do not use prophecy for general guidance, though will approve of the majority who use prophecy for general edification.

### **5.5. Luther and Charismatics on Romans 12:3–8: an assessment**

While some uncertainties will remain, the above engagement with Luther's expositions on Romans 12:3–8 has unveiled a number of convergences and a potential point of difference between Luther and contemporary Charismatics. It is in the first place evident that Luther and Charismatics treasure this passage as reflecting a fundamental aspect of Christian doctrine and ecclesial existence. Secondly they both understand the *charismata* as indispensable to the existence, growth and function of the Church. Thirdly, they both underline the supernatural

nature of these gifts, Luther in particular stressing the role of faith as God's gift to enable their operation, whereas Charismatics may emphasize the pneumatological underpinnings of the *charismata*. Fourthly they both underscore the diversity of these gifts as serving to strengthen the unity of the Church, even though Luther may well disapprove of the perceived schismatic tendencies of some Charismatics.

And finally, Luther and Charismatics both understand the *charismata* as continuing in their operation today, even though Luther was wary of predictive prophecy and certainly alert to its potential to be exercised in contradiction to scripture. The above analyses have therefore demonstrated that the exegetical method is able to identify the nuances in the continuities and discontinuities between the two parties and thus generate a more fruitful dialogue between Luther and Charismatics.

## 6. Conclusion

This study posed the question as to the potential continuities between Martin Luther and Charismatic Christianity. It has argued that whereas the historical approach to addressing this question, supplies relevant anecdotal accounts to clarify the context of Luther's expositions of Scripture, it fails to generate an adequate answer, as it is prone to several of the biases of historical enquiry. The theological method in this respect has better advantages, especially when Luther's apocalyptic demonology is compared with contemporary Charismatic demonology. However, this area is not as well developed and certainly hampered by the vast contrast in the socio-cultural contexts between Luther and Charismatics.

The exegetical method circumvents these drawbacks, and as has been shown, generates a far more complex, textured and realistic answer to

the question. Based on the results of the exegetical engagement with Luther's expositions on Romans 12:3–8 above, one may hazard the following answer to the question posed as title of the present article: Martin Luther was a 'Charismatic-like' Christian. He certainly would have comfortably fitted into some Charismatic pulpits today, but not all of them.

The current study is, however, based on a single text and will need further validation with the other passages that are foundational to the Charismatic renewal. Even so, it will be right to conclude that Luther's legacy will likely remain strong in the hands of Charismatic Christianity in the coming decades.

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