

The Original Condemnation of Asian Montanism

by ALISTAIR STEWART-SYKES

The object of this article is to describe the social and theological setting of primitive Montanism within second-century Asia in order to account for its appearance and its subsequent condemnation. According to an anonymous source employed by Eusebius the prophecy appeared in the middle of the second century under the leadership of a recent convert called Montanus, and the faithful of Asia gathered and condemned the movement at its outset.¹ Clearly this is a propagandist account but we may accept its broad outlines none the less, in that there was a prophetic movement in which Montanus was a prime mover,² and which failed to receive acceptance in the wider Asian Church.

It should be made clear that this article restricts itself to the earliest period of the prophecy and therefore to primary sources which are directly germane to that period. These sources are both preserved by Eusebius, and consist of an unnamed writer known as the anonymous, and an otherwise unknown Apollonius. A further possibly ancient source is employed by Epiphanius, but we shall observe below that its understanding of prophecy is hardly consistent with a second-century Asian origin, whereas both the anonymous and Apollonius reveal their Asian provenance in their extant writings. Although there is a degree of

Def. Orac. = Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum*, ed. F. C. Babbitt, London–Cambridge, Mass. 1936 (LCL); *GCS* = Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte; *HE* = Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. Schwartz, GCS ix. 1; LCL = Loeb Classical Library; *NovT* = *Novum Testamentum*; *NTS* = *New Testament Studies*; *Pyth.* = Plutarch, *De Pythiae oraculis*, ed. F. C. Babbitt, London–Cambridge, Mass. 1936 (LCL); *StPatr.* = *Studia Patristica*; *SVF* = *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. J. von Arnim, Leipzig 1903; *VigChr.* = *Vigiliae Christianae*

¹ *HE* v.16.10.

² On the leading role of Montanus within the movement see Christine Trevett, *Montanism: gender, authority and the new prophecy*, Cambridge 1996, 160–2.

bias in the presentation of the charges, we should none the less accept that there is a factual basis behind the assertions of the opponents, and that their opposition was motivated by a genuine belief that the prophecy did not conform with the tradition and the succession of the Church.³

Various reasons for the condemnation of Montanism, as the movement came to be called,⁴ have been canvassed by modern writers. Among explanations which have been offered three stand out as being particularly noteworthy. First, we may note the suggestion that the prophecy was not authentically Christian at all but was in the manner of its delivery more indebted to the practice of paganism.⁵ Secondly, it has been suggested that Montanism represents a rural form of Christianity and that the emphases of this rural Christianity led to conflict with the urban church leadership.⁶ Finally, we may note the widespread opinion that Montanism was crushed by the institutionalisation of Christianity which was unable to cope with such an anti-institutional phenomenon as prophecy.⁷ Slight variations on this theme are introduced by Ash, who suggests that the prophetic office was subsumed into the episcopate and could not, therefore, stand independently,⁸ and Trevett who suggests that it was the organisational innovation of Montanism, which resulted from its prophetic basis, which led to its conflict with the institutional Church.⁹

Each of these pictures has a degree of truth, but the whole picture is far more complicated than any of these suggestions would allow. On the basis of an examination of the earliest anti-Montanist sources I will argue that the rural origins of Montanism were fundamental to its exclusion and are

³ These are the charges made by the anonymous source at *HE* v.16.9. Trevett, *Montanism*, 3, adopts a similar approach to the evidence.

⁴ The terms 'Montanism' and 'Montanist' used of the first generations of the new prophecy are anachronistic. They are employed here as convenient shorthands for 'the new prophecy' and 'related to or belonging to the new prophecy'.

⁵ A. Dauntton-Fear, 'The ecstasies of Montanus', in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *StPatr.* xvii (1982), 648–51.

⁶ W. H. C. Frend, 'Town and countryside in early Christianity', in Derek Baker (ed.), *The Church in town and countryside* (Studies in Church History xvi, 1979), 25–42 at p. 36. The suggestion that the Montanist conflict was a conflict between rural and urban Christianities is followed by D. H. Williams, 'The origins of the Montanist movement: a sociological analysis', *Religion* xix (1989), 331–51 at p. 340, and Dimitris J. Kyratis, *The social structure of the early Christian communities*, London 1987, 94–5. Elsewhere ('Montanism: a movement of prophecy and regional identity in the early Church', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* lxx [1988], 25–34 at p. 28) Frend suggests that there was a difference of ideology based on the rural/urban division in that the (urban) leadership of the Church was hopeful of some accommodation with the empire, whereas the Montanists were confrontational. This is possible, but cannot be confirmed from the available evidence.

⁷ David Hill, *New Testament prophecy*, London 1979, 189–91; D. F. Wright, 'Why were the Montanists condemned', *Themelios* ii (1976), 15–22.

⁸ James L. Ash, 'The decline of ecstatic prophecy in the early Church', *Theological Studies* xxxvii (1976), 227–52.

⁹ Trevett, *Montanism*, 146–9.

the root cause of the conflict, but do not provide in themselves grounds for condemnation. Condemnation by the Church, it will be suggested, resulted from the manner in which the Montanists prophesied, which reflected the rural origins of the prophets and which, because of its rural origin, was viewed as more pagan than Christian by the urban leadership of the Church. Further to this I intend to suggest that those aspects of Montanist church organisation which Trevett sees as fundamental to the conflict likewise resulted from its rural setting.

I

Before proceeding to this conclusion we should begin by noting the manner in which Montanism was a typical manifestation of second-century Asian Christianity, so that its divergences may stand out more clearly. This continuity even extends to points at which differences have been perceived between the Montanists and their catholic contemporaries, for instance the suggestion that the Montanists had a heretical eschatology,¹⁰ or that its Christology and resultant Trinitarian theology were in error.¹¹ Montanist eschatology with its eager expectation of the end may have sounded strange to later ears, but may be paralleled in other Asian documents of the first two centuries, such as the Revelation, the writings of Papias, and the *Epistula apostolorum*. It may thus be seen that Montanist eschatology was not controversial at the earliest stage of the new prophecy, because it did not differ from the eschatology of the wider Asian Church, and was not, therefore, criticised.¹² Montanist Christology and Trinitarian theology likewise only became 'heretical' at a later period; the new prophecy was Noetian (according to Hippolytus) simply in that it (like Noetus) was representative of the traditional Asian Christology, a Christocentric monotheism.¹³ In these respects Montanism was simply normative Asian Christianity.

¹⁰ Walter Burghardt, 'Primitive Montanism: why condemned?', in Dikran Hadidian (ed.), *From faith to faith: essays in honor of Donald G. Miller*, Pittsburgh 1979, 339–56 at p. 343, suggests that it was apocalyptic eschatology which was particularly controversial about Montanism.

¹¹ An accusation which is founded on Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresion* viii.19, ed. M. Marcovich, Berlin 1986.

¹² See in particular Trevett, *Montanism*, 95–105, on Montanist eschatology and Alistair Stewart-Sykes, 'The Asian context of the *Epistula apostolorum* and the new prophecy', *VigChr.* li (1997), 416–38 at pp. 433–6, on the parallels with normative Asian eschatology.

¹³ The words of S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis: on Pascha and fragments*, Oxford 1979, p. xviii, describing Melito's Christology; Hall notes a similar Christology in the *Acta Johannis*. On Noetus and Melito see Reinhard M. Hübner, 'Melito von Sardes und Noët von Smyrna', in D. Papeandrou, W. A. Bienert and K. Schäferdiek (eds), *Oecumenica et patristica*, Stuttgart 1989, 220–3. On parallels between this and the *Epistula apostolorum* see Stewart-Sykes, 'Asian context', 432–3.

In this light we may also see that the prophecy of Montanism had much in common with other Asian prophecy, and that its appeal to earlier Asian prophets was not groundless.¹⁴ The roots of Asian Christian prophecy lie in the tradition of the Fourth Gospel, and Montanism was simply a branch from the same tree as Melito of Sardis and the *Epistula apostolorum*. In order to demonstrate this it is necessary first to examine the forms which prophetic inspiration and prophetic delivery might take.

Past studies have concentrated on the form of delivery by distinguishing between prophets who spoke comprehensible human speech, who are described as paraenetic prophets, and those who did not, described as mantic prophets.¹⁵ Both kinds of prophecy were known within ancient Christianity. However, these different manners of delivery have been confused with different means of inspiration. In particular paraenetic prophecy has been identified with prophets who speak in possession of their normal faculties, and mantic prophecy with those who do not. The equation is a false one, as Aune rightly points out,¹⁶ since it is possible for a prophet not in possession of her or his faculties to deliver paraenetic guidance.

None the less, we may retain the terms ‘paraenetic’ and ‘mantic’ as classifications of the content of prophecy, but not of the means of prophetic inspiration nor of the state of the prophet whilst in communication with the inspiring deity. Paraenetic prophecy may be defined as prophecy given in a language known to the recipients which is intended to give ethical or religious guidance. The term ‘mantic’ is a difficult one since, as Aune again notes, the term μάντις and its cognates are used interchangeably with προφήτης and its cognates and, therefore, does not necessarily carry a connotation of incomprehensibility,¹⁷ but it is employed here for want of a better term to mean prophetic communication which is uncontrolled and humanly incomprehensible.

To turn to the question of the means of prophetic inspiration we may note that there were two broad types within Christianity, both of which have parallels in the pagan world. There is visionary inspiration, by which the prophet would see a vision and subsequently describe it, and what we may term enthusiastic prophecy, by which a prophet would be

¹⁴ For such an appeal see *HE* v.17.2, quoting the anonymous’s reply to the Montanist appeal to a prophetic succession.

¹⁵ See, for example, R. P. Vande Kappelle, ‘Prophets and mantics’, in R. Smith and J. Lounibos (eds), *Pagan and Christian anxiety*, Lanham, MD 1984, 87–111; Thomas W. Gillespie, *The first theologians: a study in early Christian prophecy*, Grand Rapids 1994, 133, 157.

¹⁶ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in early Christianity*, Grand Rapids 1983, 33–4.

¹⁷ Ibid. 28–9. It is significant that according to Heraclitus quoted at *Pyth.* 397A whilst speaking μαινομένῳ στόματι, the Sibyl none the less utters plain and unadorned (and presumably therefore understandable) oracles.

occupied by a second person, the Spirit, or Christ, and speak in that person. The term is used in keeping with the usage of Plato, Josephus and Philo,¹⁸ although again it should be carefully noted that this does not imply that the content of the prophecy should be mantic, nor does it predetermine the means by which the controlling deity uses the prophet. These terms are used for prophecy resulting from the means of inspiration to which Aune refers using the terms 'vision trance' and 'possession trance' respectively.¹⁹ The term 'ecstatic prophecy' has been used extensively in the past, but should be abandoned because it is confusing due to the various possible meanings of the term 'ecstatic',²⁰ because it neither describes a particular form of prophetic delivery nor an identifiable method of gaining inspiration, and because ecstasy need not involve a loss of self-control.²¹

Finally, we may note that although the identification of enthusiastic prophecy and mantic delivery is erroneous there is none the less a correlation. A possession trance may lead to either mantic or paraenetic delivery whereas a vision trance will only give rise to paraenetic guidance, since the communication of the prophecy takes place on a different occasion from the inspiration, when the prophet has regained his or her senses.

Having distinguished these modes of inspiration we may go on to note that both would appear to have been known within Asian Christianity. The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is portrayed as an enthusiastic prophet, this in turn perhaps illustrating the prophetic practice of the author of the gospel,²² but the apocalypse is the product of a visionary prophet whose use of the 'I' form is restricted to the reporting of statements of Christ from his visions.

In observing that the Christ of the Fourth Gospel is portrayed as an enthusiastic prophet we need not go on to suggest that the discourses in the 'I' form are speeches of a Christian prophet speaking under the inspiration of the Paraclete, though this would seem most probable. In

¹⁸ Plato, *Ion* 535C, ed. St George Stock, Oxford 1909; Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* iii. 353, ed. H. St J. Thackeray, London-Cambridge, Mass. 1927 (LCL); Philo, *Quis divinarum rerum heres* 258, ed. F. H. Colson, London-Cambridge, Mass. 1932 (LCL).

¹⁹ Aune, *Prophecy*, 19-20.

²⁰ On which note E. R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an age of anxiety*, New York 1970, 70-2.

²¹ Thus in agreement with Christopher Forbes, 'Early Christian inspired speech and Hellenistic popular religion', *NovT* xxviii (1986), 257-68 at n. 6 (p. 260): 'The study of early Christian glossolalia and prophecy would be better off if these terms (mania and ecstasy) were not used at all.'

²² The conclusion of M. E. Boring, 'The influence of Christian prophecy on the Johannine portrayal of the Paraclete and Jesus', *NTS* xxv (1979), 113-23.

any event the same form of introduction is illustrated by the introductory formulae employed by Montanists. Thus we may compare:

I am the Lord God, the ruler of all... (Montanus, fr. 1)²³

and

I am not a wolf, I am a word and spirit and power (Maximilla, fr. 5)

with

I am the way, the truth and the life (John xiv. 6)

or

I am the word (*Epistula apostolorum* x) (Coptic).

Thus the Johannine community, itself familiar with the activities of prophets (and false prophets according to 1 John iv. 1) would recognise the depiction of an enthusiastic prophet in the Fourth Gospel readily enough.

The prophetic basis of the Johannine discourses is denied by Hill on the grounds that the speaker in the gospel form is the earthly Jesus and not the risen Christ who speaks in Revelation.²⁴ But in the Johannine discourses the earthly Jesus speaks as the heavenly Christ, since there is no real distinction made in Johannine Christology between the earthly and the heavenly Christ. Hill also suggests that these speeches are not the work of prophets but of teachers; but his own work indicates that teaching was a function of prophets.²⁵ Hill's denial of enthusiastic prophecy in the Fourth Gospel has perhaps been influenced by the widespread identification of enthusiastic inspiration and mantic delivery;²⁶ since the speeches of the Johannine Jesus are in comprehensible speech anyone identifying mantic delivery with enthusiastic inspiration would be led to deny that an enthusiastic prophet is depicted. But since we may now see that the identification is a false one and that enthusiastic inspiration may coexist with paraenetic delivery it becomes possible to see the discourses of the Fourth Gospel as representing enthusiastic Christian prophecy. Apart from the identification of enthusiastic inspiration and mantic delivery another underlying assumption in Hill's argument is that pagan enthusiastic prophecy was also necessarily mantic in delivery. This is without foundation in the evidence. Past accounts of pagan prophecy

²³ All Montanist fragments are cited following the numbering of *The Montanist oracles and testimonia*, ed. Ronald E. Heine, Macon, GA 1989.

²⁴ Hill, *New Testament prophecy*, 149.

²⁵ David Hill, 'Christian prophets as teachers or instructors in the Church', in J. Panagopoulos (ed.), *Prophetic vocation in the New Testament and today*, Leiden 1977, 108–30.

²⁶ See, in particular, Hill, *New Testament prophecy*, 29, 33, 121.

have made this assumption, but more recent studies have shown that most pagan prophecy was what we have termed 'paraenetic'.²⁷

The source and nature of inspiration in the school of the fourth evangelist and the circle of the seer may have differed, yet both groups seem in time to have been absorbed into the wider Johannine Christianity which became dispersed throughout Asia in the second century.²⁸ Thus the Asian prophetic tradition in which Montanus stood was open to both visionary and enthusiastic inspiration. Even so, from the limited evidence available enthusiastic prophecy would appear to have been more common in Asia. Even if the evidence is misleading and enthusiastic prophecy is not actually more common, it is none the less part of the tradition and, therefore, the enthusiastic prophecy of Montanus may readily be viewed in this light. We may moreover note that the denials by the anonymous source of Epiphanius that enthusiastic prophecy ever took place indicate that this source, whereas considerably earlier than Epiphanius himself, is either from a yet later stage in the controversy or is not Asian.²⁹ Since this source does not recognise enthusiastic prophecy at all it cannot be used in reconstructing the attitude towards Montanism of the Asian Church in the second century. Epiphanius' source makes the case that the only true prophets are of the visionary type, and ecstasy is therefore equated with the visionary inspiration of a visionary prophet;³⁰ Athenagoras would appear to reflect a more authentically second-century view when he describes the biblical prophets as enthusiastic prophets, and does so in language reminiscent of pagan language concerning the oracles.³¹ He is able to do this because enthusiastic prophecy within the Church has not yet come under attack.

That the evidence is limited cannot however be over-emphasised. Apart from the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse the only remains of the activity of non-Montanist Asian Christian prophets are the *Epistula apostolorum* and Melito's *Peri Pascha*.³² The *Epistula apostolorum* may be seen as a collection of prophecies in epistolary form essentially on the formal grounds that it is a revelation dialogue; the risen Christ is the mouthpiece for a series of prophecies, and so this prophecy may properly be seen as

²⁷ See, notably, Forbes, 'Early Christian inspired speech', which is a good critique of the secondary literature on this point.

²⁸ Boring, 'Influence', 115.

²⁹ A fuller defence of this view of Epiphanius' sources must await a separate treatment. The question has not been studied since the work of H. Voigt, *Eine verschollene Urkunde des antimontanistischen Kampfes*, Leipzig 1891.

³⁰ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48.5-7, ed. K. Holl, GCS xxxii.

³¹ *Legatio* 9.1 (ed. W. Schoedel, Oxford 1972) talks of the prophets 'who, in the ecstasy (ἔκστασις) of the thoughts in themselves, as the divine spirit moved them, gave utterance to those things with which they were inspired, as the spirit used them as a flautist might blow into a flute'.

³² There were other prophets within this school, such as Ammia and Quadratus, but nothing of their activity survives.

enthusiastic prophecy in the tradition of the Fourth Gospel. One may note that Themiso similarly gathered prophecies into epistolary form.³³ Although the claim of Melito to be a prophet is disputed by Tertullian, perhaps representing Montanist opinion, he was widely regarded as a prophet by the catholic side,³⁴ and a work of his mentioned by Eusebius bears further witness to his interest in prophecy.³⁵ On the evidence provided for us in *Peri Pascha* Melito is not a visionary but an enthusiastic prophet; indeed at the end of the *Peri Pascha* he would appear to be using the 'I' form of prophecy as in the person of Christ he invites the nations to receive forgiveness:

Come all nations of men compounded with sins, and receive forgiveness of sins. For I am your forgiveness, I am the Passover of salvation...³⁶

That both tests are the products of enthusiastic prophecy may simply be the result of the limited evidence. More importantly we may note that there is no reason why the two types of prophetic inspiration might not coexist. Both the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse were accepted into the Johannine school; outside Asia Hermas, who is a visionary prophet, is aware of enthusiastic prophecy, and the Odes of Solomon likewise betray evidence of both kinds of inspiration being practised.³⁷ Even within the Montanist movement we may note that the Montanist prophetess of *De anima* 9 is a visionary prophet,³⁸ as is the later Montanist Quintilla.³⁹ However, Montanus and the two women would appear to have been prophets of the enthusiastic type. But they are not unusual in this respect, and so it is hard to see why this in itself should bring about their condemnation. They do not differ from other Asian prophets on the basis of their enthusiastic inspiration, and the anonymous does not indicate that this is the case. It is their allegedly mantic delivery which leads to his charges.

³³ Apollonius at *HE* v.18.5; on *Epistula apostolorum* as prophecy see Stewart-Sykes, 'Asian context', 424–8.

³⁴ The evidence is to be found in a citation of Tertullian by Jerome at *De viris illustribus* 24, PL xxiii. 643.

³⁵ *HE* iv.26.4 mentions a λόγος αὐτοῦ προφητείας, which may be a collection of Melito's own prophecies, or else a book concerning its practice.

³⁶ Melito, *Peri Pascha* 103, ed. S. G. Hall, in his *Melito of Sardis*. Whereas this may be understood as ethopoiia it may simultaneously be understood as prophecy, given in the 'I' form. G. F. Hawthorne, 'Christian prophets and the sayings of Jesus: evidence of and criteria for', *SBL Seminar Papers* 1975 (ii), 105–29 at p. 117, similarly regards this as an example of prophecy.

³⁷ Note the discussion of D. E. Aune, 'The Odes of Solomon and early Christian prophecy', *NTS* xxviii (1982), 435–60, notably at pp. 438–43.

³⁸ Kurt Aland, 'Bemerkungen zum Montanismus und zur frühchristlichen Eschatologie', in *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe*, Gütersloh 1960, 105–48 at p. 115, is puzzled to find a Montanist visionary prophet in the *De anima*. This is of course an African testimonium, but it is not impossible that the new prophecy embraced visions.

³⁹ On Quintilla as a later prophet see Trevett, *Montanism*, 167–8 and refs.

II

We may now proceed to the matter of the condemnation of Montanism. To begin to understand this condemnation in the context of second-century Asia we should start by noting the specific charges made by the near-contemporary sources. However, even these earliest Asian sources are not directly contemporary with the original condemnation of the movement. It is clear that some of the charges recited in the earliest sources, such as the absence of a succession to Montanus,⁴⁰ or the absence of Montanist martyrs,⁴¹ are not directly germane to the issue of condemnation, but were charges which must have arisen after the passing of the first leaders of the movement.⁴² Even so, these earliest anti-Montanist sources derive from the same broad social and theological context as the original opponents and are therefore worth exploring in an attempt to discern what was at issue in the first generation.

The essence of the charges made by the anonymous source is that the wild and uncontrolled nature of Montanist prophecy is alien to the Christian tradition and that it is, therefore, false prophecy.⁴³ He describes the prophecy of Montanus as being given under possession, in a 'false ecstasy', and that the women likewise spoke 'in a frenzied manner, unsuitably and abnormally'. The spirit he describes as 'a spirit of false prophecy'. Apollonius on the other hand takes issue with the organisation of Montanism.⁴⁴ In particular he complains that Montanus 'taught the dissolution of marriages, legislated fasts, named Pepuza and Tymion Jerusalem, wanted people to gather there from everywhere, appointed revenue collectors, contrived the acceptance of bribes in the name of offerings, provided salaries for those who preached his doctrine'.

These are the only charges which are conceivably relevant to the earliest stage of the controversy, and if the earliest condemnation of Montanism is to be understood these are the charges which have to be investigated. In particular they may be examined against the social background of Asian Christianity in the second century.

The particular charge made by the anonymous against Montanist prophecy was that the prophecy, being wild and uncontrolled, was the work of the devil.⁴⁵ Several times he says it is false prophecy.⁴⁶ The term

⁴⁰ Anonymous at *HE* v.17.4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* v.16.12.

⁴² Although it is possible that martyrdom played a role in the early stages of the controversy, this is not reflected in the later second-century sources. If this controversy was early, it was about the fitness of offering oneself for martyrdom, whereas the charge of the anonymous is that Montanists have not been martyred. Cf. Frend, 'Montanism: a movement of prophecy and regional identity', who, at p. 28, denies that Quintus in the *Martyrium Polycarpi* is a 'proto-Montanist', and Gerd Buschmann, 'Martyrium Polycarpi 4 und der Montanismus', *VigChr.* xlix (1995), 105–45, who argues that he is precisely that.

⁴³ Anonymous at *HE* v.16.1–17.5. ⁴⁴ At *HE* v.18.1–11. ⁴⁵ At *HE* v.16.9.

⁴⁶ At *HE* v.16.4; v.16.9, and implicitly at v.16.8.

ψευδοπροφήτης is a prominent term in the Septuagintal rendering of Jeremiah, where it is used explicitly to distinguish the prophets of pagan deities from those of God,⁴⁷ and so in using this term the anonymous is implying that the prophecy is pagan prophecy. His statement that the prophetic spirit of the Montanists is a diabolic spirit is thus to be read in the light of Justin's identification of the pagan deities as demons⁴⁸ as an implication that Montanist prophecy was pagan in inspiration. It is important to note that the anonymous is not saying that the Montanist prophecy was false prophecy in the sense that Montanus was claiming to be a prophet whilst he was not, but that he was genuinely possessed by a spirit; however, the spirit was not the spirit of God.⁴⁹ Aune goes so far as to argue that the description of Montanus' initial ecstasy is part of the attempt to 'paganise' the prophecy since it is modelled on Lucian's description of Alexander of Abunoteichos.⁵⁰

In common with all other recent students of Montanism, and in the light of the treatment of Christian prophecy given above we may recognise that the charge of paganism is a false one and that Montanism arose from a context of Asian Christian prophecy,⁵¹ but we may none the less attempt to see how it is that according to the anonymous critic the spirit of the Montanists was not the spirit of God, why it is on these grounds that the women undergo exorcism⁵² and why Montanus is held to be a false, pagan, prophet; it is not by accident that Montanus is said to be a recent convert by the anonymous, as this is intended to imply that his former faith had hardly been left behind. It is at this point that we may note the rural Phrygian setting of the new prophecy.

Given the extensive role which prophetic religion, particularly connected to the cult of Apollo, played in rural Phrygia in the period,⁵³ the charge of pagan prophecy laid against the Montanists was perhaps an obvious one. It is beyond the evidence to go into the question of what influence the practice of the shrines had on the new prophecy; although

⁴⁷ J. Reiling, 'ΨΕΥΔΟΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ in the LXX, Philo and Josephus', *NovT* xiii (1971), 147–56.

⁴⁸ *i Apol.* 5, ed. E. Goodspeed in *Die ältesten Apologeten*, Göttingen 1914.

⁴⁹ Cf. Trevett, *Montanism*, 157, who implies that the charge of paganism laid at the Montanist door is later.

⁵⁰ Aune, *Prophecy*, 313.

⁵¹ C. Trevett, 'Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism: seeking the seeds', *VigChr.* xliii (1989), 313–38. See also idem, *Montanism*, 80–6, 91; Aune, *Prophecy*, 313.

⁵² It is Trevett, *Montanism*, 156, who picks up the fact that the women are singled out for this treatment.

⁵³ On which note Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: land, men and gods in Asia Minor*, ii, Oxford 1993, 12–13, 43–8. Dauntton-Fear, 'Ecstasies', whilst wrongly identifying uncontrolled enthusiastic prophecy exclusively with paganism is right in pointing to the cult of Apollo (rather than Cybele) as the source of any possible pagan influence on Montanus. The idea that the religion of Cybele might have lain behind Montanism is still to be found in popular literature but was shown wanting by Wilhelm Scheepelern, *Der Montanismus und die phrygischen Kulte*, Tübingen 1929.

a degree of syncretism is always possible, given the wide distribution of Montanism it is unlikely that the influence was significant.⁵⁴ But regardless of whether paganism influenced Montanism the anonymous contemporary opponent saw Montanist prophecy as pagan prophecy, and it is at least possible that this apprehension, even though probably false, was a genuine reaction, not motivated solely by a need to find a stick with which to beat the prophecy, but deriving from the suspicion aroused by Montanism's rural setting.

The possibility that the conflict over the new prophecy was a conflict between rural and urban has been noted before; in particular we should note Frend's claim that rural Christianity, characterised by Montanism, differed from urban Christianity in that 'its basis is prophecy, and its hope is eschatological'.⁵⁵ To this we may respond firstly that prophecy was equally an urban phenomenon (we have already noted the widespread existence of prophets in second-century Asia, and shall observe in a moment that those of which we know were all urban) and secondly that the eschatological hope of the Montanists was not discernibly different from that of any other group of Asian Christians in the second century. The conflict was not as simple as a conflict between rural and urban Christianities since, as Trevett correctly states, the prophecy very rapidly became an urban phenomenon.⁵⁶ None the less its rural origins are significant and, as Frend notes, in spite of its movement into towns Montanism remains a Christianity of rural character.⁵⁷

Thus, whereas it would be a mistake simply to see controversy over Montanism as a conflict between rural and urban Christianities the rural character of the early Montanists may none the less have contributed to its condemnation by an urban leadership. However, in order to sustain this it must be possible to find some evidence in the contemporary sources. A starting point may be found in the use of the term 'Phrygian'; this was more than simply a geographical designation, it indicated a rural, and therefore uncivilised, origin.⁵⁸ One should note the condescending way in which the anonymous refers to the villages which were the centre of the Montanist heartland. The differing social backgrounds of the catholic and Montanist leaders meant that suspicion would be natural.

It is, I suggest, the very suspicion roused by the rural origins of the Montanists which led to the charge of false prophecy. Whereas pagan prophecy in Phrygia was essentially a rural and village-based phenomenon,⁵⁹ the prophets whose memory was cherished in the Asian Church

⁵⁴ So Mitchell, *Anatolia*, ii, 40.

⁵⁵ So Frend, 'Town and countryside', 36. Note also Williams, 'Origins', and Kyratidis, *Social structure*, 94-5.

⁵⁶ Trevett, *Montanism*, 49.

⁵⁷ Frend, 'Town and country', 36.

⁵⁸ So Buschmann, 'Martyrium Polycarpi 4', 110-12 and references.

⁵⁹ So Mitchell, *Anatolia*, ii, 12-17.

would all appear to have been urban prophets; Ammia and Quadratus are reckoned as in Philadelphia,⁶⁰ the daughters of Philip were at Hierapolis and Ephesus,⁶¹ Melito at Sardis, Polycarp at Smyrna. In this light prophecy in a rural setting would be viewed with suspicion by an urban leadership. Thus when the behaviour of the prophets is described as being ἀλλοτριότροπος and their speech as ξενοφωνεῖν⁶² we may note that those things which are seen as strange and foreign are seen as such from the perspective of the city to whom the country was strange and foreign.⁶³ In second-century Anatolia the city and the surrounding countryside were, as Mitchell would have it, 'worlds apart';⁶⁴ Stobaeus quotes the stoics as considering that τὴν γὰρ ἀγροικίαν ἀπειρίαν εἶναι τῶν κατὰ πόλιν ἐθῶν καὶ νόμων.⁶⁵

The charge of paganism would then gain some credence because of the mantic behaviour associated with the prophecy; in particular the anonymous source of Eusebius is deeply critical of the mantic behaviour which is associated with the Montanists' prophecy. It is not to be taken for granted that pagan prophets behaved in this way, as earlier studies have assumed,⁶⁶ but with regard to the oracle at Delphi at least it would seem that there was some mantic behaviour. Mantic behaviour certainly does not exhaust the activities of an ancient pagan prophet and its importance has certainly been exaggerated in earlier treatments,⁶⁷ but none the less it would appear to have taken place on occasion at least. Plutarch refers to involuntary emotional, and perhaps physical, movement,⁶⁸ and suggests that the Pythia calms down when she descends the tripod.⁶⁹ In telling the story of the discovery of the Delphic oracle Diodorus Siculus tells of goats at the oracle making strange noises and leaping about, and of involuntary behaviour among those who visited the site.⁷⁰ All of this implies that prophecy might be accompanied by mantic displays. More extreme mantic displays are, however, unusual; although

⁶⁰ *HE* v.17.4.

⁶¹ So Polycrates at *HE* v.24.

⁶² Anonymous at *HE* v.16.7; v.16.9. Although we have eschewed the use of the source of Epiphanius, we may note that it states that even the names of the Montanists are ἀγρίων καὶ βαρβαρικόν (*Panarion* xlviii.12.3).

⁶³ So Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oratio* ii.29, ed. J. Bernardi, Sources Chrétiennes ccxlvii, Paris 1978.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i, 195. On rural-urban relations and social conditions in general see Ramsey MacMullen, *Roman social relations: 50BC to AD284*, New Haven 1974, 28-56, and extensive references at pp. 155-66.

⁶⁵ Stobaeus, *Eclogae* ii.103.24, cited at *SVF* iii. 169-70.

⁶⁶ See the discussion by Aune, *Prophecy*, 33-4, and Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and inspired speech in early Christianity and its Hellenistic environment*, Peabody, Mass. 1997, 103-23 and passim.

⁶⁷ Notably that of H. Bacht, 'Wahres und falsches Prophetentum', *Biblica* xxxii (1951), 237-62, notably at p. 250; Bacht is followed by Dauntton-Fear, 'Ecstasies'.

⁶⁸ *Pyth.* 404E.

⁶⁹ *Amatorius* 795B, ed. R. Flacelière, Paris 1952.

⁷⁰ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* xvi.26.2-4, ed. F. Vogel, Stuttgart 1964.

Plutarch tells one story of the Pythia going, literally, insane⁷¹ and elsewhere of an interesting case of xenolaly,⁷² these stories stand out as unusual, indeed they are told because they differ from the norm. The latter incident was, by the second century, ancient history already.

However, more significant for our study than the question of whether or not the Pythia did deliver in a mantic manner is that of the Christian perception of the prophecy of Apollo. It is quite possible that the anti-Montanists had no first-hand experience of the prophecy of Apollo and were dependent on second-hand reports for their information, being misled in the same way as modern scholars. Typical of this Christian perception is Origen, a hostile witness, who suggests that the Pythia does not have self-control in prophesying:

It is not the part of a divine spirit to drive the prophetess into such a state of ecstasy and madness that she loses control of herself...⁷³

Regardless of whether Origen is correct in this respect we may take him as representing common Christian opinion. In this light a predisposition to see Montanist prophecy as pagan as a result of its rural setting would in turn be reinforced by the manner in which the prophecy is given. If the Montanists were heard to be uttering foreign or incomprehensible words such examples as the spell employed by Branchus, founder of the oracle of Apollo at Didyma, which he employed to purify the Milesians,⁷⁴ might have come to the minds of suspicious but educated catholics, as well as the common use of foreign words in magical incantations.

There is no reason why we should disbelieve the charge of mantic behaviour among the Montanists made by the anonymous; however, the oracles which are preserved are in ordered speech, and not the products of glossolalia at all. There is moreover reference to the content of the prophecies,⁷⁵ although little has survived. The Montanists were not simply glossolalists, but functioned paraenetically as well. None the less this is entirely in keeping with their enthusiastic means of inspiration. We have noted already, that whereas paraenetic and mantic prophecy both occur, they may not be too readily correlated with the means of inspiration. Early Montanist prophecy was clearly of the enthusiastic type but this need not mean that it is purely mantic in its product. It is possible that the Montanist enthusiastic prophecy gave rise both to paraenesis and to mantic displays.

We may compare the Montanist prophets to that described by Celsus, regardless of the question of whether a Montanist is intended.⁷⁶ Here the

⁷¹ *Def. Orac.* 438A-B.

⁷² The tale is told at Plutarch, *Def. Orac.* 412A. It is first recorded by Herodotus 8.135, ed. A. Holder, Vienna 1888.

⁷³ *Contra Celsum* vii.3, ed. P. Koetschau, GCS ii.

⁷⁴ Recorded (and considered famous) by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* v.8.48, ed. O. Stählin, rev. L. Früchtel, GCS lii.

⁷⁵ Anonymous at *HE* v.16.10.

⁷⁶ Fragment 18 in Heine, *Montanist oracles*; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.9.

prophet begins with a self-disclosure in the 'I' form, delivers an oracle in ordered speech, and then proceeds to behave as a mantic. The combination of paraenetic and mantic prophecy exhibited here is certainly consistent with the conflicting evidence concerning the manner of Montanist prophecy.

Each one commonly and customarily says: 'I am God' or 'a son of God' or 'a divine spirit and I have come. For the world is already perishing, and you, gentlemen, are ruined because of your offences. But I want to save you; and you will see me coming again with heavenly power. Blessed is he who has worshipped me now....' Then Celsus says 'after they have brandished these words they subsequently add words that are unintelligible, and frenzied and totally obscure'.

This mantic display which concludes the oracle is to be seen as legitimation of the oracle which has been pronounced.⁷⁷ It is not impossible that Montanist prophets might likewise combine ordered and disordered speech, like the prophet of Celsus giving an oracle before giving way to uncontrolled mantic behaviour. Certainly the oracles of self-revelation in the 'I' form which Celsus' prophet employs are similar to those employed by the Montanists (and others) and we may thereby deduce that these prefaced the oracle proper; if this is the case then there is a distinction between the use of the 'I' form in this setting and in John and Melito. In the latter two instances the 'I am' sayings are embedded in the prophetic work, whereas the prophet described by Celsus prefaces his prophecy with this form. On this basis we may see that mantic behaviour did not precede the paraenetic prophecy, but came after. If, like that of the prophet described by Celsus, the prophecy of the Montanists was both mantic and ordered then the mantic behaviour might be seen as proof of the divine origin of their prophecy, alongside the opening of the prophecy in the 'I' form.

But if this is the case we must ask why the Montanists felt the need to legitimate their prophecy in this way. Hippolytus states that a prophetic message is self-legitimizing by virtue of the fact that the words expressed are self-evidently those of Christ;⁷⁸ he may here be representing common Asian wisdom concerning the discernment of prophetic messages. Similarly Justin suggests that the Old Testament prophets did not use proofs since their prophecies, deriving from God, were self-evidently true.⁷⁹

Herein may lie a clue to the condemnation of Montanism, for by seeking legitimation of the oracle beyond its contents the prophecy did not accord with the tradition. The Montanists sought to guarantee their

⁷⁷ Aune, *Prophecy*, 72, 359.

⁷⁸ Hippolytus, *In Psalmos* 19, ed. Pierre Nautin in *Le dossier d'Hippolyte et de Mélicon dans les florilèges dogmatiques et chez les historiens modernes*, Paris 1953, 166–83.

⁷⁹ *Dialogus* 7.

prophecy whereas this had not been done before, and moreover they sought to do so in a manner which was, according to the anonymous at any rate, new. For although the limited evidence means that we cannot be dogmatic, there is little evidence of mantic delivery in Asian Christianity outside the Montanist tradition. The nearest we have is the description of the Johannine Christ at the Last Supper who, in the course of the delivery of the farewell discourses, in the midst of bearing witness is disturbed (ἐταράχθη) in the spirit.⁸⁰ Here we may see that the disturbance accompanies delivery without interrupting its flow. Although the delivery of prophecy in a possession trance was a recognised phenomenon within Asian Christianity⁸¹ the accompaniment of a mantic display as authenticating the prophecy was alien.

It thus seems worth examining this Asian prophetic tradition further, to see if there are any other discernible differences between this and the Montanist oracles. That there are similarities in the mode of inspiration, and some similarity in the presentation is indisputable but there is at least one significant difference, best exemplified with reference to Melito, but one which may perhaps be extended to cover other Asian enthusiastic prophets.

We have argued above that Melito is to be considered an enthusiastic prophet. But it is intriguing that the Spirit should speak through him in carefully constructed sentences and periods, and in keeping with all the proper rhetorical norms of his day. Even his prophecy in the 'I' form observes all the rules of Hellenistic rhetoric. Melito is but an extreme example of Lane Fox's dictum that 'a seer is as productive as his or her previous experience'⁸² except that in his case it is not the vision that is the product of a sophistic education but the voice of the Spirit. The phenomenon of less than divine expression of the voice of God was known and discussed in the ancient world and similar conclusions were reached to those of Lane Fox. Whatever the source of inspiration the expression of the oracle was to be attributed to the abilities of the seer.⁸³ The product of a prophet reflects that prophet's training and background, as the spirit makes use of the abilities of the prophet.⁸⁴

However, we are not to suppose that Melito's prophecy is a literary fiction. Given the extent to which improvisation was a sought-after skill among the sophists of the period⁸⁵ we need not jump to the assumption

⁸⁰ John xiii. 21.

⁸¹ Cf. Terence Callan, 'Prophecy and ecstasy in Greco-Roman religion and in I Corinthians', *NovT* xxvii (1985), 125–40 at pp. 138–9, who believes that it is the trance which is alien to Christian prophecy. His sole evidence is Pauline, and he reads the instructions of I Corinthians xiv as though descriptive, and not prescriptive.

⁸² So Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Harmondsworth 1986, 401, on the visions of the martyrs of Carthage. ⁸³ Plutarch, *Pyth.* 397C. ⁸⁴ So *ibid.* 406B.

⁸⁵ Note, for example, Suetonius, *Augustus* 84, ed. E. S. Shuckburgh, Cambridge 1986; G. Kennedy, *The art of persuasion in ancient Greece*, Princeton 1963, 5.

that Melito has actually written his prophecy, nor may we assume that he has revised it for publication. It is possible that the prophecies which are found in the Fourth Gospel have been revised for publication, but they must remain close in all essentials to their original form in order to remain effective presentations of an Ephesian prophet at work. Even when prophets are occupied they speak in media of communication with which they are familiar. The prophecy of the Johannine Jesus is bound up to the synagogal use of the Hebrew Scriptures,⁸⁶ that of Melito to the rhetorical practice of the second sophistic.

Even though few of the oracles of the Montanists are preserved we may deduce that they reflect the social status of the prophets, just as do the other oracles of other enthusiasts and visionaries. In particular we may note that the Montanist oracles are short and pithy; eight probably authentic oracles survive which are not oracles of self-legitimation prefacing the speech, and none of these is longer than a few lines. Typical of these is Maximilla's prophecy: After me there will no longer be a prophet, but the end.⁸⁷ Whereas it is possible that these oracles have been excerpted from longer discourses, the fact that they may be satisfactorily interpreted as they stand is an indication that the complete oracle has been preserved. Given the rural origins of these prophets the likelihood of their having received any form of higher education is small, indeed the anonymous refers to their ἀμαθία⁸⁸ and Montanus bears a native Phrygian name.⁸⁹ Their prophecy thus reflected their social and educational status. The lack of education of rural people in the ancient world was almost proverbial,⁹⁰ and the early Montanists would appear to have been no exceptions to this rule.

We may compare these to the length and the complexity of the speeches of the Johannine Jesus, the Jesus of the *Epistula apostolorum*, and in particular the declaration of the contemporary, but urban, and rhetorically educated, Melito. We have referred to the suspicion which might derive from the rural origin of Montanist prophecy. On the basis of these rural origins we may note that it is likely that these rural prophets were members of a relatively marginalised group within second-century Asia; the women would be further marginalised because of their sex, but the primary marginalisation was one which all shared. Women prophets were not unknown in the Church, but rural prophets were pagan. And so

⁸⁶ For John's use of the Hebrew Scriptures in his discourses see P. Borgen, *Bread from heaven: an exegetical study of the concept of manna in the Gospel of John and the writings of Philo*, Leiden 1965.

⁸⁷ This is fragment 6 according to the numbering of Heine, *Montanist oracles*. The others are 4, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

⁸⁸ *HE* v.17.2.

⁸⁹ Trevett, *Montanism*, 77; cf. also n. 61 above.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Philo, *Quaest. et. Solut. in Genesin* iv. 76, cited at *SVF* iii. 170, according to whom the ignorant is to be considered *rudis atque rusticus*.

we may suggest that the mantic behaviour of the Montanists was intended to compensate for their social background and to attract an audience. As a marginalised group they would not normally be listened to, and so a mantic legitimisation of the prophecy might have been sought.

However, quite apart from the question of mantic legitimisation, a lack of facility in speech may have made the oracles appear more 'pagan' than they really were. Plutarch informs us of the short and prosaic oracles of the Pythia at Delphi;⁹¹ the same would appear to have been true of the oracles of the Montanists. The lower social status of the prophets would, moreover, reflect the practice of the Delphic oracle at least, where Plutarch tells us the Pythia comes from the class of poor farmers, and lacked formal education;⁹² in this way he accounts for the poverty of expression which the oracle possesses. If the Montanist prophets shared this social background and shared this lack of facility, and in this respect were in contrast to the urban, educated and propertied men who were the leaders of the catholics then they may have appeared pagan simply because of their social background and through the resulting simplicity of their rhetoric. This may in turn have obliged the prophets to seek alternative means of legitimisation, namely displays of mantic behaviour. Short oracles were possible for an earlier generation of Christians such as Ignatius,⁹³ but by the time of the Montanist crisis the tradition has developed, and leaves the Christian prophets of Phrygia with their short and unadorned oracles looking like pagans to the eyes of that same leadership which Ignatius represented.

The problems with the Montanist prophecy which were perceived by the contemporary witnesses thus lay in the fact that the mode of expression was comparatively simple as a result of the low educational status of the prophets, and that this lack of facility in turn meant that the prophets were concerned to give further legitimisation to their prophecy, which they did through the demonstration of mantic behaviour. Rather than legitimating the messages, however, the mantic displays combined with the 'unliterary' oracles to give an impression that the prophecy was not only contrary to the tradition but was false, pagan, prophecy.

Those inclined to see the Montanist prophets in the light of the prophets of Apollo, or those who were suspicious because of the Montanists' rural origin, would in turn note certain aspects of Montanist organisation which would lend support to their view. Priscilla, an older woman, like the Pythia who was also an older woman, is called a virgin.⁹⁴ It is

⁹¹ *Pyth.* 409C.

⁹² *Ibid.* 405C.

⁹³ On Ignatius as a prophet see in particular *Philad.* 7.1–2, ed. P.-Th. Camelot, *Sources Chrétiennes* x, Paris 1958. Ignatius' oracle 'Give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and to the deacons' is notably short.

⁹⁴ On the Pythia see Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* xvi.26.6, confirmed in part by Origen, *Contra Celsum* vii.5; on Priscilla see Apollonius at *HE* v.18.3.

significant that this is an aspect of Montanist organisation to which Apollonius objects. Indeed, if an opponent were sufficiently determined he might even see Montanist fasting practice as pagan, for all that it is widely practised within Christianity.⁹⁵ Even the Montanist practice of *xerophagia*, dry fasting, might be labelled pagan.⁹⁶ Once the suspicion that Montanist prophecy is false prophecy has been raised it is not difficult to find evidence to support it. Thus when Montanus prophesied that man is like a lyre and the spirit like a plectrum,⁹⁷ in a climate of suspicion the mind of the opponents would turn to the pagan use of the image⁹⁸ rather than the Christian.⁹⁹

The parallels may be fortuitous, but they would be noticed none the less. The suggestion made here is that suspicion was primarily aroused by the social setting of the prophecy, and that once this suspicion had been aroused it became compelling.

III

This suggestion concerning the social status of the new prophets leads us to explore whether in this regard they might likewise not belong in the tradition. In particular we may note the charge of Apollonius that the Montanists received gifts from the faithful and that there was a salaried corps of officials within Montanism.¹⁰⁰ Apollonius has clearly dressed up this charge. In part it may derive from the fundamental suspicion felt in the Graeco-Roman world about rural morality. The lack of control shown by the mantic prophet might, moreover, be compared to the lack of moral self-control of which the stoics accused country people.¹⁰¹ However, this accounts only for the dressing which the charge has gained; no modern commentator doubts that the Montanists received offerings and that their officials received payment. Amidst all the charges laid by Apollonius it is the charge of greed which is most prominent.

Apollonius' abhorrence of the practice of payment is genuinely felt. We may suggest that this abhorrence results from the fact that it is a significant departure from the practice and the tradition of the Asian Church since Christian leadership in second-century Asia was firmly based on household leadership. For this reason those leaders of whom we

⁹⁵ On the relationship of fasting and prophecy within paganism see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 173.

⁹⁶ On the basis of Plutarch, *Def. Orac.* 432–3A, which discusses the properties of dry heat on prophecy, Plutarch suggests that it might be beneficial.

⁹⁷ Fragment 3 in Heine, *Montanist oracles*.

⁹⁸ For example at Plutarch, *Def. Orac.* 436F.

⁹⁹ The same image is employed by Athenagoras, *Legatio* 9.1, cited above at n. 30.

¹⁰⁰ Apollonius at *HE* v.18.2.

¹⁰¹ Stobaeus, *Eclogae*. ii.103.24: φασὶ δὲ καὶ ἄγροικον εἶναι πάντα φαῦλον. See also Philo, *Quaest et Solut. in Genesin* iv.165, both cited at *SVF* iii.169–70.

know have a relatively high social status. Diotrephes is a householder, and uses his position as such to exclude the envoys of the elder.¹⁰² Polycarp is a householder of relative wealth.¹⁰³ Melito clearly received a sophistic education and so, whatever his origins, is by the time that he becomes bishop of Sardis an individual of some status.¹⁰⁴ Avercius had the liberty to travel and the funds to erect his own monument, and describes himself as a πολίτης of his noble city.¹⁰⁵ If a Eusebian date is accepted for the martyrdom of Papyrus, then it may be noted that he is likewise a πολίτης, of Thyatira; his Christian family is moreover not rural, but in every ἐπαρχία καὶ πόλει.¹⁰⁶ In drawing its leadership from the class of householders Christianity followed the same pattern that was common throughout Asia for magistracies and priesthoods, since the householder would have the means and the status to offer patronage for the cult. Episcopal office, as it developed through the century in Asia, was thus based on the position of the householder.¹⁰⁷ By offering salaries to his officials Montanus undercut this manner of organisation; unlike his or her catholic counterpart the Montanist ecclesiastical leader need not have been a person of property since she or he could be supported by the Church. The complaint of Apollonius is not then motivated by a potential loss to catholic coffers,¹⁰⁸ but is far more fundamental; it is occasioned by a reversal of the normal social relationships deriving from the household organisation of the Asian Church.

This is not, however, a straightforward conflict between prophetic ministry and episcopal ministry. The bishops themselves claimed to be prophetic, as did the early champion of the episcopate, Ignatius.¹⁰⁹ Polycarp was recognised as a prophetic teacher as well as being a household bishop.¹¹⁰ Thus we may suggest that being a householder was a necessary but not sufficient qualification for the episcopate. A charism was also necessary. The qualification for Montanist ministry was likewise charismatic, but no social status or economic power was needed.

¹⁰² Harry O. Maier, *The social setting of the ministry as reflected in the writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius*, Waterloo, Ont. 1991, 149–50. See also the discussion in Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social aspects of early Christianity*, 2nd edn, Philadelphia 1983, 103–10.

¹⁰³ Maier, *Social setting*, 156.

¹⁰⁴ Note the discussion of Melito's social status in F. W. Norris, 'Melito's motivation', *Anglican Theological Review* lxxviii (1986), 16–24 at pp. 18–19.

¹⁰⁵ See the presentation of the evidence and the restored inscription at J. B. Lightfoot, *The apostolic fathers*, ii, 1, London 1889, repr. Peabody, Mass. 1989, 493–501; cf. the tomb of the Montanist bishop Artemidorus of the same period at W. Tabbernee, *Montanist inscriptions and testimonia*, Macon 1997, 62, which is paid for out of church funds.

¹⁰⁶ Martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice 25–32, in *The acts of the Christian martyrs*, ed. H. Musurillo, Oxford 1972.

¹⁰⁷ A further discussion of this phenomenon may be found at Maier, *Social setting*, 145–56. ¹⁰⁸ As Trevett, *Montanism*, 48–9, suggests. ¹⁰⁹ Ignatius, *Philad.* 7.

¹¹⁰ διδάσκαλος ἀποστολικὸς καὶ προφητικὸς γενόμενος ἐπίσκοπος: *Martyrium Polycarpi* 16. 2, in *Acts of the Christian martyrs*.

Apollonius accuses the Montanists of greed, but the payment of a salary may indicate not greed but need, since those in positions of leadership within the Montanist movement might not have been financially equipped for their ministry unless they were paid; it may also indicate that a Church based on a household was not a possible means of organisation in the Phrygian countryside due to the increasing pre-dominance of large estates and urban control of the less remote villages.¹¹¹ Thus, if the missionaries derive from the same social background as the founders then their social and economic status would require that they should be salaried.

Because the traditional organisation of the Asian Church was based on property a person with high economic and social status could become marginalised as a result of his confession of Christianity, as did Ignatius,¹¹² and a person of wealth might use his position to offer charity. But when the minister is salaried, and is not an individual who has private means, then the position is reversed. A marginal individual may achieve status in this way within the Christian group, and an individual without means may obtain at least relative wealth.

That Montanus and the women received gifts and that his officials received stipends is thus a second possible cause of the condemnation of the movement. The condemnation of Montanism was not then a matter of institutionalisation obliterating prophecy,¹¹³ or even subsuming it into the episcopate,¹¹⁴ since the Asian Church as an institution had shown itself able to contain prophecy, and had been subsuming it into the episcopate long before the Montanist crisis. This however meant that prophets were settled in their community and, unlike those described by the Didache, were not financially supported by the congregations but supportive of the congregations. The Montanist movement reversed this mode of social organisation so that the prophets were supported by the congregations.

IV

The primitive sources make two fundamental objections to Montanism: that the manner in which the prophecy is delivered is of a nature to cause suspicion, and that the prophetic movement is institutionalised in a way which is in direct conflict with the social organisation of the Asian Church. Which of these was the primary cause of the condemnation is hard to say, but both derive from the rural context in which the new prophecy originated.

¹¹¹ On which see the evidence cited by Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i. 149–59.

¹¹² On Ignatius as a marginal individual see Maier, *Social setting*, 167–8.

¹¹³ So Burghardt, 'Primitive Montanism', 347; Hill, *New Testament prophecy*, 189–91; Wright, 'Why were the Montanists condemned?'

¹¹⁴ So Ash, 'Decline'.

Even these earliest anti-Montanist writings available to us derive from a relatively late stage in the crisis, a time when the Montanists had separated themselves, or been separated,¹¹⁵ and so do not address directly the original division point between the Montanists and the catholics. However, two possible reasons suggest themselves. The separation may have been over the place of charismata in the leadership of the Church or over the extension of city-based episcopal control over rural Christians, in imitation of the manner in which the Asian cities increasingly exercised control over the rural populace in the second century.¹¹⁶

The possibility that the dispute centred around the place of charism in the leadership of the Church would cohere with the words of Epiphanius that the dispute originally concerned *χαρίσματα*,¹¹⁷ and would fit in with the evidence adduced by Trevett of disputes concerning leadership in the Philadelphian Church, which she sees as an impending warning of what was to come in the Montanist crisis.¹¹⁸ However, we do not know the social status of the Philadelphian opponents, and it is possible that they were householders other than the bishop who were seeking leadership for their households by claiming charismata. The Church Ignatius visited was, moreover, an urban community. In the light of the later second-century evidence we may see that Montanism was originally rural, and that it is unlikely that its founders were large householders in dispute with others in a similar position. Moreover we may see that if charisma is in dispute at the beginning of the crisis then it is more probably over the manner in which the prophetic charisma is presented than over its occurrence, since it is the manner in which the Montanists prophesy which gives rise to objections.

The possibility that the movement originated as a protest against the encroachment of urban leadership, would explain the continuing presence in later Montanism of bishops in even the smallest villages,¹¹⁹ would explain why it is so late in the history of the Asian episcopate that the dispute occurs,¹²⁰ and would accord with the picture presented most clearly by Trevett of a movement which grew over a period of time rather than being the invention of an individual.¹²¹ It would, moreover, cohere with the significance of Montanism's rural origins which has been revealed by our examination of the late second-century objectors. If its resistance to urban leadership is the primary cause of the recognition of

¹¹⁵ Trevett, *Montanism*, 147, notes the difficulty of saying which of these took place.

¹¹⁶ As described by Mitchell, *Anatolia*, i. 165–95.

¹¹⁷ *Panarion* xlviii.12.1, apparently quoting Montanists.

¹¹⁸ Trevett, 'Seeking the seeds' and 'Prophecy and anti-episcopal activity: a third error combatted by Ignatius?', this JOURNAL xxxiv (1983), 1–18.

¹¹⁹ A point noted by F. E. Vokes, 'Montanism and the ministry', in F. L. Cross (ed.), *StPatr.* ix (1966), 306–15 at pp. 309–10.

¹²⁰ An issue raised by Buschmann, 'Martyrium Polycarpi 4', 120.

¹²¹ Trevett, *Montanism*, 27–42.

Montanist prophecy as distinct from that practised in the Church then that rural origin would in turn lead to the dispute over the manner of the presentation of the prophetic gift as the rural prophets are identified increasingly with pagan prophets, and finally lead to institutional condemnation when this apparently pagan movement upset the social organisation of the Church by organising itself in a manner contradictory to that of the Church. In this case prophecy is not at the root of the problem¹²² but a means by which rural discontent might manifest itself.

Thus the later evidence presented by Apollonius and by the anonymous, whilst not directly contemporary with Montanism's original condemnation, none the less sheds significant light on the origins of the conflict. Because the evidence is from a second generation of objectors we cannot say that the division point was over Montanist innovation, whether prophetic or organisational,¹²³ since the innovations of which we know were innovations of the period after the division. But by the end of the second century the Montanists had indeed innovated; they had institutionalised prophecy, and institutionalised the ministry. The response of the Church ended in the demise of prophecy, but this was not the result of institutionalisation but an institutional response to a way of organisation and a manner of prophetic delivery foreign to the tradition and succession of the Asian Church.

¹²² So *ibid.* 149.

¹²³ So *ibid.* 146–9.