

# Montanism: A Charismatic Movement in the Early Church? Good News to Women?

(An abstract)

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Montanism, the “New Prophecy” that arose in mid-second century, has been compared to the Charismatic Movement in recent times. Moreover, prophetesses played an important role in Montanism and one of them claimed that Christ appeared to her in the form of a woman. For such reasons, some modern feminists assert that, unlike the increasingly hierarchical and patriarchal orthodox church, Montanism elevated the status of women and was repudiated by the mainstream church for such views and practices.

This article aims to evaluate the above two assertions. After a brief account of the rise and fall of the Montanist Movement, and a summary of scholars’ divergent views, it is noted that even the apostolic church evidenced some organization with office-bearers governing local congregations. Moreover, Montanist churches likewise displayed a certain hierarchy. It is, therefore, untrue that Montanism arose as a protest against the hierarchicalism of the mainstream church.

Nor is it the case that the early church rejected prophetesses in principle. The decisive factor was rather whether they prophesied openly in church assemblies,

contrary to apostolic teaching. Furthermore, judging from the practice in Tertullian's Montanist circles, prophetesses (and presumably other women too) were subject to certain limitations owing to their sex.

Moreover, regarding the prophetic Spirit, evidence from early church fathers shows that spiritual gifts (including prophecy) did not cease in the mainstream church in the second century. Montanism was repudiated because of the violent, uncontrollable, ecstatic behavior of their prophets, their exaltation of the New Prophecy at the expense of Christ and the apostles, their unprovable (and sometimes even heretic) dogmatic claims and various unfulfilled prophecies, as well as their arrogant and even deviant conduct. The early church leaders apparently genuinely believed that the Montanist movement was demonic in origin and hence warranted opposition and suppression.

In view of the controversies still surrounding the contemporary Charismatic Movement, it is to be hoped that we can learn from lessons in the past and not be carried away simply by supernatural manifestations. A test of the spirit is clearly still in order today.