Reformation & Revival

A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 4, Number 3 • Summer 1995

The Sparrow in the Hurricane

A Review of Jack Deere's
Surprised By the Power of the Spirit
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With the release of Jack Deere's book, *Surprised By the Power of the Spirit,* the church can look at her debate over the Spirit's gifts from a new angle. Now the confessions of a former cessationist—and a former faculty member at Dallas Theological Seminary to boot—are in print. No mere anthology of "confessions," this book is a "real barn burner" assault on "the traditional Protestant position that the miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit has ceased."[1] While it is neither shrill nor vitriolic, the book truly "allows no neutrality" and "calls for a response, one way or the other, not a reaction."[2] If this is so, what should so-called "traditional Protestant" cessationists make of Deere's work? In addition, what can they learn from Deere, and what can they hope that Deere would learn from them? Without presuming to answer these questions for all cessationists, I propose to offer what I hope is no mere reaction to Deere's thesis, but a response that highlights issues that must be addressed by Deere and his fellow noncessationists if cessationists and noncessationists are ever going to get on a path to rapprochement.[3]

This review is divided into two sections, the first dealing with general observations, the second devoted to hermeneutical and redemptive-historical issues. While along the way I shall interact with certain systematic-theological or church-historical matters, I shall focus on the assumptions that govern Deere's approach to the Bible in whole and in part. Essays like G. L. W. Johnson's earlier review in this journal provide fuller commentary on the systematic-theological and church-historical dimensions of Deere's work.

General Observations

Definition of Key Terms. Deere defines the *cessationist* in the endnotes of his book as "someone who believes that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased with the death of the last apostle or shortly thereafter" (p. 267, n. 1). That may be reasonable to a point, but Deere would have done better to specify which gifts are in view. In the body of the book, cessationists are said to espouse the cessation of all miracles, even to the exclusion of supernatural healings, and, quite astoundingly, the passing away of "the gifts of the Spirit" (see Chapter 8 as a whole; pp. 99, 135, 154). Here, we have to say, is a certain slippage and sloppiness in the definition of key terms. As for the cessationism Deere discusses in the body of his book, I cannot say who taught him these things or where he read them because he does not always cite sources in this connection. (In the appendices John MacArthur is primarily in view, and Deere cites him accordingly.) Nevertheless, I can say that I never heard such teachings when I was a student of the cessationists at Dallas Seminary, 1976-80, when Deere was still teaching there. Nor did I ever hear such teachings from the cessationists at Westminster Seminary, whom I have known since I arrived there as a student in 1981. Nor are such teachings part of the *sine qua non* among the cessationists I have read. Evidently Deere would have his readers believe that, for all practical purposes, cessationists teach the non-occurrence of all miraculous phenomena, be they gifts or not, in the post-biblical period. No cessationist I know (or know of) affirms this doctrine, so I rather think Deere has engaged in serious misrepresentation in discussing cessationism.[4] At the very least, Deere seems to be confusing cessationist denials of certain noncessationist claims about miracles with a denial of their continuing occurrence in general.

The Tone of the Book. First, as for the relevance of Bible study in his pilgrimage from cessationism to noncessationism, Deere rarely misses an opportunity to remind his readers of the open-mindedness, patience, and/or intensity with which he has studied the Bible's statements on the Spirit's work (see, e.g., pp. 22-23, 47, 75; cf. pp. 99, 101). If one should wonder why Deere does not let his work speak for itself in this regard, it is evidently rooted in his commendable determination to answer the common cessationist argument that noncessationists build their theology on their experience (cf. p. 56). I am prepared to grant to Deere that no experience of the miraculous prompted him to change his views (p. 23). He will have to understand, however, that not everyone is going to concede that his conclusions—at least as they are represented in this book—are the result of open-minded, patient, and intense study of the Bible. For that matter, they will want to know how he knows that he was open-minded, patient, and intense in his study of Scripture. Surely it is not as simple as Deere clearly implies throughout his book, viz., that since cessationism does not derive from a careful study of Scripture, the fact that he reached noncessationist conclusions makes him ipso facto a careful, open-minded, patient, and intense student of Scripture. In any event, Deere's statements about his own interpretive virtues will suggest to many a certain self-satisfaction from which he would otherwise have his readers believe he was freed when he gave up cessationism (see Chapters 1-3).

Second, and still regarding the book's tone, Deere makes a good point about how "our environment, our theological traditions, and our teachers have much more to do with what we believe than we realize" (p. 47; see Chapter 4 as a whole also). Certainly, "global" factors like these figure in our reflections on the Bible, and we should develop a greater awareness of their influence on us. Nevertheless, in the context of Deere's overall purpose, his discussion of this point seems clearly designed to suggest that he has been delivered from these factors now that he is in his new, noncessationist environment with a new tradition and new teachers. Meanwhile, the cessationists he left behind toil on, unable to break out of the

mold into which they have been squeezed unawares by the influences of their community. Deere, however, is himself clearly unaware of the triumphalism and elitism into which noncessationism has delivered him.[5]

Cessationism and the New Christian. Finally, under this heading consider that at least three times in his book (pp. 54, 99, 114) Deere makes this observation: If you were to lock a brand-new Christian in a room with a Bible and tell him to study what Scripture has to say about healing, miracles, and the gifts of the Spirit, he would never come out of the room a cessationist. By this illustration I gather that Deere wishes only to make the simple but initially arresting point that his view has a certain prima facie credibility about it that the cessationist view does not have. Be that as it may, the more basic problem with the illustration is the whole idea that the church should ever defer to the judgment of a new convert on anything. Let us put the issue this way: How much of his own theology is Deere willing to submit to the judgment of the new convert? How about his endorsement of Zane Hodge's teaching that apostates will be saved? Or his pretribulationism? I do not make this observation because the new convert might end up holding any of Deere's views. I make it because Deere's reliance on this generalization is out of sync with a proposition basic to the New Testament doctrine of Christian growth and maturity, namely, that new converts lack discernment in spiritual things (1 Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14; cf. Eph. 4:14). New converts, *by definition*, lack the discernment needed to reliably establish and defend any Christian doctrine or practice, save the ABCs of Gospel content. This is why the apostles forbid us to ordain novices as elders in our churches. Of course, Deere knows all this, but he fails to recognize its impact on his generalization about new converts and cessationism. With all due respect to new converts, Deere's observation about them stereotypes their experience in a way that is entirely too facile to be taken seriously. Certainly, whatever prima facie credibility Deere may attach to noncessationism is, in the end, irrelevant insofar as it provides only a throwaway argument that depends on previously established and corroborated argumentation.

Hermeneutical and Redemptive-Historical Concerns

Cessationists and Inexperience with the Miraculous. Deere is fond of making the point that *all*—(not most, many, some, or a few, but *all*)— cessationists hold their theology of the Spirit's miraculous gifts not because of a careful study of Scripture, but because they have not seen miraculous phenomena in their experience (e.g., pp. 56-57, 199). The whole cessationist endeavor, then, is, according to Deere, an attempt to construct a biblical justification for this lack of experience (pp. 99-102). Deere leaves little doubt that by this argument he wants to criticize not merely the cessationist's teaching, but also his motivation. This becomes clear in his characterization of the Reformers. Notice his description of the dilemma they faced over against Rome's appeal to miracles: "The Reformers were confronted with a choice: Was their lack of experience of the miraculous due to a defect in their experience or to a divinely planned obsolescence of miracles?" (p. 100). Whether Deere is right about the Reformers' choice or not, he clearly would have his readers see them and the choice they faced as more or less paradigmatic of cessationists and the choice they face.

To me this way of framing the discussion of the Spirit's miraculous works is singularly unimpressive because it begs the question in the most fundamental way possible. The issue in this discussion is not "have you experienced the Spirit's miraculous work?" but "what have you experienced—a work of the Holy Spirit or a work of some other agency (human or demonic)?" In other words, Deere fails to give due respect to the reality of multiple causation in miraculous phenomena. He makes only passing reference to the plurality of possible

sources of these experiences in the Bible (p. 106). The fact is, many passages (e.g., Deut. 13:1-5; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; 2 Cor. 11:13-14; Matt. 7:22; 24:24) instruct us that miraculous phenomena may have their source not only in the Holy Spirit, but in unholy spirits (i.e., demons). It is arguable too—and I understand noncessationists as well as cessationists have made this point—that the human spirit (i.e., a person's psycho-spiritual makeup) is involved in at least some of the purported present-day counterparts to the biblical experiences. This issue of multiple sources of miraculous phenomena is perhaps as fundamental as any other that separates cessationists and noncessationists, and Deere never even acknowledges it as such. So much for careful, open-minded, patient, intense Bible study. Now, having said this, let me hasten to add that the overall positive effect of Deere's presentation should be to remind cessationists not to despise miraculous phenomena merely because some or even many prove false. This benefit notwithstanding, it remains for Deere to reflect seriously on the biblical fact that so-called "miraculous phenomena" may sometimes have their source in agencies other than the Holy Spirit, indeed in Christian carnality or in servants of Satan who disguise themselves as apostles and prophets of Christ (2 Cor. 11:13-14; Matt. 7:15-23; 24:11, 24). In fact, this biblical reality throws an entirely different light on the choice the Reformers faced in their response to Rome's purported "miracles."

Cessationism and Specific Texts. Deere makes frequent reference to the cessationist's need to provide "clear and specific statements of Scripture" to prove his position (e.g., pp. 58, 73, 100-101, 138, 266). The closest Deere himself ever gets to doing this, however, is when he discusses 1 Corinthians 13:10 (pp. 141-43) and asserts that Paul "plainly states" that the gifts will last until Christ returns.[6] Here, though, Deere shows no awareness of the extent to which his conclusions are dependent, *not* on Paul's "clear and specific" assertions, but on *his own inferences from* the assertions Paul actually

makes. The simple and painful fact is that while the apostle's words state the duration of something in 1 Corinthians 13:10, *they do not explicitly or specifically* state what that something is or what its duration is. Whether we like to admit it or not, Paul's terms are not without ambiguity—else Deere and the rest of us would not have to do the work of interpretation. This is not to say that Deere and his fellow noncessationists are wrong (though I believe they are).[7] Rather, my point is that Paul's words are not as clear and specific as Deere's claims about them would suggest. They do not provide Deere or the rest of us with a clear and specific—that is, an unambiguous—statement to prove any position on the duration of the gifts.

In connection with this matter of "clear and specific statements of Scripture," it must be said also that Deere's discussions of key texts veering on the duration of the gifts (individually or collectively)—e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 2:20; Hebrews 2:3-4—have a decidedly perfunctory and well-worn quality about them. I am told that Deere, like Wayne Grudem, believes Richard Gaffin's book, *Perspectives on Pentecost*,[8] contains the exegetical and theological argumentation he has to answer, but he interacts almost not at all in this book with the substance of Gaffin's, despite its direct bearing on many of his propositions. Deere could protest that such an evaluation appreciates neither the interests of his non-specialist audience nor the imminent release of a second, related book. But this would be an inadequate response. Where Deere believes he's "got the goods," he is more than willing to discuss at great length the details of his exegetical and theological argumentation (his discussions of miracles in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles are a case in point). But if we ask him for the necessary details on the texts that ostensibly create the most obvious or serious problems for him (his discussion of 2 Corinthians 12:12 notwithstanding), he asks us to wait for his next book or else buries his brief discussion of those texts in appendices and footnotes.[9] What

this suggests to me is that Deere was really no more ready to enter into the public discussion of the key texts that raise problems for him in this 1993 book than he was when he presented the heart of the book's exegetical and theological material at the 1990 Evangelical Theological Society national meeting. I asked him then to provide the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:10; Ephesians 2:20; and Hebrews 2:3-4 that was lacking in his considerations, and he acknowledged he had not studied those texts. Three years later we have little more than footnotes to go on. In short, Deere appears still "not ready for prime time."

All this raises the question of the advisability of Deere's seeking to publish a book that does not address the issues his opponents see as central to his whole case. What Deere has given us instead is a book whose most memorable trait may be its temerity, the most egregious manifestation of which is his choice to talk about the continuance of *all* the gifts—including apostleship—even as he begs off the needed serious discussion of Ephesians 2:20, perhaps the one text that could force modifications in his entire thesis. In my opinion, Deere owes the church much more than he has given her in this volume. In place of what the church and her teachers have a legitimate right to expect, however, Deere substitutes his oft-repeated insistence that Scripture nowhere "clearly and specifically" states that the Spirit's gifts are temporary, all the while ignoring that Scripture nowhere unequivocally states that they are permanent either. Regrettably, then, I do not see how we can characterize this product of Deere's self-professed "careful, open-minded, patient, and intense" study as anything other than theologically and therefore pastorally irresponsible.

Noncessationism and Redemptive History. Deere's theological irresponsibility manifests itself further: It is indeed ironic that Deere, an interpreter trained in the dispensational hermeneutic with its interest in the progress of revelation,

never acknowledges or addresses the redemptive-historical considerations that others, like D. A. Carson and Richard Gaffin, have raised.[10] When he discusses miraculous phenomena in the Bible (as in Chapter 5 and Appendix C), Deere shows no awareness of or interest in the fact that most of these phenomena have a direct and integral relationship to epochal developments in the history of special revelation. He writes as if there were no epochs in redemptive history, and as if there was no increased frequency of miraculous phenomena or ministries thereof related to those epochs. Clearly, Deere has yet to wrestle with this important fact: The Bible is fundamentally the record of redemptive-historical developments, and therefore its accounts of miraculous events are inevitably going to be largely associated with special revelatory initiatives. Stated differently, the Bible exhibits a discernible disinterest in miracles that are not linked with God's revelatory words and redemptive deeds.[11] Be that as it may, Deere's neglect of the integral connection between miraculous phenomena and the progress of special revelation is an oversight of fundamental and far-reaching theological significance.

In this same vein, Deere characteristically writes of how "signs, wonders, and miracles" are "connected with revival and the proclamation of the gospel" (p. 66). But, as noble as this observation sounds, it is actually, from a biblical standpoint, seriously deficient theologically because it fails to respect the biblical linkage between those miraculous ministries and the unique place of Jesus and the apostles in the history of revelation. It is in this light that we can say that Deere ironically *under*values the miraculous deeds in the New Testament. How so? Well, because he insists that in the New Testament miraculous deeds are connected with Gospel proclamation broadly defined. To say this, however, is to place the Gospel proclamation of Jesus and the apostles on a par with the Gospel proclamation of the present-day church. This parity is crucial to Deere's whole theological agenda, but it is

absolutely false.[12] Jesus and the apostles proclaimed the Gospel as infallible, "Spirit-moved" (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21) sources of special revelation. The church proclaims the Gospel as a fallible, if "Spirit-led" (cf. Rom. 8:14-16) and "Spirit-taught" (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16), interpreter of inscripturated special revelation. Throughout the New Testament—in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles—Jesus and the apostles are, respectively, the foundational cornerstone and foundational rocks on which the church is built.[13] It is, therefore, with Jesus and the apostles in these unique roles—that is, in distinction from the church at large—that ministries of miraculous deeds are invariably connected in the New Testament period.

Now, if the apostles were sources of special revelation and so functioned like Jesus as foundation stones for the church (Matt. 16:17-18), it necessarily follows that the miracles of the apostles functioned as the miracles of Jesus did, that is, they functioned as God's attestation to their role in the history of special revelation (cf. Acts 2:22 with Acts 14:3). Deere tries to refute this conclusion (pp. 101-10) by arguing that no biblical reference says such a thing. But Deere's search for the biblical basis of the apostles' attestation by miracles is frustrated not by the Bible as such, but by his hermeneutic. His interpretive method is inductivistic to the point that he is unable to see what may be deduced from the text by good and necessary inference. This hermeneutical malady afflicts Deere's argumentation throughout his book. In any event, because the apostles functioned as foundational rocks on which Jesus the foundational cornerstone was building His church, we have sound reason to conclude that the "signs, wonders, and miracles" God performed through the apostles did indeed authenticate them as sources of special revelation.

That miraculous ministries were consistently associated in the New Testament period with the unique roles of Jesus and the apostles is true whether we talk about the miracles of Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 4:17, 23-24; 10:1, 7-8; John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22, 43; 4:29-30) or the miracles of others appointed to such a ministry by the Lord (Luke 10:1, 9; Acts 6:8 (Stephen); 8:6 (Philip); 1 Cor. 12:9-10, 28). In this connection, Deere asks, "If the primary purpose of miracles was to authenticate the apostles, then why did anyone else (like Stephen and Philip) have a ministry of signs and wonders or miracles?" (p. 105; see also pp. 229-33). One way to answer this question is to observe that Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6), and others (1 Cor. 12:9-10, 28) stood in the same relation to the apostles as the Twelve (Matt. 10) and the Seventy (Luke 10) and perhaps others stood in relation to Jesus. Jesus carried out His ministry of miraculous deeds alongside that of all others whom He had so appointed, like the Twelve and the Seventy. Similarly, the apostles carried out their ministry of miraculous deeds alongside that of all others whom Christ had so appointed, like Stephen and Philip. This perspective suggests that the ministries of miraculous deeds in the New Testament period subserved the ministries of foundational special revelation. Certainly, the burden of proof falls to Deere to show that in the New Testament miraculous ministries subserved any ministry other than the foundational ministry of Jesus and the apostles.[14] We will come back to this question.

The Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:12. We should also notice Deere's treatment of 2 Corinthians 12:12, not so much for his conclusions as for his method. Deere takes exception to the New International Version translation, which takes the phrase "signs, wonders, and miracles" as an appositive of "the signs of the apostle," despite the lack of agreement in case between the former and the latter in the original Greek. Deere, with others he cites, argues that Paul does *not* say, "the signs of the apostle" *were* "signs, wonders, and miracles," but rather, "the signs of the apostle" *were accompanied by* "signs, wonders, and miracles." On this view, "the signs of the apostle" are, in sum, Paul's life and ministry, especially as he has just rehearsed them in 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10.[15]

Deere's view makes good sense of the text's syntax,[16] but is it the soundest interpretation of the passage from a broader hermeneutical and redemptive-historical standpoint? I think not. The cessationist's claim that miracles authenticated the apostles is not falsified by the lack of an equation between "the signs of the apostle" and "signs, wonders, and miracles" in 2 Corinthians 12:12. Nor is the cessationist's claim falsified by his inability to produce a biblical text that says in so many words, "Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst" (cf. Acts 2:22). These things are so because the cessationist's claim rests on what he understands the Bible as a whole to say about the function of signs-wonders-miracles in relation to the revelation of God's Word and the appointed sources of that revelation. A fair summary of the biblical teaching would seem to be that by miraculous deeds (and other operations of the Spirit—see Heb. 2:4) God bears witness to salvation in Christ along with those who are sources of his specially revealed word. This is not to say that all who perform miracles in the Bible are sources of God's word.[17] It is rather to say that in the Bible those who are sources of the divinely-revealed Word are provided with the corroborating witness of divinely wrought deeds, whether those deeds are done through the sources' own hands or those of others. In the end, then, even if Deere should be granted the benefit of the doubt on the syntax of 2 Corinthians 12:12, the cessationist loses no ground in his affirmation that the miraculous deeds mentioned there authenticated the apostles. As I see it, the best overall assessment of that text understands "sign, wonders, and miracles" to be a part of God's validating work in the life of a true apostle, even if they are not to be strictly equated with "the signs of the apostle."[18] In connection, therefore, with 2 Corinthians 12:12, Deere's inductivistic hermeneutic once again frustrates his effort to arrive at sound theological conclusions.

Gifts and Redemptive History. In his chapter on "Why God Gives Miraculous Gifts" (pp. 133-43), Deere turns to 1 Corinthians and discusses six reasons why miraculous gifts will continue in the church until the Lord returns. He maintains that the most important of these reasons is the stated purpose of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 14:26, namely, "the common good" or "edification" of the church. The remaining five reasons[19] derive their relevance, according to Deere, from their relationship with the edifying purpose. As I noted above, there is value in Deere's discussion here, but he shows himself once again to be oblivious to key considerations regarding the history of special revelation and their bearing on theological formulation. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Deere's hermeneutic is marked by dehistoricization—that is, by the habit of ignoring or otherwise violating the redemptive-historical context of a biblical text in order to preserve its contemporary relevance.[20] This controlling feature of Deere's approach to biblical interpretation manifests itself in the present connection when he pays no attention to the fact that Paul's references to the gifts are consistently placed within the context of God's new—that is to say, *epoch-making*— temple-building work. That this context informs Paul's reflections in 1 Corinthians is transparent in the apostle's references to the building (edification) of the temple body in chapters 3 and 12-14. The overall picture that emerges is one in which the gifts, both of word and of deed, are ministries (12:5) of foundation-laying or post-foundation building (3:10-11), provisionally appointed by God (12:28; 13:8-13), that the church might be built (14:12, 26) on Christ the foundational cornerstone (3:11).[21] Only in his comprehensive redemptive-historical framework can we assess Paul's teaching on the gifts, particularly the imperative elements that Deere is so interested to stress (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 39). The foundational/post-foundational periodization of God's temple-building ("edification") work would suggest that the apostle's

instruction does not always have the same bearing on the church in the post-foundational era as it did on the church in the foundational era. The burden of proof again rests with Deere to show that all of Paul's teaching on the gifts applies to the church in the same way during both the foundational and post-foundational periods of her history—or else he must establish an alternative framework that takes account of the Bible's redemptive-historical character.

Miraculous Ministries and the Present-Day Church. As we indicated earlier, throughout his book and particularly in Chapters 5 ("The Real Reason Christians Do Not Believe in the Miraculous Gifts") and 8 ("Were Miracles Meant to Be Temporary?"), we learn that, for Deere, the occurrence of miracles necessarily involves the ongoing appointment of some to miraculous ministries such as those that subserved the foundational ministry of Jesus and the apostles. But why does this follow? Deere must prove this assumption. Moreover, he knows of biblical miracles that had no relation to any such gift (e.g., Sarah's conception with Isaac, among many others he cites in Appendix C). Thus he should know that the occurrence of miracles never has necessarily implied the ongoing appointment of some to miraculous ministries.

James 5, which Deere rightly chides cessationists for minimizing in their ministries, is noteworthy in this connection. James directs the sick to their church's elders, whose qualifications, be it noted, do not include gifts of healing or miracle-working. Now, of course, it would be gratuitous to claim that those appointed to miraculous ministries were excluded from eldership. But, by the same token, such gifts are clearly not a necessary qualification for eldership or for its role in the healing of the sick. If that were the case, James could well have simply sent the sick to those with gifts of healing or miracle-working—but he does not do so. This observation is made all the more striking by the fact that James' instructions occur at a time in redemptive history when cessationists and

noncessationists agree that some were appointed to such ministries.

Well, so what? Well, James 5 illustrates how the occurrence of healing and other miracles in the church does not depend on the ongoing appointment of some to miraculous ministries, but on prayer and the ongoing appointment of some to eldership in the churches. With good reason, then, cessationists can argue that James 5 presents a paradigm adaptable to the situation of God's people in the post-biblical period—that is, to a time when healing and other miracles would be as possible as they ever were apart from developments in the history of special revelation, but when the occurrence of such phenomena would not depend on the ongoing appointment of some to those ministries that had earlier subserved the foundational ministry of Jesus and the apostles.

Miracles Yesterday and Today. Deere takes up the purpose of miracles in Chapter 8 ("Were Miracles Meant to Be Temporary?") and seeks to debunk the claim that the primary purpose of miracles was to authenticate or attest the apostles (pp. 101-10). He also wishes to challenge the notion that miracles functioned *at all* to attest the apostles as they did Jesus and the Gospel, hoping thereby to overturn a key argument for the temporariness of miracles. In view of the preceding discussion, this latter challenge need not detain us further. We should examine, however, Deere's insistence that the authenticating function of miracles is *one* purpose among many equally important purposes, including (in my words) doxological, evangelistic, and edifying (see Appendix A as well as Chapter 9). By interacting with Deere on this point, we gain still more light on miraculous ministries and their relationship to the non-foundational ministry of the church.

When taken on his own terms, Deere is quite good on the purposes served by miracles. But the problem I have with his discusssion is that he treats the multiple purposes of miracles

as separable from each other without considering whether or how they are interrelated with or even derivative from one another. Perhaps the best way to pose my question is this: Can we even conceive of miracles without an authenticating function? I suspect Deere and most others are like me. I am inclined to say that every miracle, biblical or post-biblical, has an authenticating function.[22] But we need to recognize here that we are banking on an equivocation in our terms. That is, we need to keep in mind that *biblical* miracles took place *before* the history of foundational special revelation and the attendant inscripturation process were completed. By contrast, *post-biblical* miracles take place *after* that history and process have been completed.[23] In this light, when we speak of the authenticating function of miracles, we must be careful to know what we mean. In the case of *biblical* miracles, we mean that those miracles attested to foundational special revelation then in process and to its appointed sources. But, in the case of *post-biblical* miracles, we mean that those miracles attest, not to ongoing special revelation or its sources, but rather to special revelation once-for-all delivered and now inscripturated exclusively in one source, the Bible. In other words, we must keep in mind the essential discontinuity between the miracles of the church's foundational era and the miracles of her post-foundational era.

As important as the discontinuity between biblical and post-biblical miracles is, we should also recognize the continuity between the two, namely, prayers of faith—more precisely, prayers of faith for healing or other miracles based on the revelation of the divine name already delivered and documented. In these prayers, the church in the period of New Testament revelation was to find common ground with those who were righteous in the period of Old Testament revelation (James 5:16-18).[24] In these prayers, the church in the "closed canon" situation of the post-biblical period should find continuity with her forebears in the "open canon" situation of the

biblical period. And, in these prayers, cessationists can and should find common ground with noncessationists.

In view of all these things, other cessationists and I are prepared to affirm that a ministry of healing and other miracles continues through the prayers of the churches and their elders, but that such a ministry is independent of any ongoing appointment of some to those miraculous ministries that formerly subserved the foundational ministry of Jesus and the apostles. We also wish to affirm our determination to pray for healing and other miracles according to James' instructions while avoiding the abuses to which Deere rightly calls attention. We make these affirmations within a framework shaped by three factors: (1) a recognition that "healing and related gifts stand in a different light than *word*-gifts, like prophecy and tongues ... because they do not raise the issue of revelation and the source(s) of God's word for the church,"[25] (2) a recognition of the Bible's witness to put relative disinterest in miracles not linked with the progress of special revelation or the sources thereof, and (3) a recognition of the Bible's pervasive redemptive-historical character and the correlative distinction between the foundational and post-foundational periods of church history. This third factor highlights the cessationist concern that, for all the interest we may have in the continuity between the Spirit's ministry in the New Testament era and His ministry in our day, we must maintain at least an equal interest in the discontinuity that obtains as well. This discontinuity is not only indispensable to biblical hermeneutics and theology. In addition, from the cessationist perspective, the characteristic neglect or depreciation of this discontinuity by Deere and his fellow noncessationists[26] accounts in large measure for the polarization that persists in the church's debate over the Spirit's work.

Conclusion

In sum, I find Jack Deere's book at once disappointing and

convicting: *disappointing* because of Deere's inductivistic, dehistoricizing hermeneutic, his theological irresponsibility, and the seeming self-satisfaction he brings to his considerations; *convicting* because Deere calls the church to minister in the power of the Spirit, to put James 5 into practice, and to cultivate by the means of grace a deep passion for her God. Despite its positive qualities, the negative traits of Deere's book may well serve to exacerbate an already tense situation between cessationists and noncessationists[27] and make it that much more difficult for the church to maintain the unity that the Spirit has given her in Christ. On the other hand, perhaps the power of the Spirit will surprise Deere and the rest of us yet again and deliver us all, cessationists and noncessationists alike, from our divisive selves. He will do so, however, largely in spite of, not because of, Deere's book.[28]

Endnotes

1 These remarks on the back cover are attributed to Dr. Bruce K. Waltke of Regent College. Despite the appearance of these remarks, Waltke does *not* endorse Deere's noncessationist conclusions.

2 Ibid.

3 I say "if [they] are ever going to get on a path to rapprochement," because at present I see the debate as increasingly polarized. Witness the recent exchange between cessationists and noncessationists in M. S. Horton, ed., *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), and G. S. Greig and K. N. Springer, eds., *The Kingdom and the Power: Are the Healing and the Spiritual Gifts Used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today?* (Ventura, California: Regal, 1993).

4 To my knowledge, the closest anyone has come to Deere's version of cessationism is Dr. Gene Getz, formerly of Dallas Seminary. For his view of gifts, see his *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 84-111. I am unaware of Getz's view of the continuance of miracles.

5 This problem is the same one that emerges in a recent work of Pentecostal New Testament scholar Gordon Fee. See his *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), Chapter 5.

6 He comes almost as close when he comments on Ephesians 2:20; 4:11-13 (pp. 214, 248).

7 See my "Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor. 13:10: A Comparison of Cessationist and Noncessationist Argumentation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35/2 (1992) 173-81; and idem, "Reflections on Wayne Grudem's ETS 1992 Presentation: 'The New Testament Gift of Prophecy: A Response to My Friends'" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Eastern Region, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 2, 1993) 2-11.

8 R. B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979).

9 See his decidedly insubstantial remarks on Ephesians 2:20 (p. 248) and his more substantive, but still incomplete, remarks on Hebrews 2:3-4 (pp. 227-78, n. 6).

10 See e.g., D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament," *Power Religion* (ed. M. S. Horton; Chicago: Moody, 1992) 89-118; and Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 97-99, 101-102. One could argue too that John MacArthur, whom Deere intends to answer in his Appendix C, makes an attempt—one limited in its effectiveness, but an attempt nonetheless—to raise the redemptive-historical issue as well in his book, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 112-14. MacArthur argues, in sum, that most miracles are confined to three periods in biblical history.

11 Along this line, I suspect even Deere must be intrigued by the Bible's relative disinterest in the miraculous during the post-Fall, pre-Flood millennia—yes, millennia—of world history in Genesis 4-7. After the record covering the foundation-laying week of God's world temple-building work (Gen. 1-2), the Genesis narrative covering the post-Fall, pre-Flood millennia certainly indicates the incidence of miraculous events apart from epochal developments in history, but evidently they occurred at a rate noticeably less than that which we find, say, when we come to God's covenantal initiatives with Noah. (For expositions of the creation week as a temple-building activity, see W. A Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Carpenter, 1984), and M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Southampton, Massachusetts: privately published, 1989) 16-34.)

12 The remainder of the discussion under this point is based on the very instructive comments of H. N. Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1982) 82-84.

13 On Jesus as the foundational cornerstone see Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:7. On the apostles as foundational rocks see Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20.

14 Though I cannot pursue it here, I would affirm that the foundational ministry of special revelation included the New Testament prophets as well as Jesus and the apostles. This is the import of Ephesians 2:20 especially. See my "Gaffin and Grudem on Eph. 2:20: In Defense of Gaffin's Cessationist Exegesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992) 303-20, and the excellent series by F. D. Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today? Parts I-IV," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1992 through April-June 1993).

15 The best defense of this interpretation is found in W. Grudem, "Should Christians Expect Miracles Today? Objections and Answers from the Bible," *The Kingdom and the Power: Are the Healing and the Spiritual Gifts Used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today?* (ed. G. S. Greig and K. N. Springer; Ventura, California: Regal, 1993) 63-67. See also *idem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994) 362-64.

16 I still wonder, however, why Deere takes the phrase "signs, wonders, and miracles" as an expression of accompaniment and not instrument. The resultant translation would then be "the signs of the apostle were performed ... *in* (or *by*) signs, wonders, and miracles" (cf. NASB), a rendering suggesting that the phrase defines three things in or by which "the signs of the apostle" were performed. At worst, the instrumental reading would suggest a referential overlap (if not identity) between "the signs of the apostle" and "signs, wonders, and miracles." The intent of Paul's statement to the credential-seeking Corinthians might be reflected in this paraphrase: "Actually, Corinthians, I should have been commended by you, for in nothing was I inferior to those 'super-apostles' (even though I am nothing). In fact, 'the signs of the apostle' that you demanded of me were performed among you with utmost patience, in signs, wonders, and miracles."

17 Certainly it is doubtful that all Christians who perform miracles in Scripture are sources of divine revelation (Acts 6:8; 8:6; 1 Cor. 12:9-10, 28); and, of course, Satan's servants who perform miracles never are and never will be such sources (Deut. 13:1-3; cf. Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13).

18 Cf. J. Piper, "The Signs of the Apostle," *The Standard*, November 1991, 28: "(The syntax of 2 Cor. 12:12) probably means that 'signs, wonders, and miracles' were part of the validating work of God in Paul's life, but by no means the whole of it." By citing Piper here I do not intend to suggest

that he offers the most thorough treatment of the text (see n. 22 below); I am interested only in his general assessment of the teaching of 2 Corinthians 12:12. Like Deere, Piper urges that "the signs of the apostle" should not be equated with "signs, wonders, and miracles" in the verse; but, in distinction from Deere, he accepts the validating (i.e., authenticating) function of signs-wonders-miracles in the apostle's life.

19 The remaining five reasons are (1) God commands us to eagerly desire spiritual gifts; (2) God also commands us not to forbid speaking in tongues; (3) the apostle Paul valued the gift of tongues; (4) spiritual gifts are necessary for the health of Christ's body; and (5) spiritual gifts will not cease until Christ returns.

20 This tendency on Deere's part accounts for his outrageously misplaced accusation that cessationists have adopted an anti-supernatural hermeneutic (pp.111-14).

21 Special note should be taken of Paul's citation of Isaiah 28 or in 1 Corinthians 14:21, since both he and Peter found there a prophecy of the foundation-laying activity of God now realized in Christ (Isa. 28:16; Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:11). Remembering that customarily New Testament citation of Old Testament texts involves an appeal to their larger context as well, we must see Paul's use of Isaiah 28 as invoking a redemptive-historical framework in which at least prophecy and tongues are correlated with the foundation-laying activity of God.

22 Poythress has helpfully defined a miracle as "an extraordinary visible act of God to deliver his people and attest his word" (V. S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987] 105-106 [in context with his discussion on pp. 101-19]).

23 To put my point differently, the former took place in an "open canon" situation; the latter took place in a "closed canon" situation.

24 James cites Elijah the prophet as an example (5:17-18; cf. 5:10) of the righteous whose prayers can accomplish much (5:16). When we turn to the story of Elijah's prayer in 1 Kings 18:41-46, we discover that he had been praying in the name of his God as that name had already been revealed to Israel through Moses and his writings (1 Kings 18:36-37). Hence, Elijah's prayer of faith presupposed a *prior* history of special revelation linked with the divine name, and indeed a *prior* history of inscripturating that revelation. The present-day church's prayers stand in the same relation to the history of special revelation and its inscripturation. Notice as well that Elijah exemplifies the continuity that exists between all the righteous, even if as a prophet he also exemplifies the discontinuity that applies to some.

25 Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 113 (emphasis Gaffin's).

26 A perusal of the Greig/Springer volume, *The Kingdom and the Power* (see n. 4), suggests that, like other non-cessationists, the contributors also ignore or depreciate the discontinuity between the Spirit's work in the foundational ministries of Jesus and the apostles, and his work in the non-foundational ministries of the church at large.

27 See n. 4.

28 I wish to thank the following people for their interaction on Deere's book and/or this review: Dr. Richard Gaffin; Dr. S. Lewis Johnson; Dr. Robert Thomas; Prof. Daniel B. Wallace of Dallas Seminary; Gary L. W. Johnson; and Stephen J. Nichols.

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