

The Holy Spirit and the Word

Whereas the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word has been a central theme in Evangelical theology, especially since the rise of the charismatic movement, neither the Holy Spirit nor the Word of God were central themes in post-Reformation Catholic theology prior to the renewal currents of the 20th century. However, this theological neglect should not be taken as an absence, because first and most importantly, the Holy Spirit and the Word were always more present in the official liturgies of the Catholic Church than they had been in the theology. The Creed, generally the Nicene Creed, was recited every Sunday and major feast, and the annual feast of Pentecost was always a reminder of the role and the power of the Holy Spirit. Then though the liturgy of the Western Church was in Latin through the centuries, the neglect of the Word, particularly through the period of the Counter-Reformation, when Catholics at best downplayed everything that the Protestants up-played, never led to its suppression or omission from the celebration of the Eucharist.

This background suggested that I should structure this Catholic presentation on the Holy Spirit and the Word by first looking at the process of Catholic renewal whereby these themes have re-emerged from the tradition, then summarizing where we are now, and finally making an attempt to sketch possible developments in the future..

The 20th Century Renewals

The currents of renewal in the Catholic Church of the 20th century have given more attention to both themes, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, though the influences vary somewhat in the two cases. Both themes were the subject of encyclical letters from Leo XIII in the last decade of the 19th century: an encyclical on the Sacred Scriptures, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) and an encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Divinum Illud Munus* (1897). The turn of the century saw more initiatives that paved the way for the rise of serious Catholic biblical studies: the formation of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1902), the foundation of the École Biblique in Jerusalem by the French Dominicans.

From the start there was a close connection between the liturgical renewal movement in the Catholic Church and increased attention to the Bible. At its beginnings around 1909 – 10, the liturgical movement had a very pastoral focus: the major aim was to restore the liturgy to the people.¹ In effect, this is inseparable from restoring the Scriptures to the people. Soon after the First World War the Austrian liturgical pioneer, Fr Pius Parsch from Kloster Neuberg near Vienna, began the first Catholic bible study groups and a whole work of disseminating and making known the Scriptures among the Catholic faithful. Moreover the great increase in liturgical scholarship, which paid great attention to the patristic period of the first centuries, was closely linked with the renewal of Catholic biblical scholarship. You can see this connection very clearly in books like Jean Daniélou's *The Bible and the Liturgy*, which examined the biblical foundations for the central symbols of the liturgy. The liturgical renewal was particularly encouraged by Pope Pius XII, who issued three major encyclicals in the 1940s between which one can see strong connections: *Divino Afflante Spiritu* on the Scriptures (1943), *Mystici Corporis Christi* on the Church (1943) and *Mediator Dei* on the liturgy (1947).

¹ The key originating event for the liturgical movement was the Congrès des oeuvres catholiques at Malines, Belgium in 1909, which led to the first liturgical week at the abbey of Mont-César in 1910.

All these developments prepared the way for the renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council. The Council directed Catholic attention to the Bible in a number of ways:

- by the decision to allow the Roman rite to be celebrated in local languages;²
- by the decision to reform the lectionary of biblical readings so that a far wider selection from the Bible would be read in the liturgy;
- the recommendation that homilies at Mass should be an application of the biblical readings to the present situation;
- by the teaching of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the importance of the liturgy of the Word;
- by a new openness to the Protestant confessions and communities in *Unitatis Redintegratio* and by the recognition that the Catholic Church can learn from them;
- and, most significantly, by the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*.

The Contribution of *Dei Verbum*

Most important for narrowing the gap between Catholic and Protestant are the following:

- the statement that the Magisterium (of Pope and bishops) is the servant of the Word of God, which stands in some way above the teaching office;³
- that the Bible should be open and available to all the faithful; in other words the restrictions and that all limitations such as those often imposed by church authority after the Reformation should be removed;
- that the renewal of Catholic theology requires that it be more biblical;⁴
- encouraging the collaboration of Catholics with other Christians, in effect with Protestant Bible societies, in the making available of the Bible in many languages.

I will come back later to the issue of the role of the Word of God as judge and criterion and its relationship to the Magisterium.

Post-Vatican Two

One of the most immediate and most unexpected fruits of Vatican Two was the outbreak of the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church. Although there were a few sporadic instances of Catholics being baptized in the Spirit prior to 1967, the beginnings of the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church as a movement clearly occurred in the so-called Duquesne week-end outside Pittsburgh, USA, in February 1967. From the start, what later became known as Catholic charismatic renewal obviously had an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and at the same time it gave a prominence to the Scriptures, both in teaching and in personal practice. It should be

² “since the use of the vernacular, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or in other parts of the liturgy, may frequently be of great advantage to the people, a wider use may be made of it, especially in readings, directives and in some prayers and chants.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, para. 36 (1).

³ “Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant.” (*Dei Verbum*, para. 10).

⁴ “the 'study of the sacred page' should be the very soul of sacred theology.” (*Dei Verbum*, para. 24).

emphasized that this combination of the Spirit and the Word did not result from any strategic planning by leaders, but they were intrinsically-related components of the charismatic experience which was partly mediated through Protestant sources. The ecumenical or inter-church dimension of the charismatic renewal from the outset favoured this focus on the Spirit and the Word, and the big charismatic conferences of the early 1970s regularly featured Protestant teachers who would mostly give practical inspirational teachings based on the Bible.

Although several biblical scholars and theologians were involved in the Catholic charismatic renewal, probably rather more in the 1970s and 1980s than today – at least in Europe and North America - it cannot be said that the considerable changes in Catholic popular practice mediated through the renewal have had any noticeable influence on Catholic biblical studies and Catholic theology.⁵ Maybe this is too pessimistic, as today there are new institutes and institutions of spiritual and theological formation arising either from charismatic communities⁶ or in places where there has been a marked charismatic influence.⁷

A number of the other new ecclesial movements have had more impact in the institutional arena as far as a greater attention to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is concerned. This would be particularly true of the Focolari movement, of the Sant' Egidio community and the Schönstatt movement.

Four Catholic post-conciliar documents would seem to be of particular importance in relation to our theme:

- Paul VI's post-synodal document on Evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975);
- John Paul II's encyclical letter on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986);
- The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, issued in 1994;
- *The General Directory on Catechesis*, issued in 1997.

Evangelii Nuntiandi has been important for relating the Word to the Holy Spirit. This document formed part of the process of the Catholic Church identifying a “basic gospel message” that needs to be preached and received before catechesis proper begins. This is carried further in the *General Directory on Catechesis*. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* had a welcome insistence on the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelization: “Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit. ... It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by him. The Holy Spirit places on his lips the words which he could not find by himself, and at the same time the Holy Spirit predisposes the soul of the hearer to be open and receptive to the Good News and to the Kingdom being proclaimed. ... It must be said that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization” (para. 75).

It is easy to see how much progress has taken place in Catholic biblical studies and how much more biblical Catholic teaching has become by comparing John Paul II's encyclical on the Holy Spirit with

⁵ Among the biblical scholars have been Fr George Montague, SM; Fr Francis Martin; Fr Norbert Baumert, SJ; Fr Fio Mascarenhas, SJ; and among the theologians Bishop Albert de Monleon, OP; Fr Francis Sullivan, SJ; Fr Bob Faricy, SJ.

⁶ For example, institutes founded by the Emmanuel and Chemin Neuf communities in France.

⁷ For example, the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio.

that of Leo XIII almost a century earlier. In this teaching of John Paul II, there is a strong Trinitarian pattern, with a whole section devoted to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, e.g. Jesus as “the Messiah anointed by the Holy Spirit” (I. 4), Jesus of Nazareth, “exalted” in the Holy Spirit (I. 5) and the risen Christ saying “Receive the Holy Spirit” (I. 6). Here we have in effect a much more pneumatic Christology made possible by greater attention to the texts of the Gospels and the teaching of the New Testament.

The Catechism of 1994 sought first to formulate in schematic form the whole teaching of the Catholic Church in the light of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. So on the theme of the Word of God, we find the citation of key passages from the Council documents and a putting them in a more schematic form. It is surely on the basis of the Catechism's teaching that a future Catholic theology of the Word of God will be developed.

The relevant teachings are found in the following sections of the Catechism:

- in Part I, article 3 on “Sacred Scripture”, of which the first three sections are of particular importance for our theme: I: “Christ the unique Word of Sacred Scripture” (paras. 101 – 104); II: “Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture” (paras. 105 – 108) and III: “The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture” (paras. 109 – 114).
- in Part II, Ch. 1, Art. 1, particularly in III: “The Holy Spirit and the Church in the Liturgy” which contains a section on “The Word of God” (paras. 1100 – 1103);
- in the teaching on Baptism in para. 1236;
- in the teaching on the Eucharist in paras. 1346 – 47;
- in a paragraph on the Psalms in Part IV on “Prayer”: para. 2587.

The Catechism spells out clearly the Catholic approach to understanding the Bible. It provides three principles, all of which are holistic or catholic:

- “Be especially attentive 'to the content and unity of the whole Scripture” (para. 112);
- “Read the Scripture within 'the living Tradition of the whole Church” (para. 113);
- “Be attentive to the analogy of faith” (para. 114) – i. e. to the “coherence of the truths of faith among themselves”;

Among the key statements in the Catechism I would single out:

“Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.” (CCC, para. 111), in fact a citation from *Dei Verbum*, para. 12).

“the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture” (para. 113);

“The Gospels are the heart of all the Scriptures 'because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour.” (para. 125);

“The Holy Spirit first recalls the meaning of the salvation event to the liturgical assembly by giving life to the Word of God, which is proclaimed so that it may be received and lived” (para. 1100);

“By means of the words, actions, and symbols that form the structure of a [liturgical] celebration, the Spirit puts both the faithful and the ministers into a living relationship with Christ, the Word and Image

of the Father” (para. 1101);

“By the saving word of God, faith ... is nourished in the hearts of believers.” (para. 1102).

The General Directory on Catechesis (1997): This document from a Vatican office with the approval of the Pope carried the emphasis on the role of the Word of God further. In particular it develops further the concept of their being an initial message of salvation to proclaim that is directed towards conversion and is much less broad than church teaching as a whole. This first proclamation is called “the primary proclamation of the Gospel” (GDC, para. 61). “Catechesis, 'distinct from primary proclamation of the Gospel', promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community.” (para. 61). This distinction is in effect new in modern Catholic teaching since the Second Vatican Council.⁸ While there are more references to the Word than to the Holy Spirit, there are relatively frequent mentions of the role of the Holy Spirit including, for example, the statement: “Starting with the 'initial' conversion of a person to the Lord, moved by the Holy Spirit through the primary proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis seeks to solidify and mature this first adherence.” (para. 80).⁹ However it must be confessed that pastoral practice usually requires time to catch up with such teaching.

The Current Situation

At present, we can say that through the renewal currents of the past century and through the decisions and teaching of Vatican Two there has been a form of rehabilitation of the Word of God in the Catholic Church. This rehabilitation can be seen in the following features of Catholic life today:

- the choice of the theme “The Word of God” for the Bishops' Synod of 2008 and the impending issue by the Pope of a post-Synodal document on this theme;
- an improvement in the standard of Catholic homilies, though as letters to the Catholic press often remark and as some of the Synod Fathers recognized, there is still some way to go as Catholic preaching standards are not universally high!
- the training of lectors to read the Scriptures at Mass;
- the advance of Catholic biblical studies and the impact they are having on Catholic theology;
- a greater attention to the role of the Holy Spirit and the efforts to make Christology more pneumatological;
- much greater Catholic reading of the Scriptures, especially within the new ecclesial movements and the Catholic charismatic renewal;
- the much stronger biblical foundation in official Catholic documents of the last 30 years;
- the much clearer articulation by the magisterium, particularly by John Paul II, of the necessary complementarity of the institutional and charismatic dimensions in the life and “constitution” of the

⁸ In one way, it was necessitated by the Council's decision to restore the adult catechumenate.

⁹ Also the programmatic principle: “The 'providential plan' of the Father, fully revealed in Jesus Christ, is realized by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (para. 37). Other references to the Holy Spirit in Part I of the Directory are found in paras. 43, 44, 45, 48, 54, 55, 56, 70, 77, 78, 81, 82.

Church;¹⁰ this has major implications for a greater recognition of more prophetic and non-ordained ministries of the Word;

- the much clearer recognition in Catholic teaching of the necessary complementarity of Word and Sacrament;
- the emergence, as yet on a very limited scale, of the ministry of evangelist, and in a few places the official commissioning of lay people as evangelists in the Church.

However, there is not yet really a developed Catholic theology of the Word. It is symptomatic that there is no index entry for “The Word of God” in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹¹ But with these developments, it would seem that the necessary elements are in place for such a theology to be developed. A century ago, this would have been impossible.

It would seem that a major stimulus for developing a Catholic theology of the Word is the role of the Word in the birth of faith. Important NT texts here are: “humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (James 1: 21) and “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ... And this is the word that was preached to you.” (1 Peter 1: 23, 25). This foundational truth has not yet found a central place in Catholic presentations on the nature of faith.

Elements for a Catholic Theology doing full justice to the Spirit and the Word

It will surely have a Trinitarian foundation, as in *Lumen Gentium*, paras. 2 – 4, in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and in many encyclicals of John Paul II.

A theology of the Word will show the interconnection between the eternal Word, the Word Incarnate, the proclamation of the Word by the Church and in the Church, the role of faith in the Word. All these dimensions involve at their heart the mission of the Holy Spirit, both the eternal mission and the temporal mission.

A Catholic theology of the Word will emphasize the essential complementarity of Word and Sacrament that has been consistently asserted in the official Catholic teaching of the post-conciliar era. While the priority of the Word is affirmed in its role of eliciting faith in the hearers, this priority has not really taken hold in Catholic presentations of the Church and the sacraments, and less still in most Catholic pastoral practice.

A Catholic theology of the Word will need not only to affirm the complementarity of Word and Sacrament, but also to elucidate their distinctive roles: the Word as prior, because of its role in the genesis of faith, and the necessity of Sacrament as the Word enfleshed and made accessible in enacted

¹⁰ This distinction should not be understood in terms of seeing the former as merely human and the latter as uniquely Spirit-filled. It refers to the difference between permanent elements in the Church's life and those elements that come and go under the moving of the Holy Spirit. See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) *New Outpourings of the Spirit* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2007).

¹¹ There is no entry under “Bible”, but simply one on “Scripture, Sacred”. Likewise, there is no index entry for “Evangelization”.

signs. Both of these will require a clear affirmation of the fundamental role of the Holy Spirit, both in the ministry of the Word and in the celebration of Sacrament. The role of the epiclesis in the Mass, which has been enhanced in the new eucharistic prayers introduced since Vatican Two, needs to be further accentuated. Ecclesial communion is formed by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

A Catholic theology of the Word will also need to include a treatment on all the ministries of the Word, including the complementarity of the ordained and the charismatic-prophetic ministries not flowing from official ordination or commissioning.

Challenging Questions for the Future

I want to raise what I originally formulated as two distinct issues that I believe the Catholic Church and her theologians have to address. The two issues are (1) the normative role of the Sacred Scriptures and (2) the role of the prophetic in the Church. However as I have worked further on these themes, I am seeing that both issues are in fact closely related. In fact a deeper understanding of both issues leading to significant changes in the way the Catholic Church functions is essential for real progress towards Christian unity. The normative role of the Scriptures has always been a major issue for all Protestants. The role of the prophetic in the Church is now being raised more sharply by the rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements and will obviously be of ongoing concern in any Catholic – non-denominational encounters.

1. The normative role of the Sacred Scriptures

As already noted, the Council Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation teaches that: “this Magisterium [of Pope and bishops] is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant.” (para. 10). However the concept of “the Word of God” is here wider than the Scriptures, for the same paragraph had used the phrase: “the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition”. Here the Scriptures are presented as being at the heart of the “Tradition” with a capital T, that is to say, the foundational revelation recorded in the Bible and handed down by the apostles and the bishops.

At the present time there is no recognized way in the Catholic tradition to test present teaching by the biblical revelation. The danger then is that the Magisterium becomes self-authenticating. It is a distinctive witness of the Reformed tradition in particular to the role of the Word of God as criterion and as instrument of purification for all Christian doctrine. In fact, it would seem that in the renewal of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century, the renewal of Catholic biblical scholarship has in fact exercised a purifying role on Catholic life and teaching. But this process is not currently acknowledged in the official teaching. This is of course a point of massive importance in all Catholic – Protestant dialogue. Here the Reformation has left a legacy of fear that each believer with a Bible becomes like his own Pope.

A very significant indicator in this debate is the teaching of Vatican Two on the Jewish people. For in the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, para. 4, the Council taught that God has not rejected the Jewish people: “the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.” What is significant here is that this teaching has no precedent in the tradition since the first century. It is the only place in the Council

documents where there are no citations from the Fathers of the Church or past church authority. Its sole authority is the Scriptures and this paragraph is full of biblical references and allusions. This example is highly relevant at the present time as the Society of St Pius X, aka the Lefebvrists, contested the Second Vatican Council precisely on this point insisting that this teaching as also the teaching on ecumenism and religious liberty was a deviation from the Catholic tradition.

I suggest that we need to re-think the distinguishing features between what is essentially Catholic and what we see as essentially Protestant. Or maybe to put it in a more constructive way, we need to distinguish between what is receivable and from the Lord in the Protestant traditions and what is not receivable. I am suggesting that the constant Protestant witness to the normative role of the Sacred Scriptures is fundamentally right and should be received as authentically Catholic. But on this issue the distinctive contribution from the whole Catholic tradition is that the responsibility to discern the process of how the Scriptures play this normative role in the life of the Church is an ecclesial responsibility. The Magisterium of Pope and bishops has a God-given authority to teach that comes from the Lord. The work of each Christian to the task of renewal and re-interpretation of the heritage has to take place within the communion of the Church and in proper recognition of the role of the official teachers and of right relationships within the whole Body.

2. The Role of the Prophetic within the Church

The Pentecostal and charismatic currents that have gained so much ground in world Christianity also pose the question of the role of the prophetic in the Church. This question is totally one of Word and Spirit! Prophetic gifts are gifts to speak words from the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit. Any developing Catholic theology of the Word has to address the role of the prophetic within the Church. The fact that apostles and prophets are named together in the New Testament alerts us to the foundational importance of the prophets. In Ephesians 2: 20, the prophets mentioned with the apostles as “the foundation” are clearly New Testament prophets, not the prophets of the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians, there would seem to be a distinction between the “prophet” specifically called to this ministry (“Are all apostles? Are all prophets?” 1 Cor. 12: 29) and the general prophetic unction found among all the faithful (“I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.” 1 Cor. 14: 5).

I feel that the analysis of Père Congar in the 1950s in *Vraie et Fausse Réforme dans l'Église*, a very bold book for its time (1950), does not honour sufficiently the role of the prophetic in the New Covenant.¹² “Le régime de l'Église n'est plus prophétique, mais apostolique.” (p. 79). The Old Testament prophets were characterized by their bold challenges to the corrupt and the immoral in Israel and by their visions of a very different future being prepared by the Lord. But is not the future coming of the Kingdom in its fulness being prepared by the Lord through the Spirit during “the age of the Church”? Here the marginal position of eschatology in most Catholic theology is manifest. A recovery

¹² This position is based on the relationship to Christ: “Sous l'ancienne Disposition, le Christ est attendu et l'Esprit de Dieu ne fait que survenir de façon transitoire. Le régime est essentiellement prophétique. La nouvelle et définitive Disposition, celle après laquelle il n'y a pas d'autre qui soit plus parfaite, est caractérisée par le fait que le Christ est venu, que la cause pleinement suffisante de la communion avec Dieu a été, de façon ferme, posée dans le monde, donnée au monde.” (p. 79). I sense that this view of the difference between the two covenants, which is totally traditional, does not pay enough attention to the eschatological future (the second coming of Christ) and its prophetic implications.

of the eschatological dimension and the fulness of the “blessed hope” (Tit. 2: 13) is necessarily linked to the recovery of the prophetic. Here it is noticeable that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has helped to restore a stronger eschatological thrust to Catholic teaching in a much more marked way than other documents of the magisterium.¹³

While prophecy has emerged in the Catholic charismatic renewal as a regular feature within charismatic prayer and worship, it has mostly been restricted to rather benign declarations about God's love and about imminent blessing. In its most authentic forms, this can be understood as the gift that St Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 14: “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” (1 Cor. 14: 3). The kind of prophetic word that is reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets and the book of Revelation is rather rarely heard, though one is reminded of the two remarkably challenging prophecies given within a liturgy in St Peter's basilica here in Rome in 1975. I have never heard any prophetic words in Catholic charismatic circles that were full of biblical allusions such as I once experienced in a particularly dynamic Pentecostal church. In effect, this kind of prophecy seemed to me to be a recycling and reapplication of biblical prophecy to the present day. I would interpret the current Catholic renewal patterns as reflecting the limitations of our rooting in the Scriptures.

Is there any likelihood of prophecy being given a recognized place in Catholic life and polity? Before such a development becomes possible, it would seem to me that three things have to happen: (1) there has to be a much deeper grounding in the Scriptures among the Catholic clergy and people; (2) there has to be a more significant exercise of prophetic gifts among Catholics and (3) there has to be a real theological reflection on the role of prophets. It is interesting that Karl Rahner, who often studied phenomena in the life of the Church, wrote a book *Visionen und Prophezeiungen* (English title *Visions and Prophecies* 1963), but in effect it is a study of the nature and role of apparitions and visions in the life of the Church. But the way the Catholic Church handles alleged apparitions – not denying the possibility in principle but responding cautiously in practice - is probably an indicator to the way a more prophetic dimension will be received. Here what we find is the strong tendency only to affirm the prophetic element in someone's life when they are considered as candidates for sainthood after their death. In the case of some saints, their influence was so powerful during their lives that they were quickly hailed as prophetic figures – for example, St Bernard of Clairvaux and St Francis of Assisi. But in most cases the public acceptance of prophetic figures only happens after their death, most often when they are canonized. However important and enriching this has been in the life of the Catholic Church, it does not allow for the contemporary impact that characterized the Old Testament prophets who had a now-word for Israel combining promises of the Messianic future and judgment on sinful Israel.

We should note that apparitions and visions though “interventions from above” are not necessarily a form of the Word. However, I have the impression that the messages of visionaries in recent centuries have been mostly calls to personal repentance or devotional encouragement. The clearest instances I can think of in the Catholic tradition of prophetic voices speaking out a now-word for the Church are in fact pre-Reformation: two canonized, St Catherine of Siena and St Bridget of Sweden in the 14th century and one burned at the stake at the end of the 15th, Savonarola, though there has been talk of his

13 See especially paras. 671 – 77, 1001 – 04, 1090, 1107, 1130, 1403, 2046, 2772, 2816 – 18, 2854.

being rehabilitated. In modern times, I can think of two Catholics who sent prophetic requests in writing to the Pope: Blessed Elena Guerra, who wrote letters to Leo XIII about the Holy Spirit, which were heard and acted on, and Fr Max Metzger, who in Advent 1939 wrote to Pius XII from prison with challenging questions on Christian unity. It is not even known whether the Pope received this letter, as it was never acknowledged. Metzger wrote that “The opinion of the best kinds among non-Catholic Christians is that a certain proud self-righteousness on our side prevents our acknowledging the faults and failings within our own Church, the sins and errors through which we share in the guilt of these divisions.”¹⁴ Maybe it is easier for church leadership to hear the voice of holy women than the indignation of men. But of these examples probably only St Catherine's was more widely known in her life-time.

Bringing the Two Issues Together

This question of the role of prophecy in the life of the Church is closely related to the previous one of the role of the Scriptures in the reform and renewal of the Church. For it is through prophetic gifts and figures that the Scriptures are rightly brought to bear on contemporary Church life and practice. Later in his book Père Congar wrote about the “Situation de Prophétisme dans l'Église” (pp. 218 – 20). He says that “the prophecy of the biblical prophets is structuring (*structurante*) for the people of God” (p. 218, my trans.), whereas “the prophecy of ecclesial prophetism is situated in the order of the Church's life and presupposes its structure and is only exercised within the limits of this structure” (p. 218). There is certainly this major difference in relation to binding revelation, which in Catholic teaching was complete with the death of the last apostle, but was still in the course of development in the Old Testament. But while the writings of the biblical prophets are part of the revelation once given, is it accurate to say that Old Testament prophecy played a structuring role in the life of Israel? One could say that the prophets were outside the divinely-given structures in Israel (the Law, the Aaronic priesthood, the Kingdom of David) and spoke corrective words that were not changing the structure, but purifying it and elevating the sights. Congar's position would seem not to take sufficient account of the foundational role of “apostles and prophets” already noted in the letter to the Ephesians. But of course Congar's point about the definitive character of the Christ-event and the apostolic origins remains absolutely true, and in fact points us back to the foundational role of the Scriptures. The Catholic Church is in a better position today to revisit this question than it was in 1950, particularly with the recognition of the complementary character of the institutional and the charismatic components in the life of the Church.

Fear is a major factor in approaching both issues. There have long been deep fears manifest when addressing the authority of the Scriptures, the fear that giving authority to the Bible will undermine the authority of the Church and in particular of its ordained ministry. But there are also deep fears manifest when any attempt is made to recognize the role of the prophetic, especially within the lifetimes of those called to prophetic service. Here we see the close connection between a fear of the Word of God and a fear of the Holy Spirit. There is the fear of trusting the leading of the Holy Spirit. Often any appeal to the Holy Spirit has been dismissed as “illumination”. In particular, there has been a fear of trusting the Holy Spirit in the laity. But there is also the fear of opening the Bible to the people. So many official

¹⁴ Cited from Lilian Stevenson, *Max Josef Metzger: Priest and Martyr* (London: SPCK, 1952), p. 49. Fr Metzger was arrested the final time in June 1943 and was executed by the Nazis on 17th April, 1944.

bans and restrictions were placed in the past on Bible reading among the Catholic people. Of course this was a fearful reaction to the experience of people discovering the Bible and then becoming Protestants.

The Catholic response to these fears has to be trust. Trust in the God, who has sent his Son and poured out the Holy Spirit. Trust by those in authority and trust in those under authority. The answer cannot simply be restrictions. It has to be biblical preaching, thorough teaching of the whole biblical revelation, guidance in spiritual maturity and discernment. The fears have been associated with a misunderstanding of authority in the Church as control. So we have to work not just for a more adequate theology of Spirit and Word, but also for a deeper reliance on Spirit and Word throughout the Church. This is a sine qua non for profound renewal.

So this is my reading of the more immediate past, the present and the likely future concerning the role of and inner relationship between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in the Catholic tradition.

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