

Prophecy

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In this paper I will treat prophecy and the prophetic under four headings: (I) the roots of the prophetic in Israel; (II) prophecy in the New Testament era; (III) the prophetic as a key element in the larger category of the charismatic; and (IV) the exercise of prophecy today: pastoral implications and discernment.

I: The Roots of the Prophetic in Israel

Prophecy has its origins and roots in the life of the people of Israel. What is distinctive of prophecy is particular to Israel and its calling. Walter Brueggemann has written, "The emergence of individual persons who speak with an authority beyond their own is indeed an odd, inexplicable, originary happening in Israel."¹ This is in marked contrast to the wisdom tradition, in which Israel received elements from the wisdom traditions of neighbouring peoples, as for example from Egypt. For Brueggemann, prophecy in Israel always contests what he calls "the dominant narrative", the prevailing values, assumptions and modes of thought, so that the task of the prophet is to confront "our conventional idolatries and/or our conventional atheisms".² There is a close link between prophetic utterance, the call to repentance, and the prayer of lament. But the Old Testament prophet does not only contest the "dominant narrative" by recalling the covenant with Israel, but also presents an alternative and transformed vision for the future. In these ways, Old Testament prophecy is strongly marked by the calling, mission, and destiny of the people of Israel. Here I single out two characteristics of Israelite prophecy.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 622.

² See arts. on Brueggemann's book *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) by Lee Roy Martin, Rickie Moore, James Shelton and Derek Knoke in *Journey of Pentecostal Theology* 22/2 (2013), 155-181.

First, prophecy, unlike the wisdom literature, always starts from the particular, as to time, people and/or place. This particularity reflects the call of a particular people (Israel), the call of a particular area or place (the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem), the coming of a particular event, time, or aeon ("On that day", "In those days", "On this mountain"). However, the particular is God's instrument to bless the universal (all peoples, the whole earth), for Israel's election is not simply for their own sake (see Ex. 19:5-6).

Second, what characterizes prophecy in Israel are the three elements of the past, the present, and the future, all related to the covenants and the promises. The prophets recall Israel to the covenants made between God and the chosen people in the past, they remind the people of their deliverance from Egypt in the exodus, they confront infidelity in the present – often containing warnings for the immediate future – and they present visions and promises concerning the future, both of judgment and of glorious transformation. To express this in simpler terms, prophecy points to a God who speaks, to a God who acts, and to a God who makes covenant promises. "Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts. The prophets proclaim a radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations."³

The Old Testament prophets frequently rebuke those with responsibility in Israel, the priests, the kings and princes, and the prophets. So, for example, "The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Ba'al, and went after things that do not profit." (Jer. 2:8).⁴ Later, Jeremiah ridicules the false prophets, thereby indicating the characteristics of authentic prophets: "For who among them has stood in the council

³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), para. 64.

⁴ See also Jer.2:26; 4:9; 13:13. Some passages just refer to priests and prophets: Jer. 5:30-31; 6:13;8:10; 14:18; 23:11.

of the Lord to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened?" (Jer. 23:18). This verse brings out a twofold pattern in prophecy: those who see, and those who hear.⁵

We can note that while the prophets confront priestly infidelity and condemn merely ritual sacrifice and worship, the liturgical worship of Israel is also characterized by this threefold reference to past, present, and future, particularly in the established feasts of Israel. This parallel indicates that any opposing of prophecy to ritual celebration as a matter of principle is mistaken. This worship pattern was then received and heightened in Christian liturgy, with the reference to the past being anchored in the memorial of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

II. Prophecy in the New Testament Era

What happens to prophecy and the prophetic calling in the new covenant era? In the New Testament, there are several references to prophets, to the gift of prophecy, and to believers prophesying. In Ephesians, prophets play a foundational role together with apostles, "with the household of God [being] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20; see also Eph. 3:5). The prophets here are members of the Church, not the prophets of the Old Testament, for "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets" (1 Cor. 12:28), an order that recurs in Eph. 4:11. This ministry of prophet is a more restricted category than those exercising the spiritual gift of prophecy mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:10, 14:1, 3-5, 29-32; Rom. 12:6. In relation to the former Paul asks a rhetorical question, "Are all prophets?" (1 Cor. 12:29), clearly expecting a negative answer, while two chapters later he writes about the spiritual gift not the ministry, "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." (1 Cor. 14:1).

The book of Acts mentions prophets in the church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:27; 15:32) and in the church of Antioch (Acts 13:1). The first

⁵ For prophets who see, refer to Is. 2:1; 30:10; Amos 1:1; and Hab. 1:1. In many other cases "the Word of the Lord came" to the prophet: Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zech 1:1.

sending out on mission – the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul – is a result of prophecy (Acts 15:2 – “the Holy Spirit said”). Specific mention is made of the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28) and of the four daughters of Philip who prophesy (Acts 21:9). Finally, the whole book of Revelation is described as prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:19). Note the statement “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10) and the words of the angel, “I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets” (Rev. 22:9).⁶

What is the role of prophecy in the first generations of the Church? Paul writes to the Corinthians: “he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding (*oikodomēn*) and encouragement (*paraklēsin*) and consolation (*paramuthion*).” (1 Cor. 14:3). Does this statement refer only or mainly to those who prophesy but are not designated as prophets? It appears to present a much more limited role for the Christian prophet than for the prophets in Israel, for whom there was a role of social criticism, of admonishment, rebuke, and correction. Is the context in 1 Corinthians more domestic, a teaching for local gatherings of Christians rather than for the wider Church? However, *paraklēsis* in the New Testament suggests much more than nice encouraging and consoling words and was used to describe strong words of exhortation to communities undergoing persecution and martyrdom.

A key theological question for addressing the role of prophecy in the Christian Church is our understanding of **fulfilment**. Christian faith sees the person of Jesus Christ at the centre of history, as the Word of God who is the fullness of divine revelation and “in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). So the Second Vatican Council taught: “The Christian dispensation, therefore, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim 6:14 and Tit 2:13).”⁷

⁶ See also Rev. 10:7, 11; 11:3.

⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, para 4, cited in CCC, para. 66.

Does this mean that prophecy in the New Covenant era has a different character from that in the Old Testament, a less important role that is no longer decisive for shaping the future of the people of God? It seems that such a conclusion was often drawn in practice, shown by the lack of theological attention to the role of prophets and prophecy in the New Testament, and by the widespread Christian assumption that all Old Testament prophecy has already been fulfilled in the coming of the Christ.

In his major work *Vraie et Fausse Réforme dans l'Église*, Yves Congar wrote about prophetism in the Church: "The prophecy of the biblical prophets is structuring for the people of God, it provides its form of faith, and is situated at the service of the "economy" which leads in Jesus Christ to the constitution of the universal cause of salvation for humankind. Ecclesial prophecy is located in the order of the Church's life; it presupposes the Church structure and is only exercised within the limits of this structure."⁸ Congar then cites the distinction of St Thomas Aquinas in relation to prophecy between structure and life: the Old Testament concerned both – structure to establish the faith and life for moral correction – but in the Church there is only the latter as moral correction is always needed.⁹

Although Congar was a theological pioneer whose work on reform of the Church was not welcomed at the time,¹⁰ this treatment does not do full justice to the place of prophecy and prophets in the New Testament. The exclusion of any structuring role for New Testament prophecy hardly accords with the apostolic affirmation concerning "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20). What is

⁸ Yves M-J. Congar, *Vraie et Fausse Réforme dans l'Église* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1950), my translation. The original reads : « La prophétie des prophètes bibliques est structurante pour le peuple de Dieu, elle lui donne sa forme de foi, elle se situe dans le service de l'« économie » qui aboutit, en Jésus-Christ, à la constitution de la Cause universelle de salut pour les hommes. La prophétie du prophétisme ecclésial se situe dans l'ordre de la vie de l'Église; elle suppose donnée la structure de celle-ci et ne s'exerce que dans les limites de cette structure. » (p. 218).

⁹ See Congar, op. cit., p. 219.

¹⁰After the publication of True and False Reform in 1950, the Vatican banned any further printing of the book and any translations of it into foreign languages. This was why no English translation was made in the years following this book's publication. An English translation of parts of the book was published in 2010.

missing is the messianic and eschatological orientation of all prophecy and the orientation to the coming Kingdom of God. These were also missing from St Thomas' treatment of prophecy in the *Summa Theologica* which focuses on knowledge of divine things¹¹, so that the three kinds of truth are revealed to prophets: (i) things that can be known by natural means, but which are hidden from the prophet; (ii) supernatural truths only knowable by divine revelation; (iii) future events that cannot be naturally foreseen.¹²

I suggest that the distancing of the early Church from its roots in Israel aided by the problems arising from Montanism in the second century led to a weakening of the sense that the life and thinking of Jesus were oriented beyond the consummation of the cross to the eschatological fulfilment associated with his second coming. This question is often confused with the anticipation of an imminent fulfilment. But this consummation-orientation is there in Jesus whatever the conclusions about imminence. "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16).¹³

The polemic of Church Fathers against the Jews sought to prove that Jesus is the figure to whom all Old Testament prophecy pointed. This inadvertently contributed to a devaluation of prophecy in the New Testament era. For if all the promises are already fulfilled, then the Church is only living in the time of realized fulfilment and prophecy is at best recalling people to the existing fulfilment of the Old Testament promises in Christ.

A key question then becomes: How can the Church – how can Christian theologians – do full justice both to the fullness that is

¹¹ "Prophets have a deeper knowledge of divine things than any other men" (S. T. II – II, q. 173, a. 1, obj. 1).

¹² S. T. II-II, q. 171, a. 3.

¹³ See also "For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt. 23:39). "I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:29-30).

already realized in the first coming of Jesus and to the fullness that is promised for the eschatological completion (second coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, new heavens and a new earth)? The first fullness is grounded in the divinity of Jesus, in whom is all fullness - "For in him [Christ] the fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9) - while the second fullness is grounded in the economy of salvation that involves two comings of the Messiah/ Saviour - "so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." (Heb. 9:28). The two related fullnesses are at the heart of the mystery of Christ, that encompasses both his person and his mission. This tension resulting from the first fullness that reaches for the second fullness is indicated at the end of Ephesians 1: "and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Eph. 1:22-23).¹⁴

A holding together of these two forms of fullness requires a holding together in the New Testament era of the unity and coherence of the promises concerning a Messiah figure (a person), his mission, and his kingdom. There is a fullness in the Messiahhood of Jesus - "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36) - and there is a fullness in the realization of the Messianic reign of Jesus that is still to come. This question is relevant to prophecy in the New Testament era, for New Testament prophecy is as fully directed to the coming messianic completion as was Old Testament prophecy. In the book of Revelation, a voice from heaven declares "that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled." (Rev. 10:7). The context (seventh and last angel, coming fulfilment of the mystery of God) points to the second fullness, as is also suggested in the next chapter, "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying: The kingdom of the world

¹⁴ Is there a parallel here with the sufferings of Christ that are both complete (see Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27) and yet are to be completed (Col. 1:24)?

has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev. 11:15).

How is the function and character of New Testament prophecy shaped by the definitive teaching that the fullness of divine revelation is already given in the first coming of Christ for "Christ ... is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation"¹⁵? I am suggesting that this doctrine does not necessarily reduce the functions of prophecy in the New Testament as compared to Old Testament prophecy. It requires only that prophetic utterance in the age of the Church cannot add to the deposit of faith, and that it is controlled by the once and for all revelation in God's only begotten Son.¹⁶

The eschatological and messianic character of prophecy underpins its ecclesial nature. The "end-times" promises are given to the people with whom God has made covenant: Israel as people of God in the Old Testament, and the Church as people of God (not a substitute people, but the Church of Jews and Gentiles), that has become body of the Messiah (Christ) in the New Testament. Acts 3:18 – 26 is a key passage for understanding how the Jewish apostles reinterpreted the prophetic promises to Israel in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter's message cites the prophecies that have already been fulfilled ("that his Christ should suffer" Acts 3:18) and then speaks of the fulfilment of "all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" at "the time for "the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all things" (Acts 3:21).

This rehabilitation of prophecy in the New Testament era necessarily involves an appreciation of Jesus himself as prophet. Yes, Jesus is more than a prophet, but he is also prophet. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that "Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and by

¹⁵ *Dei Verbum*, para. 2.

¹⁶ In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit "will declare to you the things that are to come." (John 16:13).

the power of his word."¹⁷ During his earthly ministry, he acts in a charismatic manner led by the Holy Spirit, so that he is recognized as a prophet (see Matt. 16:14; 21:11; Mark 6:15; Luke 7:16,39; 24:19; John 6:14). Jesus heals, he gives prophetic words, he effects works of power. He can be said to be exercising the charisms that are listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10. But at the same time he acts to structure the future community of his disciples. In effect, he was giving the institutional dimension of the Church its basic shape, most obviously in the call of the Twelve, the role of Peter as leader of the Twelve, and the institution of the eucharist at the Last Supper with the command "Do this in memory of me." (Luke 22:19). After the resurrection, the Eleven are told to baptize (Matt. 28:19; see also Mark 16:16), and according to John, they are given the power to forgive sins (John 20:23). All is then enlivened by the Spirit of God that descends at Pentecost.

Jesus does not belong to the governmental structure of Israel. He does not come from the priestly tribe of Levi: "For it is evident that our Lord who descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests." (Heb. 7:14). But neither is he a trained rabbi. Even at the age of twelve, "all who heard him [in the temple] were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47). The people in Capernaum "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." (Mark 1:22). In other words, Jesus acted in a charismatic way outside the official structures of Israel. In this charismatic way, he fashioned the basic structure of what we know as the Church. But he fashioned the new structures in full respect of the heritage and calling of Israel. So he chooses twelve apostles, clearly because there are twelve tribes of Israel. It would seem in Matthew that the Twelve are to be the leaders of the Israel receiving him as Messiah: "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. 19:28; see also Luke 22:30). Likewise, the eucharist is

¹⁷ LG, 35.

fashioned from the celebration of the feast of Passover. Jesus gives instructions to prepare to celebrate Passover together: "Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?" (Luke 22:11).

I will return to this question of the relationship between the institutional and the charismatic. But here I note simply that we should really speak of the charismatic and the institutional, not the other way round, since the charismatic comes first. The call of the Twelve, the institution of the Eucharist, these are charismatic acts.

III. The Prophetic as a Key Element in the Larger Category of the Charismatic

In this dialogue, prophecy is being considered in the context of a longer reflection on the charisms. It may be helpful for the reflection on prophecy to make some general comments about charisms and from that foundation to return to the prophetic. At Pentecost 1998 Pope John Paul II made a remarkable statement: "Whenever the Spirit intervenes, he leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; he radically changes persons and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements." The pope went on to state: "The institutional and charismatic aspects are co-essential as it were to the Church's constitution."¹⁸ This suggests that these two elements are best understood in their distinction and mutual complementarity.

What are the differences between the institutional and the charismatic? I suggest that the institutional dimension of the Church comprises all those elements that are permanent, given from the foundation, without which there would simply be no Church framework at all. In this sense the institutional dimension is made up of the Word of God, the liturgy and the sacraments, including the basic structures of ministry within the Church. The institutional

¹⁸ Both sentences are cited from John Paul II's address to Ecclesial Movements and New Communities on May 30, 1998, para. 4.

should not be equated with the bureaucratic or the routine. By contrast, the charismatic element represents the unpredictable workings of the Holy Spirit that cannot be humanly planned or codified. "The *pneuma* blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." (John 3:8).

Thus there are two different yet complementary ways in which the Holy Spirit is given to and within the Church. One way is "institutional" (i.e. instituted), which still needs the Holy Spirit to become the vehicle of divine life. We see this from the epiclesis prayers in the eucharist, and in other sacramental rites, such as confirmation and the conferral of holy orders. The other way is "charismatic" and has the character of an outpouring, or an unexpected manifestation of God's working. John Paul II saw the new ecclesial movements and communities, whose representatives had gathered in Rome at Pentecost 1998, as evidence of this rediscovery of the charismatic dimension: "You, present here, are the tangible proof of this "outpouring" of the Spirit."¹⁹

One question that arises here is whether the charismatic dimension comes primarily from the ministry of the risen and ascended Lord and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This can be suggested by Eph. 4:8-11, where after the citation "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men" (4:8), he writes, "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers" (4:11).²⁰ Or is the charismatic dimension in Christian ministry in some way grounded in the sending out of the disciples by Jesus during his earthly ministry, when he told them "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Matt. 10:8)? In other words, do both the institutional and the charismatic dimensions have a foundation in the earthly ministry of Jesus, with their full empowerment at Pentecost following his ascension? Or is

¹⁹ Ibid., para. 5.

²⁰ This is an interpretation found among some new charismatic teachers affirming a contemporary ministry of apostles and prophets.

the institutional more rooted in the earthly ministry than the charismatic?

The charismatic dimension of the Church is wider than the exercise of charisms. I see at least three distinct manifestations of the charismatic in the history of the Catholic Church: (1) the regular exercise of Christian ministry and service in which the Holy Spirit is active without any element of unexpected irruption or outpouring; (2) the unexpected working of the Holy Spirit manifest in new initiatives within the Church, both personal and corporate (most evident in the origin and foundation of new religious orders and congregations, and more recently in the rise of new forms of community)²¹; (3) the manifestation of the spiritual gifts by which Christians can speak or act in a way that does not have its origin in themselves, but is received from the Lord;²² this is a “manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” in the sense that St Paul writes in 1 Cor. 12:7. In my understanding, the gifts called “spiritual” (*charismata pneumatika*) are distinctive within the wider category of charisms by being “manifestations of the Spirit” in this senses.²³ We might want to add a fourth category, the manifestation of the charismatic in Christian martyrdom. Teaching on martyrdom appears first in Catholic magisterial documents with John Paul II, who spoke of “the highest point of the life of grace, martyria unto death”.²⁴ Since martyrdom is the most total witness to Christ, made possible through the Holy Spirit, it necessarily has a striking charismatic and prophetic character.

²¹ The Council’s Decree on Religious Life presents the origins of forms of consecrated life in terms of inspiration by the Holy Spirit speaking of “a great variety of gifts” (*Perfectae Caritatis*, para. 1; see also para. 8).

²² This gift is described in the ICCRS document on Baptism in the Holy Spirit in this way: “Prophecy is speech inspired by the Spirit, communicating a message that is not one’s own but comes from God.” (p. 49).

²³ See 1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1.

²⁴ *Ut Unum Sint*, para. 84; see also *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), paras. 90-93. Very recently (May 25, 2014) Pope Francis mentioned an “ecumenism of suffering” in his message at the joint liturgy celebrated with Patriarch Bartholomew in Jerusalem: “When Christians of different confessions suffer together, side by side, and assist one another with fraternal charity, there is born an ecumenism of suffering, an ecumenism of blood, which proves particularly powerful not only for those situations in which it occurs, but also, by virtue of the communion of the saints, for the whole Church as well.”

Here it may be useful to reflect on the contribution of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church to the new awareness of the Church's charismatic dimension. Obviously, the greater attention given to the Holy Spirit reflects several influences, not least the witness of the Churches of the East, particularly during the Second Vatican Council, and the development of Catholic biblical scholarship.²⁵ But the specific attention now being given to charisms owes something to the Renewal movement. It is within the charismatic renewal that charisms are a constant feature of Christian life, and that the term enters into Catholic terminology. In 2008, Benedict XVI commented: "one of the positive elements and aspects of the Community of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is precisely their emphasis on the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit and their merit lies in having recalled their topicality in the Church."²⁶ I suggest that the manifestation of the pneumatic charisms (*charismata pneumatika*) most clearly manifests the character of the charismatic in a wider sense. In other words, without a regular presence and exercise of the spiritual gifts, any Christian communion is unlikely to have an adequate understanding of the charismatic dimension and to pay proper attention to the full range of charisms in its teaching and formation.

Applying this to prophecy, we can say that as the charismatic dimension of the Church is wider than the exercise of charisms, the prophetic dimension and role of the Church is wider than the exercise of the charism of prophecy. We can also say that the manifestation of prophecy in the charismatic renewal manifests the fundamental character of the prophetic to the wider Church, makes the Church more conscious of this dimension in her life, and purifies or corrects looser and less biblical attributions of prophetic qualities.

²⁵ It is instructive here to compare the two papal encyclicals on the Holy Spirit, *Divinum Illud Munus* of Leo XIII (1897) and *Dominum et Vivificantem* of John Paul II (1986) to see how much more biblical is the second.

²⁶ Address to Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, 31 October, 2008.

There are cogent reasons for seeing the prophetic as the most foundational element in the charismatic dimension of the Church. This “primacy” of the prophetic stems from the primacy of the Word. In Catholic life, this primacy is expressed in the fact that all liturgies begin with a liturgy of the Word. In the Council document on priests, the first task of the priest is to be a minister of the Word.²⁷ Here there is a recognition that faith comes from hearing the Word (see Rom. 10:17).

As the charismatic is related to the institutional, and the Holy Spirit to the Word of God, the exercise of the prophetic has a necessary relation to the liturgy of the Church. This relationship should not be reduced to the exercise of spiritual gifts within liturgical celebrations as easily happens. What is vital is that local communities of faith have a strong liturgical expression and are open to the charismatic. Where this is the case, the liturgy shapes the framework of understanding, helps to ensure its Trinitarian and Christocentric character, and grounds it in the church dispensation between the first and second comings of the Lord.²⁸ This is the most fundamental protection against group exaggeration of the charismatic and people being led astray by deviant words.

IV: The Exercise of Prophecy today: Pastoral Implications and Discernment

I ask now how the three aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit listed above apply to the prophetic work of the Spirit. If the charism of prophecy makes manifest the nature of the prophetic in a wider sense, then it may help to examine the three aspects in the reverse order, moving from the least specific to the most specific, from the more implicit to the most explicit.

The regular exercise of Christian ministry and service in which the Holy Spirit is active without any element of irruption or outpouring. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* teaches that “The holy

²⁷ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, para. 4.

²⁸ See CCC, para. 1076.

people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office."²⁹ Rather surprisingly, since prophecy is a "Word-gift", the Council did not relate this prophetic dimension to preaching the Word of God³⁰, though in the chapter on the Laity it is stated: "Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfils this prophetic office, not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also through the laity."³¹ The last part of this passage is cited in the Catechism of the Catholic Church under the heading "Participation in Christ's prophetic office"³². However, Benedict XVI wrote about the liturgical homily: "The faithful should be able to perceive clearly that the preacher has a compelling desire to present Christ, who must stand at the centre of every homily. For this reason preachers need to be in close and constant contact with the sacred text; they should prepare for the homily by meditation and prayer, so as to preach with conviction and passion."³³ This is virtually a commendation for a prophetic preaching in which the preacher receives illumination from the Holy Spirit.

In the same section of the Catechism we read: "Lay people also fulfil their prophetic mission by evangelization"³⁴. Evangelization belongs to this category of regular Christian witness, stemming from baptism, rather than being unexpected new initiatives of the Holy Spirit. Of course, there are instances where individuals are impelled by the Holy Spirit to evangelize a particular person or in a particular situation. But this illustrates the interaction between these forms of the Holy Spirit's activity rather than invalidating the categorization.

²⁹ LG, para. 12.

³⁰ However, the Catechism links the prophetic with proclamation in para. 1070. LG treats the *sensus fidelium* as sharing in the prophetic ministry of Christ (LG, para. 12; CCC, para. 904).

³¹ LG, para. 35.

³² CCC, para. 904.

³³ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), para. 59.

³⁴ CCC, para. 905.

In regular Catholic usage, particularly among the more educated and the most socially committed, the term “prophetic” is most commonly used in reference to bold statements and actions protesting against injustice, oppression and the current world (dis)order. This is a legitimate and proper usage when the bold utterances are coming from an identification with Christ and are accompanied by a vision of the coming kingdom of God. The constant insistence of Pope Francis on the special place of the poor in God’s people, what he calls “this divine preference”³⁵ has a prophetic dimension as a revelation of the heart of the Father that contests the established and received orders of society and Church.

The unexpected working of the Holy Spirit manifest in new initiatives within the Church, both personal and corporate. John Paul II and Benedict XVI clearly saw the rise of the new ecclesial movements and other new communities as a charismatic occurrence (see above). This is in fact a contemporary manifestation of the charismatic dimension of the Church of a long-standing pattern in Catholic life. The Council Decree on Religious Life had spoken of “very many institutes, clerical and lay ... endowed with gifts which vary according to the grace that is given to them.”³⁶ So the term “charism” has come to be used in relation to the distinctive gifts and callings of monastic and religious congregations, particularly of their founders. Such new foundations would always seem to have a prophetic dimension.

The manifestation of prophecy as a gift from on high. In the spiritual gift of prophecy Christians speak a message that does not have its origin in themselves, but is received from the Lord.³⁷ This exercise of prophecy as a regular element in Christian life is a particular characteristic of the charismatic renewal. What is distinctive about the charismatic renewal is the restoration of charisms as part of

³⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 198.

³⁶ *Perfectae Caritatis*, para. 8. This paragraph then cites 1 Cor. 12:4.

³⁷ This gift is described in the ICCRS document on Baptism in the Holy Spirit in this way: “Prophecy is speech inspired by the Spirit, communicating a message that is not one’s own but comes from God.” (p. 49).

God's equipment of the Church, their bestowal on ordinary Christians, and the expectation of prophetic words on a regular basis. In this context, Christians – both lay and ordained – speak a word or message that is presented as coming from God and not from their own minds or imaginations. I am not aware of the charism of prophecy being exercised in this way in any other Catholic circles. This raises the question as to whether this charism is in fact being exercised in other circles maybe without any conscious identification with the spiritual gift of 1 Cor. 12. But in fact through Church history, there are countless instances of prophetic words concerning the future spoken by holy people, many subsequently canonized.

It is this third category of prophetic utterances that raises the most pastoral questions. Since this is a spiritual gift given for the upbuilding of the body of Christ³⁸, it is to be welcomed with thanksgiving, as *Lumen Gentium* states.³⁹ This recognition suggests that pastors and others in leadership should encourage the emergence and exercise of prophecy. However, this raises the question as to how to encourage the prophetic, and whether people can be trained in the exercise of prophecy.⁴⁰ In the charismatic renewal, the reception of the spiritual gifts has been experienced as a consequence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ It is the deeper surrender of the person's mind, will and imagination to the Lordship of Jesus that makes possible this immersion in the Holy Spirit and the possibility of receiving impulses from God in their spirits. Is it possible to receive words from the Lord without such a human yielding, whether or not one speaks of a baptism in the Holy Spirit?

³⁸ "he who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Cor. 14:4).

³⁹ LG, para. 12.

⁴⁰ Some new charismatic churches train their members in receiving prophetic words and encouraging those who receive them to speak out.

⁴¹ "Baptism in the Spirit brings about the release of charisms, particularly the 'spiritual gifts' listed by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10." (*Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, a booklet published by ICCRS in Rome, 2012, p. 22).

My personal observation is that there is a direct correlation between depth of knowledge of the Scriptures and the depth of prophetic utterances. Prophetic utterances from people without a deep grounding in the Bible tend to be benign, sometimes manifesting a spiritual equivalent of political correctness. The somewhat stereotyped forms of prophetic words that are given in some charismatic groups may also reflect a very selective reading of Scripture, concentrating on what is personally comforting rather than on what is seriously disturbing. This point may throw light on why the use of prophecy in the charismatic renewal rarely seems to address the social ills of our day and to confront the sickness of the world with God's alternative vision. Maybe Pope Francis who is clearly at home with the worship patterns of the Renewal can be seen as exercising the spiritual gift of prophecy in many of his more penetrating observations on the Church and the world.

There is the need for discernment of spirits to ascertain whether the prophetic utterance is truly from God. In 1 Corinthians 12, the discernment of spirits is another of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:10). It is important for all in leadership to identify people who have received this gift. Often this is not done, because discernment is not a gift that attracts attention. Then it can be assumed, not necessarily correctly, that everyone in leadership roles has good discernment. But for discernment to be well exercised and to be truly received requires a level of spiritual formation beyond what is often found. This is probably the point to which it is most crucial for bishops and church leaders to attend.

In the process of discernment, it should not be assumed that a proposed or delivered utterance is 100% from God or 100% from other sources. It is often the case that someone genuinely receives some sense from the Lord, but then clothes it in ways that reflect their personal desires and emphases. Another instance of very human elements entering in is when people preface a prophetic utterance by some phrase like "Thus says the Lord." The urge to do this can come from insecurity and the fear that without this declaration the word may not be accepted or it can come from

authoritarian leaders. In either case, it can be a device to bypass discernment or to make it more difficult.

The members of charismatic groups often need instruction in distinguishing real words from the Lord from their own pious wishes. They can be told that having an idea to say some word can be checked against their personal prayers and regular conversation. When the proposed word is no different from their normal thoughts and desires, it is unlikely to be a real word from the Lord. It is not bad, it is a pious thought. The reason for this is the creativity and newness of the Holy Spirit, about which Pope Francis is often speaking.

A major question is how to take this gift of prophecy out beyond explicitly charismatic settings into the wider life of the Church. A possible way forward is to encourage the formation of groups of intercessors to pray for official church bodies, who then seek during their meetings to receive input from the intercessors. Such input does not have to be given a highly charismatic flavour, but it can be communicated that the intercessors have received the following impressions. My experience in meetings where this has been done is that the value of the intercessors' input is evident from its relevance to the meetings of the leaders and their agenda.

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