

PONTIFICIAE UNIVERSITATIS GREGORIANAE
FACULTAS THEOLOGIAE

The Problem of Christian Prophecy:

Its Preconditions, Function, and Status in the Church

Auctore

Niels Christian Hvidt

Excerpta ex dissertatione ad Doctoratum

In Facultate Theologiae

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Contents

1	<i>Introduction</i>	3
1.1	Thesis and Purpose	3
1.2	Limitation	6
1.3	Towards a Working Definition of Christian Prophecy	9
1.3.1	Motivation	16
1.3.2	Outline	22
2	<i>Prophecy and Tradition</i>	25
2.1	Christianity as Preliminary Stage of Salvation	28
2.1.1	Maximus the Confessor and Philipp Renczes, Prophets of the Telos	31
2.1.2	Hans Urs von Balthasar on Christianity and Eschatology	33
2.1.3	Joseph Ratzinger on Christianity's Hope of <i>The Kingdom to Come</i>	35
2.1.3.1	Prophets as Servants of Hope	36
2.1.4	John Zizioulas on Charismatic Apostolic Continuation	39
2.1.4.1	Historical Continuation	40
2.1.4.2	Synthesis of Horizontal and Charismatic Apostolic Authority	42
2.1.4.3	Charismatic Apostolic Authority	44
2.1.5	Conclusion	48
2.2	Prophetic Implementation of Revelation	52
2.2.1	Prophecy and Scripture	54
2.2.2	Prophecy and the Magisterium	55
2.2.3	Prophecy and Theology	59
2.2.3.1	Prophecy and Development of Dogma	60
2.2.3.2	Catalysing New Ideas	62
2.2.4	Confirming Dogmatic Development	64
2.2.5	Prophecy and Development of Pious Traditions	65
2.2.6	Prophecy, Liturgy, and Sacraments	65
2.2.7	Prophecy and Places of Pilgrimage	67
2.3	Conclusion	67

3	<i>Prophecy and Sociology</i>	69
3.1	Alessandro Toniolo's Reception of Victor Turner	72
3.2	The Communitas as Anti-structure	73
3.3	Necessity of Destruction for Recreation of Initial Perfection.	79
3.4	The Surety of a New Beginning and the Eschatological Tension	82
3.5	Towards the Heart of Faith	83
3.6	The Prophetic is in the Liminal	86
3.7	Wider Application of the Paradigm Limen to the Christian Context	92
3.8	Conclusion	95
	<i>Works Quoted</i>	97

1 Introduction

“Is there no prophet of the Lord here, through whom we may inquire of the Lord?” (2 Kings 3,4). These are the words of a King of ancient Israel who in frustration cried out for a prophetic word when he and his people found themselves in a threatening political situation. Prophecy was the means by which God guided and saved his people throughout the Old Testament, so that their well-being was directly dependent on his prophetic works that kept them in his grace, which they lost when the prophets were silent or silenced: “When there is no vision, the people get out of hand” (Pr 29,18).

But what happened with the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ? Did God withdraw for a long celestial holiday until the day when he will “come with the clouds of heaven?” (Mk 14,62). Or has he continued to guide, build, and save his church through the works of his servants the prophets, just as he did with the people of Israel?

1.1 Thesis and Purpose

The contention of this thesis is that prophecy, as known in ancient Israel, continued right down in the bosom of Christianity as an inherent and continuous feature and charism of the church. This idea is not generally accepted, as theologians have argued that prophecy died either with the last Old Testament canonical prophet, with John the Baptist, with Jesus, with the last apostle, with the closure of the Canon, with the rise of Montanism or with Islam. In his *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, which many scholars consider the best contemporary work on Christian prophecy, David Aune writes: “Christian prophets and prophecy were in a constant state of change and development from the earliest eschatological proph-

ecy within a millenarian setting of Palestinian Christianity to the final death rattle of prophecy with the rise and rejection of Montanism” (195).

Arguments adduced for prophecy’s “death rattle” have been both historical and theological. The purpose of this work is hence to prove by historical evidence and theological argument that the notion of prophecy’s end, despite its popularity, does not reflect Christian truth, and moreover that prophets have a vital role in the New Covenant. Dissenters from the traditional view state that prophets “form a major line of continuity between Israel, Judaism, and the church, both historically and theologically” (Boring 16-17); that “the history of the church is marked through and through by the fact of prophecy;” that the prophets “always possess a permanent and irreplaceable significance for the church” (Fisichella, *Prophecy* 788 & 795); and that “without this rebirth of prophecy, there would have been no Jesus movement, no Gospels, and thus no Christianity” (Sato 411). Ben Witherington has summarised this well:

[The prophets] stood as constant reminders that God was not finished with God’s people just yet, nor had God left them without a living witness. To a significant degree, both Judaism and Christianity can be called communities of the word, and one form in which the word often came to these communities was through prophets and prophetesses. They reminded them not merely that “in the beginning was the word” but also that God would have the last word (404).

According to this view, prophecy and prophets have always had a vital function in the church through which it continues to fulfill its potential for the salvation of mankind. However, during our work, we shall do more than demonstrate prophecy’s continuous Christian presence, for prophetic investigation leads to profound and often surprising insight into the very nature of Christianity and the church.

For example, some theologians have argued that Christianity represents a perfect state, and that salvation merely occurs in the world when people accept its doctrine as the truth. With the support of modern theological insights, this work will reveal that things are not so simple. Rather the thesis will show how Christianity is an intermediary state between the first and the second coming of Christ, and that the church in order to realize its potential is in constant need of the guidance and instruction of the ever-living Word, who never ceases sending his prophets to guide it and lead it towards its goal. The *telos* or aim of Christianity may be just as significant a guiding light for the church to fulfill its task as the *arché* or *point de départ*: Just as the Old Testament prophets kept hope in the coming Messiah alive, pointing to the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham and Moses, so the Christian prophets serve to keep Christ's promise to come again alive. In this way, Old Testament and Christian prophecy share a similar fundamental structure of building upon and serving a revealed normative salvation economy while promising the fulfilment of a yet greater economy in the future.

Phenomenologically, Old Testament and Christian prophecy are identical, as the same God reveals himself through both Old Testament and Christian prophets. Authentic Old Testament as well as Christian prophetic messages are the result of direct divine revelation and intervention and not of mere rational reflection. And both Old Testament and Christian prophets are authorised and ordered to forward the revealed Words to the people of God for their edification. Thus, their fundamental traits are identical.

However, theology has treated the two phenomena as completely different. While it has called Old Testament prophecy by its proper name, *prophecy*, it degraded Christian prophecy to terms such as *private revelations* or *epiphenomena of the*

mystical life that do not give enough credit to Christ's free choice of addressing his people for designs the importance of which only he is aware of. If the phenomenon is identical in both contexts of the Old Testament and the church, why do they receive such different treatment? Karl Rahner and others discern two reasons for this enigma. Firstly, from the beginning Christianity was marked by a platonic preference for a wordless and imageless faith to the detriment of a more prophetic and kerygmatic spirituality that he considers more authentically Christian than the former (Visionen 5). Secondly, Rahner believes the problem arises from what he calls "theological jealousy" towards the charismatic authority of prophets, an authority no theologian is able to overturn (Les révélations 507). Obviously, none of these reasons seem valid. If Christian prophecy is received in the same way as its Old Testament counterpart, why treat it differently? Why not call Christian prophecy by its proper name, and investigate its authentic theological value, place, and function in the church? The present work is a humble step toward this end.

1.2 Limitation

One of the problems with the notion of Christian prophecy is that it has been watered down. It has, as Fascher notes, become "ein Rahmenwort ohne konkreten Inhalt" (51). In secular life, the terms *prophecy*, *prophet* or *prophetic* are commonly used for protesters against globalisation, for visionary politicians who read the signs of the times, or for wives who see the treachery of their unfaithful husbands. In the Christian context something similar has happened, so that theologians apply the prophetic metaphorically to various scenarios in the church. In Lutheranism the prophetic category has—along the lines of the reformation *Munus*

profeticum, the prophetic criticism of Gospel-faithless Christianity—led to a notion of prophecy according to which the prophet *is* the protestant, the religious rebel, or just the inspired preacher of God’s word. Protestant Eugene Boring has well characterised this tendency:

Modern religious leaders who are suspicious of charismatic phenomena but want to claim the biblical prophets as their heroes can consider the essence of “prophetic” ministry to be championing the cause of the oppressed in the name of social justice, as in Protestant liberalism, or simply identify “prophecy” and “preaching with authority,” so that “every real preacher is a prophet,” as in some conservative streams of Protestantism (35, ref. to McGarvey 118).

Catholics, on the other hand, often apply the prophetic to the Spirit’s operations in and through the Magisterium, guaranteeing its infallibility charism or assuring that it mediates God’s truth through time. Thus Rahner talks about the general assistance of the Holy Spirit as a prophetic element (The Dynamic 40), just as the anthology of texts on Vatican II *Il concilio Vaticano II—Carisma e profezia* (edited by Tommaso Stenico) investigate the prophetic novelty of Vatican II. Similarly, the high quality anthology *Chiesa e profezia* (edited by Gianfranco Calabrese) features numerous applications of the prophetic term to the Christian context, without directly treating the prophets in the church, such as Bridget of Sweden and many others who preached directly revealed words of Christ in their times. In other contexts, the term is used for individuals who acted under the inspiration of the spirit, consciously or unconsciously. Thus John Conley and Joseph W. Koterski entitle their book on John Paul II *Prophecy and Diplomacy* and B. Häring calls Francis of Assisi the most important Christian prophet ever (912), although Francis never wrote down revealed messages as did the Old Testament

prophets. In the same way, Marianne Schlosser writes in her dissertation on Thomas Aquinas' treatises on prophecy that her main concern is to uncover prophecy's broader application to the prophetic vocation of every believer (10).

The prophetic category has also been applied to the wider context of the church which carries out a prophetic task for the world in forwarding God's word and ministering his salvation. This has been iterated by the Second Vatican Council, and is an accepted fact by most denominations, although Hans-Ruedi Weber is puzzled by "the strange lack of ecumenical reflection about the prophetic vocation of the Church" (218).

As Boring has pointed out, even New Testament scholarly works on prophecy are often weakly argued. Thus he criticises David Hill's *New Testament Prophecy* for using vague phrases such as "pastoral preaching" and "exhortatory teaching" for his working definition of prophecy which "allows him to designate Paul's sermon in Acts 13, all of Paul's letters, and the Letter to the Hebrews as 'prophecy'" (35-36). In his 1973 Oxford dissertation, Walter Houston uses "creative manipulator of traditions" as his working definition for prophecy. This leads him to consider both Matthew, Mark, and Luke to be prophets (282).

While wider applications of the prophetic category may have their contextual validity, they remain *applications* of the term, and not full treatments of the original phenomenon itself. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is not to treat Christian prophecy in its applied but in its immediate and original form. But what exactly is that?

1.3 Towards a Working Definition of Christian Prophecy

In order to be able to investigate prophecy both for its historical development and for its theological significance and function, we need to arrive at a working description of Christian prophecy. As the phenomenon of prophecy has undergone so many changes in different historical periods, it is not possible to deduce one uniform formula. Most New Testament scholars agree that it is possible to arrive at a description of prophecy as the New Testament portrays it, based on its origins in the Old Testament, and this is what we need, since Christian prophecy emerges directly from the function of prophecy in the early church. We will therefore briefly present the different attempts that have been made in modern exegesis to define New Testament prophecy. With this description, we then have the necessary tools to move beyond Scripture in our search for the phenomenon in the history of the church, whether it is labelled prophetic or not.

There are many approaches towards defining Christian prophecy. The first is the etymological approach that investigates the word for its original meaning. E. Fascher followed this approach to the word-group *prophet* in his very thorough *ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΣ, Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, published in 1927 and in this way managed to point out many traits of New Testament prophecy. However, it is important to keep in mind that the original meaning of the word *prophet* may not apply in New Testament times. A word means what it signifies in a given context, not what it signified originally.

Next, it is possible to look in a specific body of writings for all the occurrences of the word *prophet* and the variations of that word. This has the advantage of examining a phenomenon in its given setting and usage. The problem with this ap-

proach is that it is exclusive: There is no guarantee that all prophetic phenomena are linked to the word-group *prophet*, so a definition based only on the factual occurrences of the word itself risks missing prophetic phenomena that are not explicitly called as such. For example, there are many reasons why certain prophets will not call themselves prophets, even though they and their followers consider themselves to carry out the task of prophets. This applies especially to postcanonical prophecy, both Early Judean and Christian: History indicates a change in the attitude of the early church (and certainly after Montanism) whereby theologians ceased calling the phenomenon they so far had labelled prophecy by that same name.

If we are looking for the continuation of the prophetic tradition in the church, we therefore need to be able to identify it through its function, not merely its label. Hence, the best way to define the prophetic phenomenon is the phenomenological way—investigating prophecy's function in a given historical setting and distinguishing it from other offices in the church. If, however, there is no initial indication of what prophecy is all about it is impossible to arrive at a pragmatic description of prophecy, and this is why the phenomenological approach must begin with the etymological investigation those passages of Holy Scripture that refer to prophecy. By examining these passages that mention and describe the phenomenon itself, it is possible to use these hermeneutical keys to describe related phenomena not imbued with prophetic nomenclature.

Following this principle, Johannes Lindblom gave the following characterisation of the prophetic class among *homines religiosi*:

[Prophets] are entirely devoted, soul and body, to the divinity. They are inspired personalities who have the power to receive divine revelations. They act as

speakers and preachers who publicly announce what they have to say. They are compelled by higher powers and kept under divine constraint. The inspiration which they experience has a tendency to pass over into real ecstasy. One further attribute may be added: the special call. A prophet knows that he has never chosen his way himself: he has been chosen by the deity. He points to a particular experience in his life through which it has become clear to him that the deity has a special purpose with him and has designated him to perform a special mission (6)

In line with this principle, M. E. Boring gave his description of prophecy in his very valuable paper ‘ “What are we looking for?” Toward a Definition of the Term “Christian Prophet” ’ at the American Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Seminar on “Early Christian Prophecy” in 1973. According to Boring, “A prophet is an immediately inspired spokesman for the (or a) deity of a particular community, who receives revelations which he is impelled to deliver to the community” (147). In Boring’s view more than anything else *the mode and the origin* of the prophetic message is what characterises prophecy. But the prophet is not just a mystic who seeks the godhead and is in communion with him: the prophet is compelled to pass on his message, and this turns a ‘mere mystic’ into a prophet. Boring excludes self-induced means of obtaining prophetic messages but does not exclude the use of existing prophetic material in the formation of the message. He elaborates his definition in the following way:

The prophet presents all that he utters as a prophet as the immediately inspired present address of the deity to his community. This message may well include material taken from tradition and the prophet’s own reflection, consciously or unconsciously, with or without re-interpretation, but it is not presented as material which a past authority once said, but as what the deity now says. The same

material may be presented by the non-inspired teacher or preacher, but with the formal and functional difference that this claim to immediate inspiration is not made (What are we looking for? 149).

In a later publication, he continued his understanding of prophecy in the specifically Christian context. A prophet of the church is a “Christian who functions within the church as an immediately-inspired spokesman for the exalted Jesus, who receives intelligible revelations which he is impelled to deliver to the Christian community” (Ref. in D. Hill *New Testament Prophecy* , 7) and which he in his 1991 *The Continuing Voice of Jesus* rephrased one last time:

The early Christian prophet was an immediately inspired spokesperson for the risen Jesus, who received intelligible messages that he or she felt impelled to deliver to the Christian community or, as a representative of the community, to the general public (38).

With his definition, Boring explicitly excludes a number of related phenomena in early Christianity, which often are labelled with the term “prophetic.” Prophecy in the strict sense does *not* apply to the notion that the spirit-filled community consists of believers who, by the indwelling of the Spirit, are potential prophets. Nor does it apply to the general preaching ministry of the church. God can choose anyone he wants to be a prophet, but in order to be a full Christian prophet, a moment of divine commission is required. Only those who actually function as prophets are included by Boring in the prophetic category.

At the same above-mentioned seminar, David Aune delivered his definition of a Christian prophet:

The Christian who functions in the prophetic role (whether regularly, occasionally or temporarily) believes that he receives divine revelations in propositional

form which he customarily delivers in oral or written form to Christian individuals and / or groups (Ref. in D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* 7).

Boring is critical towards Aune's insistence that a prophet can deliver his message to individuals, as he very firmly holds the Christian prophet's audience as the community. But, if one understands Aune's "individuals" as individual members of that community, Boring's worries prove less compelling.

David Hill does not disagree with any of the above-mentioned definitions, however, he finds that they lack "any specific reference to 'call': it is implied by both scholars in their definitions, but, in our view, it requires explicit statement" (7). Conversely, Hill finds this expressed well in the above quoted definition of Johannes Lindblom. Furthermore, Hill finds Boring's insistence that "the Christian prophet functions as the 'spokesman for the exalted Jesus'... unnecessarily restrictive and may carry hidden presuppositions about the relation of prophetic words to 'oracles of the risen Lord' " (8), which is Boring's main thesis with regard to Christian prophecy, presented in his influential but disputed *Sayings of the risen Jesus* and *The Continuing Voice of Jesus*. In this respect he finds Aune's definition better.

As his own proposal, Hill gives the following definition of prophecy:

A Christian prophet is a Christian who functions within the church, occasionally or regularly, as a divinely called and divinely inspired speaker who receives intelligible and authoritative revelations or messages which he is impelled to deliver publicly, in oral or written form, to Christian individuals and / or the Christian community (8-9).

David Aune finds that Hill's definition is seriously lacking:

This definition will make it very difficult for Hill to distinguish among a prophet, an apostle, a preacher, and a teacher later on in his study, for he later observes that “the prophet is not the only leader in the church whose speech is inspired by the Spirit” (Hill 129) and that “it cannot be assumed that all inspired speech in the early Christian community emanated from prophets: were not ‘teachers’ and ‘evangelists’ also inspired by the Spirit” (Hill 167).

Aune’s criticism of Hill is valid, but this does not mean that the history-of-religion method employed by Hill and other scholars is wrong—only that Hill does not apply it consistently in his research. In fact, he deviates from this principle in the latter parts of his book, especially in his chapter on the presumed cessation of prophecy in early Christianity when he claims that teachers took over the prophetic vocation (190).

Most scholars agree that it is difficult to distinguish prophetic messages from other messages in the church, and although Aune dedicates most of his book to the identification and categorization of prophetic and oracular speech in Early Christianity, he admits that the oral or written product of a prophet alone is not enough to indicate that the prophet is indeed a prophet. Thus, for Boring, Aune, and others the ultimate characteristic trait of true prophecy is its *mode*: namely that it is derived from *experienced divine revelation* conferring divine commission. Thus Aune concludes his chapter “The Basic Feature of Early Christian Prophetic Speech:” by writing that “...the distinctive feature of prophetic speech was not so much its *content* or *form*, but its *supernatural origin*. Christian prophetic speech, then, is Christian discourse presented with divine legitimisation...” (338).

Like Aune, L. L. Grabbe sees in the revealed mode of prophecy its major characteristic trait: The prophet is a mediator who claims to receive messages directly from a divinity by various means, and communicates these messages to recipients” (83). Witherington agrees: “Divine revelation is a *sine qua non* of prophecy” (3) just as Robert Omara who in his recent Lateran dissertation infers from 1. Cor. 14.30 that prophecy involves “a sudden revelation at the moment—the Greek word is *apocalypsis*, revelation” (96). A prophet is one who has mystical experiences that provide his cognition and writing, and from this perspective a prophet is a mystic. Conversely, not every mystic is a prophet, for being a prophet requires more than mystical experiences, since the prophet has to pass on his message to the church for its edification. Already Thomas Aquinas knew of different applications of the prophetic term, yet he considered the highest realisation of prophecy to occur when the prophet was aware that God was addressing him directly through immediate revelation (ST II-II, 174,3).

Hence, visions, apparitions, locutions, and other means of divine communications are requirements for speaking of prophecy in the strict sense. These have often been grouped under the title of “private revelations” but as we shall see, the modern dynamic understanding of Revelation has confounded this notion which even within a doctrinal understanding of Revelation never managed to do justice to God’s prophetic appeal to his people. True Christian prophecy could never be a private affair for the person who mediates the message.

In dealing with the theological significance of Christian prophecy, it follows that it is very important to discern how prophecy relates to the prediction of future events. It has been commonly considered the main characteristic trait of Old Testament prophecy to predict Christ’s coming or in a limited way to reveal his truth.

If this is the only definition of prophecy's function, it follows logically that there can be no Christian prophets, since the fullness of Revelation was revealed in Christ and his coming would make the predictions of the Messiah futile. But 20th Century exegesis has rejected such limiting definitions of Old Testament prophecy. Old Testament prophets did much more than speak about the Messiah and give a foretaste of his doctrine. In fact, their main task was simply to speak the words that God inspired them to speak, and in general their words referred to their own generation's conversion and right observance of the Law of Yahweh. Likewise, Christian prophecy is about much more than prediction. Following his analysis of prophecy in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Omara concludes:

[Prophecy] does not necessarily mean a prediction of the future, for even in the O. T. the prophet was primarily the man who spoke the word of the Lord for the contemporary community—that is, what the community needed most to hear at this moment. Occasionally there were promises or threats about the future, but all these emerged out of a concern for hearing the word of God in the present moment and responding to it (96).

Summarising the debate between the various experts, we may conclude that a Christian prophet—whether labelled as such or not—is a Christian who, through experienced revelations, receives a message that he or she is directed to hand on to the church for its edification as part of a firm design in God's will to save, guide, and bless his people.

1.3.1 Motivation

As it shall be clear during the course of this work, prophecy never ceased in the Christian church but has continued to play a vital role, especially in the Catholic

tradition, and it is difficult to consider the Catholic Church without the prophetic tradition that has accompanied its entire history. Prophetic visions and divine instructions accompanied the founding of the vast majority of its religious orders. The same accounts for most pilgrimage sites, which usually gained their status after apparitions of the blessed Virgin or of an angel to a privileged soul (Saudrau 216ff). Much Catholic hagiography has eminent prophetic traits so that individuals such as Gertrude the Great, Catherine of Siena, Margaret Mary Alacoque, and Bridget of Sweden are seen as classic Christian prophets.

This proliferation of the prophetic charism in the church has not decreased over time; on the contrary, theologians such as René Laurentin speak of an “increase” of prophetic manifestations in our own time (The Apparitions 1) which John XXIII implored from God as the Second Pentecost.

Today—it seems—the prophetic voice is manifested more than ever before. Since the major Marian revelations of the last century—beginning with La Salette, Lourdes and Rue de Bac in France and Fatima in Portugal—Marian apparitions, mostly to children, have become more and more frequent. The Catholic authorities have recently recognised Banneux and Beaurain in Belgium. In the sixties the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared to four girls in Garabandal, Spain. In Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, she has reportedly been appearing to six children since the summer 1981, and thirty million believers have now visited Medjugorje.

The messages of Greek-Orthodox Vassula Rydén constitute another interesting example of possible contemporary Christian prophecy. Mrs. Rydén is reported to have received messages from Jesus and Mary since 1986. Her writings have re-

ceived enormous attention, so much so that the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1996 felt obliged to issue a warning to Catholic faithful not to take her words for more than private meditations. The prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger later defended the CDF's statement over against protesting theologians who proved the conformity of her writings to Catholic faith. The Cardinal stated that the case was not closed, that her messages were being studied, and that during this clarification process the faithful should be prudent and maintain a discerning attitude (The Problem 83). Nevertheless, the interest in her writings has been such that her messages, first published in 1991 under the title *True Life in God*, only nine years later were translated and published in 38 languages. Respected theologians have written over 20 books about Mrs. Rydén, and since her first public meeting in 1991, believers have invited her to give over 600 public lectures in over 58 nations. She receives no recompense for either books or travels.

Modern experiences as these motivate theological elaboration of prophecy, because they are proving to be a vigorous factor of contemporary church life. As prophecy itself continues to grow, the need for serious theological reflection increases. Since true prophecy always has and will be accompanied by its false counterpart, the need for criteria to "discern the spirits" grows as well. Such discernment is presented by New Testament authors as a gift of the Spirit, and as Aune has shown "there is a connection between the gift of prophecy and the gift of 'distinguishing between spirits,'" (220). But even though God provides his grace to facilitate discernment, prophetic messages are always judged in light of doctrinal investigation of its conformity to Scripture. Hence, a further motivation for this work is the pastoral need to identify criteria for the discernment of true

Christian prophecy. Only with this discernment is the church able to apply Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians today: "Do not stifle the Spirit or despise the gift of prophecy with contempt; test everything and hold on to what is good" (1. Thess. 5.19-21). Obviously, the discernment that Paul speaks about is twofold: Christians are called to be on guard against false prophets, and at the same time to make sure they do not judge and ultimately kill the true prophets (Lk 13,34 & Mt. 23,37-39). It is a serious matter: On one hand, history has shown that false prophecy can create true havoc in the church. On the other hand, judgement of obvious authentic prophetic gifts ultimately risks judging and rejecting the Holy Spirit. Thus, not without reason, the Didaché equates the rejection of true prophecy with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (13,10).

It is possible today to discern a difference between popular and academic approaches to the life of faith. "Popular spirituality" is easily moved and inspired by what theologians consider charismatic phenomena, both true and false, whereas theologians tend to remain aloof from such occurrences in the church. The dichotomy between popular, uneducated, charismatic spirituality and academic, rationalistic theology is thus easily drawn: the popular circle of believers tend to be *a priori* suspicious of the "close-minded" attitude of theologians, and theologians are contemptuous of the unreflected faithful for their affinity for what Rino Fisichella labels "forme meno impegnative per la fede" (Preface 8).

Antonio Gentili argues that the laity are greatly enriched by charisms in the church. Vatican II has once more made it clear that God is free to diffuse his gifts among his people, and that the experiences of the laity are important to the life of the church. While it is true that believers at times follow easy and often-false forms of faith, it is also true that the laity cannot live without the gifts of God.

God has various ways of mediating his life to his people, both through the institution, founded on the Biblical Revelation and through the free mediation of the Spirit of God. The latter is as important to the well-being of God's people as the former: "Le seconde rimandano all'insieme di doni che lo Spirito Santo suscita nei credenti e che offre alla Chiesa per il suo pieno sviluppo la sua trascendente bellezza" (234).

This is why Vittori Messori finds it a tremendous shame that theological and institutional authorities in the church are often prejudiced against prophetic gifts among God's people. Vatican II called the faithful to scrutinise and interpret the "signs of the times" in the light of the gospel, yet Gentili observes that these very signs "sono invece rimossi, quando non ridicolizzati, spesso proprio da chi più si è invaghito di quella espressione evangelica ("segni dei tempi") e ne ha fatto una bandiera per un cristianesimo "adulto" come lo chiamano" (9). Messori argues that the theological opposition to God's charisms in the church is such that it is dangerous for a writer to elaborate these issues that can be a mine-field (10). And yet he is convinced that this danger should be met with courage since theologians cannot ignore the true and actual context of the people of God in the 21st Century, and Messori believes that the spirituality of the laity has its justification and proper place in the church. Agreeing with Antonio Gentili, Messori even has the "coraggio di chiedersi se per caso non abbiano ragione gli "oscurantisti"; e se nel presunto "oscurantismo" dei segnali inquietanti che sembrano giungerci dal Mistero non ci sia forse da attingere la luce maggiore" (9).

The apparent dichotomy between "lay" and "religious" spiritualities (Gentili 13ff.) is regrettable, for the different 'spiritualities'—popular and academic—are in reciprocal need and should enrich rather than oppose each other. Even truly

divine charisms need theology to realize their full significance, while good catechesis should prevent false charismatic developments. Conversely, theology is in need of the prophetic, for as Ratzinger says, “the true and proper way from which great theology may again flow is not generated by the rational side of theological work but by a charismatic and prophetic thrust. And it is in this sense, I believe, that prophecy and theology go hand in glove” (The Problem 78). Gentili has summarised this interdependency between the charismatic and the institutional well:

le mediazioni istituzionali e quelle carismatiche sono del tutto compresenti e si integrano e arricchiscono a vicenda. Senza il supporto e la ratifica dell'istituzione, le mediazioni carismatiche si risolverebbero in arbitrio e... disordine, come apprendiamo dalle prime pagine della storia cristiana (cf 1. Cor. 12 e 14). Analogamente, senza l'apporto dei carismi, le mediazioni istituzionali si chiudono in una gestione routinaria e in una ripetitività formale di riti, dottrine e precetti (234).

Theological elaboration of the prophetic is therefore no luxurious occupation with a marginal phenomenon, but the elaboration of a vital fact in the life of the church, which thrusts the faithful toward more engaged forms of faith, and even acts as catalyst for theological progress.

As this has not always been considered possible, theology has basically ignored Christian prophecy as an academic issue. In fact, few theological issues have received such scarce attention. Therefore, the need for theological work on prophecy is not only pastoral but scientific as well.

1.3.2 Outline

Following the introduction, the second chapter of this thesis (Prophecy and Theology) will consider the theological elaboration of prophecy. Reasons shall be presented why the theme has been for so long in the dark and why only now most theological branches start bringing prophecy into the lamplight. If history could prove that there is no such phenomenon as prophecy in the church, then there would be no real problem to investigate theologically. The only way the prophetic category could make any sense would be by applying it analogously to elements in the church that it would seem to fit. Therefore, the third chapter of our study (Prophecy and History) shall investigate the historical development of prophecy and demonstrate that it did not cease but continuously recreated itself according to the needs of the church as it evolved. Having examined the existence of specific Christian prophecy, in the fourth chapter (Prophecy and Revelation) we shall investigate different models of revelation and the image they produce of prophecy. This investigation leads to the fifth chapter (Prophecy and End of Revelation) that deals with the much debated notion of the “end of Revelation with the last apostle” which has often been used to enforce the necessary end of prophecy. We shall see how today theologians consider the concept a theological artifice fitted for specific apologetic purposes, rather than a reflection of salvation history, although this discussion has gone for years and already Vatican II clearly avoids using the term “end”. With both theological, historical and sociological research, in the sixth chapter (Prophecy and Tradition) we shall see how prophecy has played a continuous role in Christianity by mediating God’s salvation attained in Christ for every new generation in the church. This especially accounts for the fruits of prophecy in the inner life of the church, which we shall

examine in the seventh chapter (Prophecy and Sociology). The results of prophecy's interaction with Tradition and the development of doctrine shall be summarised in the eighth chapter (Prophecy's Status and Types of Faith) where we shall examine the somewhat antiquated but still useful typology of faith, and how Christian prophecy fits into that system. Having thus identified the place and function of prophecy in the church, in the ninth chapter (Prophecy and Truth) we are, prior to the General Conclusion, ready to identify the criteria needed for discerning true from false prophecy in the church. These criteria are vital if Christian prophecy shall continue to have a role to play in the church.

2 Prophecy and Tradition

The maxim of faith that Christ is the full and perfect expression of Revelation's fullness and truth is the only valid starting point for discussing the relationship between prophecy and Tradition. All later revelations must be less full than the Incarnation but this does not mean that from a *material* point of view they have no relation to the Incarnation. For given the oneness of God, they basically express the same reality, and *every true prophetic revelation must stem from the same reality as Christ did*. The revelations that precede and those that follow are equally less perfect than the Incarnation, but they originate in the same mystery. Hence, *from a material point of view*, it makes little sense to speak of a growth of Revelation that should have ended with Christ. This has important implications on the quality of Christian Revelation, as prophecy expresses the same reality whether it occurs before or after Christ!

The Revelation in Christ thus becomes a maximum in God's Revelation in time that no revelations before or after can match; only the final coming of Christ will transcend the Incarnation, allowing all of creation to participate in the full life of the Trinity. But revelations both before and after Christ are from a material point of view equal in nature, equal in quality, vital to God's presence in history and to the growth of his kingdom. This is the limit and the place of prophecy from a material perspective. *If a prophetic revelation is a true revelation of Christ, it must from a material point have the same source and object as Tradition, namely Christ, and continue his mission.*

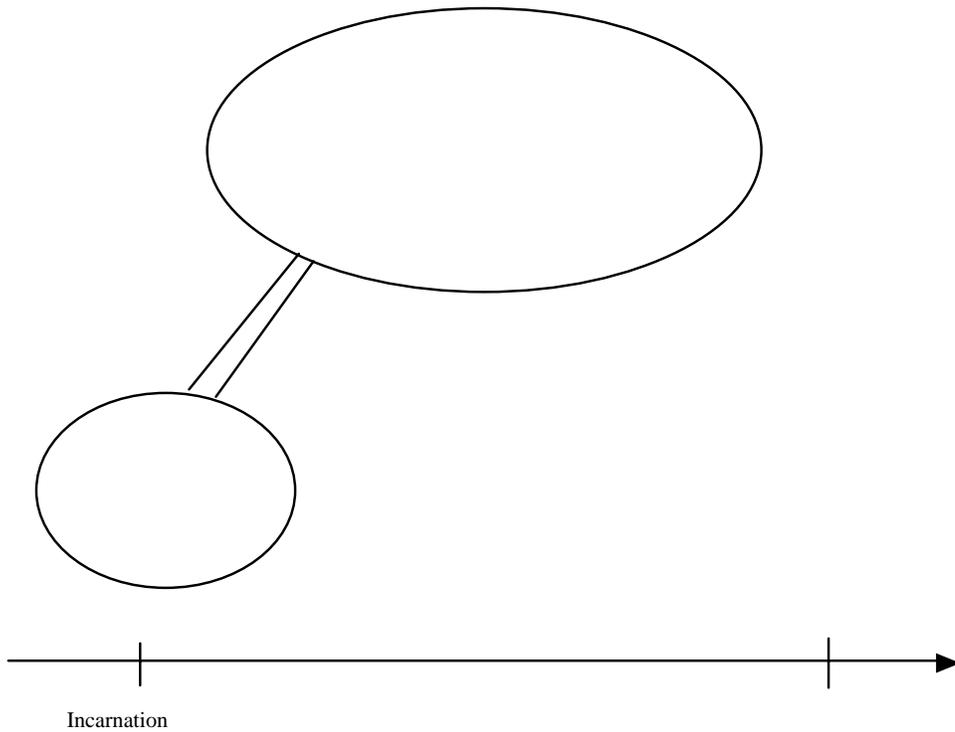
The second aspect that must be considered to clarify the transmission and actualisation of Revelation during history, is the formal. In order to be accessible to man, Revelation must have an expression and a form, before it can be received and bear fruit by the faithful. Even though Christ is the full Revelation of God

this would have little historical importance without its formal transmission and reception by humans. Revelation is not only Revelation *of* something or someone, it is Revelation *to* someone. On this, the formal level of Revelation that theologians also call Revelation *in acto secundo*, it makes no sense speaking of an end of Revelation, as Revelation continues to be transmitted in history. From the formal perspective there must be a continued growth in the knowledge and implementation of Revelation's truth. This growth begins with Man's first questions about his existence, is intensified through God's revelations to the Old Testament prophets, reaches a perfect realisation in Christ, but continues after his ascension until judgement day.

The *locus* of this transmission is the complex entity called Tradition, making out much more than the product of pious traditions and dogmas in the church. Just as the church is made out of more than the number of believers in it, as its soul is the Holy Spirit, so one could say that the Holy Spirit is the divine feature that out of the various traditions and doctrinal expressions, intending to cover Christ's truth, makes *Tradition* as Christ's continued heritage and presence in history.

The doctrinal approach to Revelation tended to summarise the transmission of Revelation with the sum of ecclesial doctrinal pronouncements paired with the multitude of traditions with a small "t." In the dynamic approach to Revelation, theologians such as Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Karl Rahner talk of Tradition with a capital "T," indicating the reality that in the dynamism of the Spirit transcends the sum of the individual traditions. Here, Tradition is seen less as the formulation and expression of the doctrine of faith than the life of faith that the Holy Spirit realises in the church. The traditions and Tradition are related, and yet it appears to be beneficial to discern between the two since they do

not coincide fully. Tradition with capital “T” could be synonymous for the transmission of Revelation and cover the reality of God’s Revelation as such. In Scripture and the ratified traditions the faithful discern the norm for the reality and expression of Tradition. The following figure illustrates this.



Tradition has a historical starting point, and it is evident that the traditions as historic realisation of the expressible aspects of Revelation belong to Tradition. However, the true transmission of Revelation powerfully transcends the sum of the traditions, as Tradition’s ontological and transcendent aspects *as well as prophecy*, continuously accompany Scripture and the many traditions. Revela-

tion's transmission in history is simply not only the transmission of a historical event, not only a description of what the Word did, but continues to be the expression of what the Word *does* and *who the Word is*, with Pottmeyer "ongoing self-transmission of the word of God in the Holy Spirit" (1123). Since the starting point of God's Revelation precisely is God's universal and constant will of salvation, God's continuous activity is so vital to the right understanding of Tradition that it cannot be conceived of without a truly prophetic element that includes the possibility and need for continued prophetic revelations. In order to be true transmission and *Vergegenwärtigung* of the mystery of the Word it must contain both horizontal and vertical elements; horizontal because it originates in a full salvific event in history, the event of Christ; vertical because the revealing activity of the Holy Spirit must continuously renew the church, if Tradition is to be a timely and plentiful expression of Revelation. In order not only to be a mechanical repetition of the first witnesses of Christ's Revelation of God, Tradition must be an expression of the same Revelation. *Tradition must be prophetic in order to be Tradition.* Understanding Tradition in this way has many theological implications, especially with regard to the understanding of the church and of Christendom as such that emerge not as perfect and final divine stages but the *most* perfect in the present world before the fulfilment of all things in the *World to Come*.

2.1 Christianity as Preliminary Stage of Salvation

In the following we shall examine Tradition's general prophetic charism and how Christianity is a preliminary stage towards its final fulfilment at the Second Coming of Christ. This we shall do by looking at the research of four theologians, who from their own particular perspectives have provided new insights in the na-

ture of Christianity on its way towards fulfilment. They all oppose the widespread opinion that Christianity is the fulfilment of God's purposes when in reality it is God's *already-but-not-yet-fully* and an intermediary stage between what Christ did at his first coming and what he will do when he returns.

Philipp Renczes shall show on the basis of Maximus the Confessor that the fundamental structure of Christianity is directed not by the beginning but by the end. This applies especially to the sanctification and salvation of the individual. Balthasar shares this view amongst others in his *Pneuma und Institution* and broadens it to the ecclesiological realm by looking at the end not mainly of the individual but of the church as a whole, while Ratzinger gives further conclusions on the Christian structure as such and its continuous need for becoming what it potentially is, a need that cannot be fulfilled without the Christian prophets. This eschatological outlook on Christianity shall be paired by an examination of where the fullness of Revelation in Tradition comes from. Here we shall look at a patristic theory, received and re-proposed by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, who believes that Tradition draws its dynamic power not only from the fullness of the Christ-event 2000 years ago but that it lives already now in the dynamism of the eschaton, participating through the Eucharist in the glory of the Kingdom to come.

On the basis of this appreciation of Christianity as a non-closed and non-static reality but the people of God going towards its "telos," we are then ready to examine the different instances (*loci*) through which God actualises and realises Revelation in history. We shall see how prophecy relates to all of these, partly because in their very structure they are charismatic expressions of God's action

and truth, partly because prophetic revelations were powerful vehicles of God's direct intervention through all the *loci* during the entire history of the church.

Powerful currents of Christian theology have seen a radical difference between Judaism and Christianity. Theologians of this persuasion saw the Incarnation and Jesus' redemptive death on the Cross to be such a complete and final salvific event that they considered it the ultimate peak of redemption. This leads them to various conclusions: While Judaism was a preliminary state, Christianity was final. While Judaism was constantly imbued with a radical structure of hope anticipating the coming Messiah, Christianity would always look backwards at Christ Incarnate as the Messiah who has already come. And while Judaism constantly needed prophets to keep the hope in the coming salvation alive, Christianity no longer needed prophets, because the hope of the coming Messiah had been exchanged for an already fulfilled salvation. As Wayne Grudem shows, this opinion has been particularly diffused amongst protestant theologians of the Cessationist School (The Gift 228 ff.).

This view has encountered serious theological opposition in recent years with many qualified publications that seek to correct it. Many factors have led to these corrective approaches, mainly post Vatican II developments in Revelation theology where God's revelatory activity is more than a revelation of sentences which only need to be handed down from generation to generation. Revelation is now seen as the salvation of God that the church shares through the redemptive works of Christ not by mere *anamnesis* of Christ's passion but also by a continuous ontological participation in the reality of the Word of God.

2.1.1 Maximus the Confessor and Philipp Renczes, Prophets of the Telos

Philipp Renczes provides in his 1999 Sorbonne and Institute Catholique Dissertation *L'agir de Dieu et la liberté de l'homme* a valuable and high quality reception of Maximus the Confessor, a father of the church, who has experienced a renaissance in recent years. Renczes writes about Maximus' synthetic approaches to the often-difficult theology of Grace, in particular with regard to the interaction of God's grace and man's action. He shows that while insisting on the importance of man's origin, Maximus is more interested in his end or final destiny in God, as man because of the fall no-longer can know his *origin*, only his *end* in God:

...l'homme en tant qu'inscrit dans un mouvement ($\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$) orienté par un principe ($\dot{\iota}\rho\alpha$) et une fin ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$) n'a plus accès, selon le Confesseur, au niveau de sa connaissance, à ce qui constitue ontologiquement le principe de son ouverture à Dieu ($\dot{\iota}\rho\alpha$), c'est-à-dire à son origine en tant que cause efficiente, dans la mesure où la condition humaine, imprégnée par la « faute d'Adam » perçoit son origine comme étant irrémédiablement perdue, ne lui laissant désormais la possibilité de la retrouver que dans sa fin ! (199).

Maximus writes this himself, distinguishing between searching and re-searching where “le chercher est naturellement de l'ordre du principe ($\pi\rho\delta\ \tau\acute{\iota}\nu\ \dot{\iota}\rho\alpha$) et le re-chercher de l'ordre de la fin ($\pi\rho\delta\ \tau\omicron\ \tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$)” (Renczes 200):

Car après la transgression [le péché d'Adam], la fin ne se montre plus à partir du principe, mais le principe à partir de la fin ni personne ne cherche plus les raisons du principe ($\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \tau\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma\ \dot{\iota}\rho\alpha\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma\ \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$), mais on recherche les raisons

qui amènent ceux qui se meuvent vers la fin (τοὺς πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοὺς
κινουμένους ἰπάγοντας) (Maximus Thal. 59, ref. in Renczes 200).

Man moves towards his goal—this divinisation in which God becomes himself in man. In reference to time, it occurs eminently after man’s death but also already now during his earthly life by the works of the Holy Spirit through which God continuously confers himself to man. This union is possible through the mystery of the ontological unicity of the “en-deçà” and the “au-delà” of man’s existence. As we shall see with Balthasar and Zizioulas, this relationship between man’s earthly and eternal life is not one where the eschatological life begins simply when the earthly ends. Both occur simultaneously in the present through man’s participation in God, and no human life can be conceived without the spark of God’s life, as “la divinisation est assuré par la finalité inhérente à celle-ci qui caractérise de toutes les façons la condition humaine, orientant son mouvement vers Dieu, l’accomplissement de tout agir” (Renczes 202).

In his innermost being, man is orientated towards his fulfilment which does not simply equate the reception and implementation of his origin. It occurs through his anticipation of and participation in the divine life that Christ conquered and made accessible to man through his death and resurrection, and that he will fulfil completely in the Eschaton. In the same way, the Fathers of the church knew that creation’s fulfilment in Christ’s return would be a more perfect state than that of Paradise as the world had merited Christ as its Saviour. In this way, the fate of every individual is analogous to that of creation as such. In the following, we shall see how Balthasar has reflected upon this.

2.1.2 Hans Urs von Balthasar on Christianity and Eschatology

Hans Urs von Balthasar laments the lack of serious theological reflection on the eschatological hopes of Christianity. He observes that the theological issue of eschatology has been so watered down that it has lost the radical hope of creation's ultimate fulfilment at the end of time. In its weaker reinterpretation, the end of time means the general period of Christian salvation announced and initiated with the Christ-event. It could even mean creation as such, for how is it possible to conceive of a God creating a world, if he did not have a plan of salvation for it? God does have a plan of salvation, and in this sense the entire history of humankind is one of salvation history. This entire history of God with man has been called the eschatological realm, since it implies God is leading creation towards its goal of resembling evermore the eschatological kingdom of God. While Balthasar does not directly oppose such views, he nevertheless considers them to be metaphorical applications of the eschatological category. As a counterbalance to these wider applications, Balthasar ventures to present eschatology as it was conceived in the strict sense by the Fathers of the church and as it is required by Christians that wish to keep the radical hope of God's ultimate salvific goal alive. Without referring to Maximus on whom Balthasar wrote, he agreed with the Confessor's conviction that man's end is more important than his origin, although the two are ontologically related:

“Omega” ist nur vom “Alpha” her verständlich, beide sind im Heilsratschluß Gottes eins, Eschatologie ist die Mündung der Protologie und ohne diese nicht darstellbar... [so daß] die letzte Wegstrecke innerlich den ganzen durchlaufenen Weg, dessen Bedingungen und Gesetze in sich schließt, ja ihn gerade im

Münden erst in seinem von Anfang an gemeinten Sinn zur Erscheinung bringt (Pneuma 410).

Along the lines of classical eschatology, Balthasar presents the two instances through which creatures go into the eschatological realm. One entrance occurs in relation with the individual, also called first judgement, following upon a person's death. The second occurs with the general, also called final judgement, occurring at the end of history, when "the Son of Man will come on the clouds of Heaven." Balthasar reflects at length on the difference between these two kinds of judgement, on the role and features of the Judge, on the person being judged, and on the nature and blessed reality of the eschatological life. But of Balthasar's eschatological reflections the most important to our theme are those on the fate of creation as such, on what it is now and on what it shall be. Already now, Balthasar writes, creation lives in the eternal and limitless life of the Eschaton:

In diesem Schlichten, wenn auch oft sehr schwierigen Vorziehen des göttlichen Willens, einem Gewährenlassen in dem unsrigen, vollzieht sich schon im sterblichen Leben das Zentrale, was das Wesen des ewigen sein wird, und zwar viel zentraler, als dies etwa durch eigenmächtigen Versenkungsübungen... und vermeintliche Einigungserfahrungen mit Gott erreichbar ist (Pneuma 427).

The shift from this world to the Eschaton is not one of linear sequence where one continues at the "zu Ende gelaufenen Geschichtszeit" but reigns in "einer dieser gegenüber inkommensurablen Dimension" (Pneuma 445). This world and the *World to Come* are ontologically linked in the mystery of the church that unifies "Endgültigkeit und Vorläufigkeit" (Pneuma 446) and where time is less important than God's on earth, as Christ swallowed up time in his death. There is a direct ontological link between God's life in the church today and life in the *World*

to Come, whereby the church's divine life today does not come from mere reception of a perfect doctrine but from the church's participation in the Eschaton that the church foretastes already now. Thus Balthasar believes that

der Neue Äon nicht chronologisch an den Alten anschließt, sondern, ihm inkommensurabel, wie im rechten Winkel daraus entspringt. Und daß die Existenz im Übergang nicht, wie in den Religionen der Sehnsucht nach dem Absoluten, eine Flucht aus der Zeit ist...sondern Existenz innerhalb der Existenz Christi, der wie kein anderer die Verantwortung für die gesamte Zeitlichkeit auf sich genommen und bis zum Paschamysterium durchgestanden hat (Pneuma 451).

The Christian church exists after the death of Christ but anticipates and shares the glory of his second coming, it reigns in the “Äonenwende zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern” (Pneuma 452). Ratzinger agrees with these perspectives on Christianity.

2.1.3 Joseph Ratzinger on Christianity's Hope of *The Kingdom to Come*

In spite of frequent accusations of being merely a conservative theologian, Ratzinger in various publications has displayed an appreciation of Christianity that, while retaining Revelation's cognitive aspects, portrays Christianity as awaiting the Spirit's ongoing activities and Christ's final redemptive works in his second coming. Like Balthasar, Ratzinger laments the lack of serious theological reflections on eschatology. In my interview with him, entitled “Christianity always carries within it a structure of hope—the Problem of Christian Prophecy,” Ratzinger gives crystal-clear expression to this outlook on the church. His considerations on the nature of Christianity and the conclusions they lend to the role

of prophets deserve particular attention. Ratzinger clearly rejects the idea that prophecy should have ended with the fulfilment of Revelation:

There is a thesis whereby the fulfilment of Revelation marked the end of all prophecy. I think this thesis harbours a double misunderstanding. First of all, it harbours the idea that the prophet, who is essentially associated with the dimension of hope, has no further function for no other reason than Christ is now with us so that hope has given way to presence. This is an error, because Christ came in the flesh and then rose again 'in the Holy Spirit.' This new presence of Christ in history, in the sacrament, in the Word, in the life of the church, in the heart of every man is the expression and beginning of the definitive advent of Christ who 'fills all things' (Eph. 2,20; 4,11). This means that Christianity always tends towards the Lord who comes, in an interior movement. This still happens now though in a different way because Christ is already here. However, Christianity always carries a structure of hope within it... The New Testament has a different structure of hope within it but it is still always a radical structure of hope (Christianity 75).

Ratzinger refers to the Eucharist as the primary place in which this eschatological dimension is realised, as it represents the whole church going towards the Lord who comes.

2.1.3.1 Prophets as Servants of Hope

This openness of Christianity moving towards the coming Lord means that the church will always grow in the fullness of Christ. Ratzinger believes that

the coming of Christ is the beginning of an ever-deepening knowledge and of a gradual discovery of what, in the Logos, is being given. Thus, a new way is inaugurated of leading man into the whole truth, as Jesus puts it in the Gospel of

John when he says that the Holy Spirit will come down (John 16,13). I believe that the pneumatological Christology of Jesus' leave-taking discourse is very important to our theme given that Christ explains that his coming in the flesh was just a first step. The real coming will happen when Christ is no longer bound to a place or to a body locally limited but when he comes to all of us in the Spirit as the Risen One, so that entering into the truth may also acquire more and more profundity (Ibid.).

Because this is so, Ratzinger believes Christianity to be constantly imbued with a general prophetic dimension which not only allows for but needs the works of concrete prophets as those who point to and carry out the hope-dimension of Christianity: "It seems clear to me that—considering that the time of the church, that is, the time when Christ comes to us in Spirit is determined by this very pneumatological Christology—the prophetic element, as element of hope and appeal, cannot naturally be lacking or allowed to fade away" (Christianity 75-76). Radicalising the difference between the Old and the New Covenants is an error that the Fathers of the church knew to avoid:

They proposed a tripartite schema, "umbra, imago, veritas," in which the New Testament is the *imago*. Thus, the Old and New Testaments are not set in opposition to one another as shadow and reality but, within the triad of shadow, image and reality, the expectation of the definitive fulfilment is kept alive and the time of the New Testament, the time of the church is seen as an ulterior plane, a more elevated one but still on the pathway of the promise. This is a point which to date, it seems to me, has not been given sufficient consideration. The Fathers of the church stressed with force the intermediate nature of the New Testament in which not all the promises have been fulfilled yet. Christ came in the flesh, but the church still awaits his full Revelation in glory (Christianity 81).

Ratzinger believes that the “unfinished state of Christianity” is a theological issue that has been seriously underdeveloped with surprisingly grave results, leading to both theological and ideological faulty developments that have damaged the world:

It is of extreme importance to specify in which sense Christianity is the fulfilment of the promise and in which sense it is not. I believe that there is a close tie between the current crisis of faith and the insufficient clarification of this question. There are three inherent dangers here. The first is that the promises of the Old Testament and the expectation of the salvation of men are seen only in an immanent way in the sense of new and better structures, of perfect effectiveness. Conceived in this way, Christianity proves to be just a defeat. From this basic perspective, there has been an attempt to replace Christianity with ideologies of faith in progress and then with ideologies of hope which are just variations of Marxism. The second danger is to see Christianity as something solely associated with the afterlife, something purely spiritual and individualistic thus negating the totality of the human reality. The third danger, particularly menacing at times of crisis and historical turning points, is to take refuge in infatuations with things apocalyptic. In opposition to all of this, it is increasingly urgent that the authentic structure of promise and fulfilment inherent in the Christian faith is presented in a comprehensible and liveable way (Ibid.).

With these fundamental conclusions on the nature of Christianity, Ratzinger is then able to explain how he conceives the working of concrete historical prophets:

The prophets are the ones who bring out Christianity’s dimension of hope. They are the channels of access to what must still come to pass and, therefore, allowing us to go beyond time to attain what is essential and definitive. This eschato-

logical character, this thrust to go beyond time, is certainly part of the prophetic spirituality (Ibid.).

2.1.4 John Zizioulas on Charismatic Apostolic Continuation

Like Ratzinger and Balthasar, Zizioulas also proposes a Christian economy of salvation that continues after the groundbreaking Christ-event. The Christian life is not realised only through an anamnestic movement backward in time. Rather, Zizioulas revivifies an ancient Eastern tradition according to which Christianity reigns in the power of the *Eschaton*, the *World to Come*, continuously expressed, realised and made accessible in the Eucharist. Zizioulas knows this as the Biblical view:

As all Biblical scholars know the anamnesis of which the Bible speaks, above all in relation to the Eucharist, is not only an anamnesis of the past but also, if not mainly, the remembrance of the future, of the last days of the eschatological state of the church and the world (164).

Zizioulas proposed this view poignantly during a lecture at the 1995 conference “Apostolic Succession and Continuity” at the *Centro pro Unione* in Rome. The aim of the conference was to examine from an ecumenical viewpoint the problems that theologians from different traditions face when trying to come to grips with the complex issue of apostolic continuity: how the church realises the reality to which the apostles were primary witnesses and that the church continues in time. This issue that Zizioulas rightly calls “thorny and divisive” may be the most tricky of all remaining ecumenical questions and one that is likely to continue long after the problem of justification causing the Western schism has been settled. And yet, Zizioulas believes that because the ancient church reveals a “diver-

sity of approaches” to the problem, presenting them may be a way of solving the issue (152).

Delving into the diversity of ancient church approaches to the problem not only aids ecumenical advancement. It sheds light on the complex nature of Christianity itself, proving that the church realises salvation simultaneously by looking back to the faith and the teaching of the apostles in a historical, horizontal way and by receiving it directly from the Word Himself through an ontological participation in the eschatological kingdom (153).

2.1.4.1 Historical Continuation

The first approach to Apostolic Continuation is that of a linear development which highlights the historical succession of faith from the apostles. It is the notion that by far has most influenced theology:

In speaking of continuity and succession we normally have in mind a linear historical sequence coming to us from the past to the present and involving the psychology of a retrospective anamnesis. This is in line with our typical cultural formation influenced as it is by Greek, especial Platonic, thought in which remembrance or “anamnesis” can only refer to the past (164).

The apostles are “regarded as *missionaries* sent by Christ to preach the Gospel, ordain ministers and establish churches” (153). This means that the church historically derives from the work and tradition of the apostles, and this gave birth to the notion of apostolic succession according to the following schema: “God sends Christ \Rightarrow Christ sends the apostles \Rightarrow the apostles transmit the Gospel and establish churches and ministries” (154). Scripture echoes this linear view in several

passages, for instance in Jn 20,21; Lk 10,16; Mt 28,18-20; Rm 10,13-17; 2 Tm 2,2 and Tt 1,5.

The linear approach continues in the early church, where *1 Clement* (95 AD), says that the apostles established bishops and deacons in the various cities (42,2-4) and later explains why:

Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be quarrels concerning the ministry of *episkopé*. For this reason they... established the aforementioned (ministers) and made provisions that when these die other worthy men should succeed their ministry” (44,1-2—Zizioulas’s translation).

This notion builds on the driving force of historic continuity: “Historicity, dispersion and mission constitute the fundamental ecclesiological presuppositions of this conception of apostolic succession” (154). To our theme of Christian prophecy it is very important to understand the philosophy that underpins this view. Zizioulas writes that it grows out of the Jewish concept of *shaliach*, that is of *vicariousness* or *representation* containing the notion of the “plenipotential,” that Zizioulas summarises as being carried by “someone invested with authority to represent someone fully and in all matters” (154-155). The bishops in the church represent the apostles and thereby are able authoritatively to make present and confer to the faithful the faith reality that the apostles attained in their life with Christ.

Cyprian amplified this tradition decisively, in particular through his insistence that the church is based on the *cathedra Petri*. Against Fr. Afanassieff, Zizioulas argues that Cyprian does not propose a universalistic ecclesiology, since he “understands the ‘*cathedra Petri*’ not in relation to the church universal but to *every*

local church headed by a bishop” (156-157, ref. to Cyprian’s *Epistle* 69 (66) 5; 43 (40) 5 and *De ecclesiae unitate* 4). Nevertheless, Cyprian identifies the bishop “fully and exclusively with the office of the apostle” (157). Cyprian says this explicitly: “apostolus id est episcopus” (*Epistle* 3:3). With this, apostolic continuity and succession became a matter of transmitting a historical tradition, handed down from generation to generation and from bishop to bishop in a linear historical movement, which eventually won the day, especially in the West as well as in Orthodox academic theology (157).

If this were the only notion of succession of the reality of faith that the ancient church knew of, then the prophet would indeed be ill-fated in Christianity. For if the successors of the apostles, the bishops in union around Peter, the Pope, were able fully to transmit the apostolic reality to their subordinates so effectively that it would be lived out fully, then there would indeed be no more need for prophets. They would mean a continuous challenge to the hierarchy’s unique authority and transmission of divine life, but this historical-horizontal notion of actualising the Christian life anew was not unique in the Bible nor in the ancient church.

2.1.4.2 Synthesis of Horizontal and Charismatic Apostolic Authority

Already Hippolytus and Irenaeus are able to present a more diversified view of apostolic continuity where they synthesise the view of linear succession of authority from the apostles with a Christ-based *shaliach*, a “*Christological* view of succession, i.e. with the belief that succession perpetuates and affirms also the presence of Christ as head of the community, especially in its eucharistic form” (156). Even though Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* is from the beginning of the 3rd century, Harnack argues that it builds on traditions and ecclesiologies from the

middle of the 2nd century (225). As Zizioulas shows, this document reveals that “Hippolytus—and the church of his time?—thinks of the bishop simultaneously as *alter Christus* and *alter apostolus*.” This is visible in the prayer of ordination to the episcopate, contained in the *Apostolic Tradition*. Here God is asked to:

- (a) give the ordained bishop the “princely Spirit” which according to Psalm 51,14 was given to Christ, thus making him an “image of Christ” or one acting in *persona Christi*, and (b) “the authority You [God] gave to the apostles,” i.e. making him *alter apostolus*” (155).

The bishop succeeds Christ as the one who offers the Eucharist “while his capacity as *apostolus* relates to his power to “bind and lose” sinners and teach the people” (156).

Battling against the Gnostics who claimed a secret source of divine teaching, Irenaeus is particularly known for insisting that the church obtains its authority through historical succession from the apostles. However, it is wrong to conceive Irenaeus solely as a spokesman for mere horizontal authority, for although the true doctrine that Irenaeus proposes goes back to the apostles, it remains the expression of a present, ontological relationship with the resurrected Christ. The continuous realisation of this union between inherited faith and its lived realisation occurs in the Eucharist. This is how Irenaeus is able to say: “Our opinion ..., i.e. faith or doctrine, agrees with our Eucharist and our Eucharist agrees with our faith” (*Adv. Haer. IV, 18,5*). Irenaeus combines apostolic Tradition as the linear representation of Christ-given authority with a notion of charismatic re-actualisation of the Christ-reality through the Eucharist.

2.1.4.3 Charismatic Apostolic Authority

The insistence on direct Christ-given authority in the vertical realisation of the Christian faith increases in the East, in particular in Ignatius of Antioch. Zizioulas observes limited interest for Ignatius of Antioch in historical and dogmatic studies on succession (158). One could think this to be because he does not express himself on the matter, but the contrary proves to be the case. Ignatius has much to say on apostolic succession, only it does not “fit our classical view of succession” as known in the West (158). If 1 Clement and Cyprian knew of a horizontal succession of authority from the apostles only, and Hyppolytus and Irenaeus knew of a synthesis between horizontal and vertical authority, then Ignatius is a spokesman mainly of the christological *shaliach* and its consequent vertical understanding of authority. In fact, Ignatius does not connect the bishop with the office of the apostles. Instead he proposes a eucharistic view of the church. To Ignatius, the “continuity of the church is not realised through *historical* continuity...but through the gathering of the faithful for the celebration of the Eucharist” (158). The Eucharist is the place in which the Christian faith is actualised and empowered anew. It is an empowerment that the church receives not only by re-enacting the Eucharist celebrated by Christ while on earth. Rather, the Eucharist is a direct participation in the Eschatological reality, as Ignatius sees the image of the eschatological community in the eucharistic gathering, that is a remembrance of the future! Zizioulas reflects well upon this apparent paradox by referring to his own Orthodox tradition:

This means that for him [Ignatius] the church’s continuity passes through the experience of the eschata and not through the retrospective reference to the past. This is a continuity involving a *remembrance of the future* such as the Liturgy of

St. John Chrysostom that we celebrate in the Orthodox Church has in mind when it says in the Anaphora that we remember not only Christ's death, resurrection etc., but also "His second coming." It sounds, of course, very strange to "remember" something that has not yet taken place. Just as it is strange to speak of succession and continuity to us not from the past but from the future, the eschaton. And yet this is what a eucharistic view of the church involves. Ignatius' ecclesiology is of this kind (159).

This view of continuation or realisation of the Christ-reality implies a different understanding of the apostolic ministry than the one known from 1 Clement and the subsequent horizontal notion of Tradition. It does not see apostles as those *individuals* spread in the world to preach and ordain followers. Rather

they form a *college* surrounding Christ in His eschatological function. Their function is to 'sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Mt 19,28) and this they can do only in the context of the *gathered* people of God and under the headship of Christ... It is a succession of *communities* and not of individuals (159).

This does not mean that the bishop is not important, on the contrary, but he is so primarily as the representative of Christ, not of the apostles. This Christological *shaliach* is evident in most Orthodox churches in the symbol of the Bishop's seat. Usually it has the form of a greatly ornamented chair with a canopy and an icon of Christ the King. When the bishop is not present, the seat is empty, but this does not mean that it has no symbolic value, on the contrary: When the bishop is present he represents Christ directly whereas, when he is absent, it is the empty seat that represents Christ in his community.

Ignatius is not alone in his teaching as it is continued in other Syro-Palestinian sources as for instance the third century Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*. As in the epistles of Ignatius, “the church is an eschatological community in which the apostolic ministry is exercised by the apostles headed by Christ in the presence of the community” (159).

The christological *shaliach* is continued in yet another Syriac source of the fourth century, the so-called Pseudo-Clementine literature. Zizioulas shows in detail how it continues the collegial view of Tradition with Christ and his apostles around him ruling in glory over his pilgrim church on earth. In line with his Orthodox background, Zizioulas insists that this means apostolic Tradition does not come from Peter only but from James as well, “and finally by the bishop of every local church” as a continuity of *communities* (161). Zizioulas draws the following theological conclusions from this scheme of succession:

Each local church in its eucharistic structure is the image of the *New Jerusalem* coming down from heaven, i.e. a repetition and a copy of Jerusalem as the point on which the dispersed people of God were expected to gather in the last days. The outlook is *eschatological* and not historical [with the community as] the image of the community of the New Jerusalem of the last days (161).

The Western excessive emphasis on the historical, horizontal realisation of Revelation led to a number of erroneous practices in the life of the church, all of which were the result of “the loss of the Christo-centric and eschatological approach to apostolic continuity” (165). Zizioulas presents a number of such mishaps that should be replaced by a synthesis of the two approaches “more or less in the sense in which we find it in St. Hippolytus of Rome and in the New Testament itself” (165):

It became sufficient to speak of a continuous chain of episcopal ordinations in order to establish apostolic succession, as if it were a matter of some sort of mechanical activity. It became also a matter of transmission of power and authority from one individual to another. It also led to an understanding of the apostolic college as something standing outside and above the communities of the church and transmitting prerogatives of a self-perpetuating cast... (165).

Furthermore, Christianity was considered an accomplished fact that only needed to reproduce the apostolic times in order to carry out its mission in the world. By only looking backwards in time for the reality of the word, it was ignored that the church lives through the continuous power of the Word, the servants of which are the prophets. This endangered the pneumatological christology that sees the Word as the one who continues to address his people in every new historical context. In order to be a full representation of the Word incarnate yet ever active, the church needs both the horizontal and the vertical forms of anamnesis, and Zizioulas is right in calling for a synthesis of the two:

The church is an entity that receives and re-receives what her history transmits to her ..., but this transmission is never a purely historical affair; it takes place *sacramentally* or, if you prefer, *eucharistically*, i.e. it is experienced as a gift coming from the last days, from what God has promised and prepared for us in His Kingdom. This passage of the historical tradition through the eschaton is what the Holy Spirit does in apostolic succession, since the Spirit brings about the last days into history (see Acts 2:17), wherever He blows. Apostolic Tradition ceases to be a gift of the Spirit if it is simply a matter of historical continuity (167).

The church actualises a message that has historical roots but that participates ontologically in the eternal life of God that the blessed share with him, but that the church participates in during history until the Eschaton. It is only this synthesised

historical and charismatic actualisation that we rightly can define as “Revelation” or the Deposit of Faith that the prophets serve.

2.1.5 Conclusion

From the material perspective, a prophetic revelation occurring after the resurrection and ascension of Christ must be just as much an expression of God’s reality as prophetic revelations in Ancient Israel. Materially, Christ is the climax of revelation but not its end. From the formal perspective, things are more complex, although the results of our investigations are the same: Revelation has been expressed eminently in Christ to which the apostles were particularly graced witnesses. Their normative testimony in Holy Scripture remains *norma normans* for all later expressions of Revelation so that any word pronounced to express God’s truth that clearly contradicts Scripture must be rejected as a faulty actualisation and expression of Revelation. While Scripture has this normative status, it is, however, by far *not* God’s only means of continuous self-communication as he keeps expounding not just his true doctrine but himself to every new generation with the aim of being received as Saviour once again. This compels the conclusion that it is not only allowed but for the sake of highlighting God’s continued salvific action *necessary* to speak of a *continuation* of Revelation after the Last Apostle. Only clearly affirming this gives full credit to God’s oneness and continuous dynamism in time. From a material point of view, these prophetic manifestations of the Word do not transcend God’s ultimate self-expression in Christ. On the formal level they may, however, at times appear as truly “new revelations” when pointing to truths explicitly or implicitly contained in Scripture that the church has neglected to the point of oblivion.

If these fundamental considerations are true, then we must ask ourselves, why so many generations of theologians have heralded the quasi-dogma of Revelation's historical end. Why was it so important? Part of the answer is as shown above that the theologians that invented the idea found themselves in a dispute with modernist thought that threatened the normativity of Scripture-based church teaching, and hence needed a time-wedge to indicate when the normative treasure that the church was guarding was filled up. However, this explanation still leaves many questions unanswered. Looking at the theological gallery that remains after the last decades' criticising winds blew away the End-idea and other vain notions, some solid and sound stone reliefs remain. Christ *was* the climax of revelation and *something* was given and constituted with Him and the apostles. Today the question is: *what?*

As Gerald O'Collins and others showed, this *something* cannot be the problematic concept of the Deposit of Faith in its neo-scholastic form. The church did not receive a secret book of true sentences, contained in a secluded safe of the Vatican's cellars that the Pope or his collaborators could check in times of dogmatic doubts as a key for right answers when Scripture alone did not supply them. The often quoted notion makes no sense, although even Rahner indirectly supports it, that the Deposit of Faith should be like a container, the filling up of which all Old Testament prophets contributed to gradually until Christ with whom it finally was full. This notion of the Deposit of Faith features the idea of a continuous growth of Revelation with every new Old Testament prophetic word until Christ when the summit is reached, the Deposit-reservoir is full, and Revelation is ended, and growing revelation has become continued revelation. Rahner was so concerned with this idea, that he had to find a function for prophecy, totally eclipsed from

the context of the Public revelation, both materially and formally, namely that prophecy's purpose is to be an imperative on how to act in a specific historic situation.

The church received neither a container nor a secret book full of true ideas through which it should exist. Its life-giving secret is not a doctrinal possession but its ontological union with Christ, with the Word. If this is so, then we cannot say that the prophets only served the foundation of the church, filling up the treasure that became its secret principle of being. If the very principle of the church is the ever living Word himself, then prophecy becomes enormously important to Christianity, even more important than it was to Israel. For then prophecy becomes an immediate and continuous means of rephrasing that Word through which the church exists.

The only way it makes sense to speak of a Deposit of Faith is in analogy to Revelation or the very Life and Truth of God himself, but we cannot say that this was constituted or fulfilled in a full way with the apostles, as God's people continues to grow into its fullness. To my view it makes sense to assess the constitution of three instances that are perfect and immutable entities, guaranteed in the will of God:

1. *A perfect economy of Salvation.* Christ fulfilled the law and thereby was able to extend to his people a new law of grace that works salvation for those who believe in him. This economy is fully constituted and fulfilled with Christ. Nothing needs to be added to it, and it will not be overruled by a new economy until the return of Christ where it will be realised in all creation. Although it is fully constituted, it nevertheless needs to be implemented through the faith of believers in

every new generation, and in this sense the collaboration, the “co-redemptive” mission of every believer in every new generation is required, aiding to the “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col 1,24). It is in this context of the continuous implementation of the Salvation wrought in Christ that the prophets have the most excellent part to play.

2. *Scripture*. Even though Scripture may contain grammatical errors, even though it was not written in the finest Greek of the times, and even though there exist different versions of the Sacred texts, God has *chosen* to express his truth normatively therein. In this way, Scripture becomes normative testimony of Revelation, but does not equate the reality of Revelation itself, which is God’s life in his church.

Referring to Ricoeur (115ff) Elmar Salmann has summarised well the extent and limitation of Scripture and how it relates to the Word:

Genauer wird man sagen müssen, daß der Text der Schrift Niederschlag eines nie ganz faßbaren Wortereignisses und Auslöser einer Geschichte von Auslegung und Applikation ist, wobei gerade die Eigenart der verschiedenen Textformen (Erzählung und Prophetie, Kult- und Weisheitstexte, Legende und Parabel) in ihrem unaufhebbaren Widerspruch diese zum offenen Verweis auf das je größere Verbum und die je gemäßigere Rezeption hin werden lassen (177).

3. *The church*. The church like Christ is the mystical fusion of history and transcendence, of human frailty and divine grace. It is the room in which the Economy of Salvation that Scripture expresses normatively is continuously realised and extended to creation until the fulfilment of all things. The entire people of God are the inhabitants in this room and they are those who live and realise reve-

lation during the course of history. The Magisterium plays a particular role in intensifying and authoritatively expressing aspects of Revelation, but this does not prevent God from employing prophecy, calling individual members of his people, to address it with a message that actualises and revitalises his life in their midst.

This confirms the conclusion of the exposé of the historical development of prophecy: Just as there is no evidence that from a phenomenological perspective indicated a radical change in prophecy's function from the Old to the New Covenant, so there is no theological argument that commands the function of Christian prophecy to be any different from that of its Old Covenant counterpart. True, there are differences: While the Old Testament prophet is most likely to speak in the name of Yahweh, the Christian prophet is most likely to speak in the name of Christ. While the Old Covenant collected God's people in a covenant, Christ in his new covenant collected his people in the church which as his Body is the continuation of his own presence on earth. But if the functional definition of prophecy as *God calling and guiding his people directly through means of revelation to live in his truth and receive his life again*, then prophecy is and remains an uninterrupted means of God's guidance throughout the entire history of his salvation.

2.2 Prophetic Implementation of Revelation

On the basis of what was said above, we must conclude that while Christ did constitute the church as his own body as his continued presence on earth, this does not change its need for growing into what it potentially is, namely the realisation and realising agent of his truth. Revelation still needs to be mediated and actualised in every new historical context. In the following paragraphs, we shall examine those instances, *those loci*, that actualise Revelation in time. We shall see how

the prophetic impulse is vital to each and every one of them in order truly to reflect the truth they serve, and we shall give concrete historical examples of how prophecy influenced their development and function as one of the primary agents of actualisation. We shall see how prophecy inspired the Bible's formation and interpretation and how it related to and inspired the Magisterium in union with its theologians along important activities. We shall see how prophecy influenced the development of dogma, the understanding of the sacraments, the rise and diffusion of spiritual traditions and places of worship. And last, we shall enter the realm of sociology in order to be able to delve into the interaction of prophecy and the general religious life of the faithful.

In spite of the importance prophecy played for the actualisation of Revelation, it is surprising how few works dealing with this issue focus on prophecy. Searching for prophecy in these works, one encounters a surprise much like the surprise encountered investigating Melchior Cano's *De locis theologicis*. *Mysterium Salutis* may serve as a prime example of this as it employs 286 pages (497-783) to portray all the different instances that serve as Revelation's sources during history. On *none* of those 286 pages, neither in the text nor in the footnotes, does it refer to Christian prophecy's importance to Revelation's transmission, except in one very cautious footnote in the chapter on the "Überlieferung der Offenbarung": "Man müßte wohl die Privatoffenbarungen zu der Überlieferung der Offenbarung mitrechnen" (665). It is the same with Joseph Schumacher. In his 336 page work *Der apostolische Abschluss der Offenbarung*, it is surprising that he employs only a four page "Exkurs" to the issue of private revelations (73-77). How can this strange exclusion be explained other than by the jealousy of prophecy's authority which theology harbours as Rahner pointed out? (Les révélations 507 &

Visionen 22). The fact is that prophetic revelations continued throughout the entire history of Christianity to play an immense role in re-actualising and re-expressing Revelation. In the following paragraphs, we shall see how.

2.2.1 Prophecy and Scripture

Scripture as the permanent authoritative testimony to Revelation and as such the Word of God is the criterion for God's truth and as such serves as the primary measuring rod for evaluating prophecy in the church. In this sense, Scripture has supreme power over prophecy that never can oppose the former. This does not mean, however that prophecy had no influence on Scripture, on the contrary. Entire books in Scripture are collections of prophetic oracles, and only God knows how much the prophetic spirit inspired the formation even of those Biblical writings that do not have the form of oracles. And even though Scripture is the norm for Tradition, it is itself a piece of Tradition as a literary product of the early church. With Hallbäck and Kelber we saw how the decline of the earliest Christian prophecy effectuated the main reason for the editing of the New Testament in the shift from oral to written tradition. We saw how much the Q-source, reflecting the theology of a genuinely prophetic tradition, influenced the final Gospel products, and with Boring we investigated the debated Bultmanian thesis of Christian prophets playing an overwhelming role in transmitting words of the historical Jesus in the light of their own experience of the risen Christ. Although Witherington and others portrayed the difficulty in proving this thesis, we did nevertheless conclude that scholars supporting the Scripture-creative role of Christian prophets have increased evidence that not only Old Testament but also New Testament prophecy greatly influenced the formation of the Canon.

Prophecy has influenced not only the formation of Scripture but its continuous hermeneutic as well. With Ellis and Boring we evaluated the idea that one of the functions of New Testament Christian prophecy is inspired exegesis. As we saw with Engelbert, this function continued in the life of the church, so that many Christian prophets elucidated obscure parts of Scripture, so much so that great theologians as for instance Thomas and Bonaventura used prophetic revelations when judging which interpretation of Scripture was right and which was not. While these prophetic insights on Scripture, of which we have given but an infinitesimal view, they never attained in the Catholic context the hermeneutic authority of the Magisterium.

2.2.2 Prophecy and the Magisterium

Catholic theology ascribes to the Magisterium, formed by the bishops and theologians in union with the Pope, a particular role in transmitting Revelation. In the Magisterium the general infallibility of the church is considered to be concentrated in a way that lends it special authority, charging it with the task of interpreting Scripture, of keeping the church's true teaching, and of safeguarding during history the treasure it received from Christ and the apostles. In order that the safeguarding task may not evolve into its suppressing opposite, the Magisterium depends on a direct prophetic influence that Rahner refers to as the assistance of the Holy Spirit (The Dynamic 42ff). It must be imbued both with a "negative" prophetic dimension, assuring that the Magisterium's task of safeguarding does not degenerate into error, while maintaining also a "positive" prophetic dimension assuring in the Holy Spirit that the Magisterium continues to forward the eternal truths so that they make sense in every new context. The ministry of Peter

and the ecumenical councils play a particular role; Papal pronouncements *ex cathedra* and officially ratified council promulgations are considered imbued with a particular grace avoiding the profession of wrong doctrines, also known as papal infallibility. The Magisterium never professes the faith of the church in isolation from the people of God—it does so *on behalf of the people* expressing the faith of the entire church as expression of the truth of Christ. Hence, what the Magisterium professes is ideally the *sensus fidelium*.

Countless Papal documents have pointed out the importance of prophecy and prophetic revelations in the life of the church (Suh 168 ff.). What is perhaps more interesting, countless prophets have presented divine instructions, messages, and encouragements to the leaders of the church—“Que des révélations soient destinées aux membres de la hiérarchie, c’est un fait” (Volken 247). History knows many examples even of Popes whose actions were inspired by the messages of often simple believers.

Famous in this regard are the actions of Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, who both insisted that the Popes return from their exile in Avignon to Rome, carrying out their prophetic vocation by admonishing the leaders of the church to change in order to secure the unity of the church (Ratzinger, *The Problem* 78). Gregory XI declined the prophetic warnings of Christ presented to him through Bridget, and it took the later warnings of Catherine of Siena to bring about the move from Avignon to Rome. But according to Saudreau, even Catherine’s words would not have touched the Pope’s heart and would not have “trionphé des oppositions des prélats de la Cour pontificale, qui se montraient incrédules à sa mission,” had it not been for the undeniable sign that, according to former prophetic patterns, in 1376 accompanied and authorised the revealed

words. As a proof of Catherine's sending, she told the Pope that Christ had unveiled to her a vow he had made and that was known only by him (220).

In 1582, a young girl, named Orsola Benincasa, presented herself before Pope Gregory XIII and told her the Lord had sent her to ask the church to work harder for the reform of the church. First, no one believed her, and yet the Pope had her examined by cardinals, theologians and Philip Neri in particular. The latter spent seven months examining her and eventually came to the conclusion that this simple girl was truly sent by God with an important message to his church. The Pope accepted Neri's conclusion and decided to enhance the reform of the church, a reform that was carried out in the years that followed.

Two important consecrations of the human race, one to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another to the Immaculate Heart of Mary were not only directly inspired, but *urgently requested* by Jesus and Mary through various prophets:

On 25 May 1899, Leo XIII announced in his Encyclical "Annum sacrum" a great event that he expected to have lasting fruits in the life not only of God's people but for the entire human race. It was the consecration of mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the same Encyclical, we read a somewhat enigmatic sentence in which the Pope presents one of the motives that lead him to the solemn act of consecration which he called "The greatest act of my pontificate": "There is one further reason that urges us to realise our design; we do not want it to pass by unnoticed. It is personal in nature but just and important: God, the author of all Good has saved us by healing us recently from a dangerous disease" (71). This sentence in the Encyclical only makes sense if one knows the story behind it:

On 10 June 1898 a religious Superior, Mary of the Divine Heart Droste zu Vischering, wrote a letter to the Pope, that the Lord had told her to forward to his vicar his desire of having him consecrate the entire world to the divine Heart. The Pope did not believe her and undertook nothing. But on 6 January, she wrote a new letter in accordance with her spiritual director, telling the Pope that he not only should venture towards the consecration of mankind to the Sacred Heart but advise increased devotion for It by encouraging the pastors and the faithful to devote the first Fridays of the month to its adoration. In addition, she wrote the following: “Last summer, Your Holiness suffered of an illness that caused your children to worry, given your advanced age. The Lord gave me the sweet consolation that he would prolong the days of Your Holiness in order that you may realise the consecration of the entire world to his divine Heart” (Chasle 367). Volken shows that this moved the Pope’s heart (249). Although the consecration act caused theologians certain difficulties, especially with regard to the possibility of consecrating even non-Christians to Christ, it took place, as did the other requests of Christ through the Superior.

The second consecration act occurred on 8 December, 1942, 25 years after the Virgin through the apparitions of Fatima had asked that the world be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart. On 7 July 1952 the consecration was renewed, this time with particular attention to Russia: “As we have consecrated some years ago the human race to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary of God, so we now consecrate to the same Immaculate Heart in particular all the peoples of Russia” (AAS 44 (1952) 511). In order to discern a strong link between this act and Fatima, it is enough to know the content of the Fatima apparitions and their strong insistence on the consecration of Russia to Mary’s heart. On 9 October

2000 in the presence of the original statue of Our Lady of Fatima, 1450 of the World's 4500 Catholic bishops, gathered in Rome for the Jubilee for the Bishops, Pope John Paul II once more consecrated the world to Mary's Immaculate heart. In a press release, the Secretary of the Jubilee Committee, Mons. Crescenzo Sepe, made it clear that the reason why the consecration occurred in the presence of the original Madonna of Fatima was exactly to link this consecration in the year 2000 to the apparitions of Fatima, in which the Virgin Mary made her request known.

Many more examples could be given, but these suffice in order to show to which extent prophets inspired the course of Christian history by moving the hearts and actions not only of the simple people of God but of the hierarchy as well.

2.2.3 Prophecy and Theology

Theologians play a vital role in transmitting Revelation. Their task is the same as the Magisterium's, namely to interpret and actualise Revelation which in Basil Studer's words they do in "hervorragender Weise" through their "engen Verbindung mit dem kirchlichen Lehramt" while employing ever new scientific methods (602). Just as with the Magisterium, so too theology, if it wants to be true living theology, needs the influence of prophecy. Ratzinger has reflected well upon this fact:

While one proceeds with the mind only, nothing new will ever happen. Increasingly more definite systems may well be construed, increasingly subtle questions raised but the true and proper way from which great theology may again flow is not generated by the rational side of theological work but by a charismatic and

prophetic thrust. And it is in this sense, I believe, that prophecy and theology go hand in glove (The Problem 78).

As examples of this fruitful collaboration, Ratzinger proposes the examples of the theological-prophetic companionships between Augustine and Athanasius, between Thomas Aquinas and Dominic, between Bonaventura and Francis of Assisi, and between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr. Theology as a scientific discipline is not prophetic, “but may only truly become living theology under the thrust and illumination of a prophetic impulse” (Ibid.).

2.2.3.1 Prophecy and Development of Dogma

The relationship and interaction between Christian prophetic revelations and the church’s ongoing growth in the truth of the Triune God is one of most burning issues of the discussion of prophecy’s role in Christendom. The interaction between prophecy and dogma is reciprocal so that prophetic language is inspired by doctrine just as prophetic paranesis largely is directed to the implementation of Christian truth. Ernst Benz has reflected well upon this prophetic-dogmatic interaction:

Aufs Ganze gesehen besteht ein so enger Zusammenhang zwischen Vision und Dogma, daß man sagen kann, die Geschichte der christlichen Visionen in ihrem Gesamt Ablauf sei eine Art Bilderbuch der Dogmengeschichte; ebenso kann man sagen, daß die Visionen jeder bestimmten Epoche der Kirchengeschichte ein charakteristisches Bilderbuch der spezifisch dogmatischen Anschauungen dieses Zeitabschnittes bilden, soweit die betreffenden Visionäre nicht ihre Offenbarungen gegen die Kirchenlehre ausspielen und damit eine neu Epoche der Dogmenbildung einleiten (481).

We have already questioned the prevailing thesis that the church's prophetic revelations have nothing to do with the Deposit of Faith and concluded that they, although they add nothing to the material fullness of God's Revelation in Christ, are among the main catalysts in the continuous historical unfolding of Revelation and "growth into the full truth." Even though the teaching office may have the last word in proclaiming this deepened knowledge through authoritative doctrinal proclamations, no theological argument writes of prophecy as an instance that helps to draw forth issues that, at least explicitly, were not proposed before as part of Christian truth. This theological assessment finds plentiful historical evidence, and we shall examine it briefly in the following.

As we saw, pronouncements by the Magisterium are thought to summarise, concentrate, and proclaim truths that are the heritage of the entire church, the *sensus fidelium*. Historically, ideas growing forth from the writings of Christian prophets often first spread among the faithful before they become part of the general faith of the church and then, sometimes, attain official expression through the Magisterium. According to Rahner, a prophetic revelation can never in itself express a new dogma. The revelation may express a not yet realised truth that, however, first becomes dogma when it is promulgated as such by the Magisterium (*Geschichtlichkeit* 756). The prophetic revelation may be an inspired hypothesis for theologians to work on, implying an important spark causing them to consider new aspects of Revelation and investigate if they are founded in Scripture and in accordance with Tradition. This hermeneutic function of controlling new insights into the existing consensus of Christian truth is with Rahner one of theology's main tasks:

Das Problem der Dogmenentwicklung besteht im Grunde in der Aufgabe, die Selbigkeit der späteren, "entfalteten" Glaubensvorlage mit der in Christus ergangenen apostolischen Vorlage der Offenbarung als grundsätzlich möglich und in den einzelnen Fällen als wirklich identisch nachzuweisen (Geschichtlichkeit 728).

Volken agrees with Rahner and equally considers the message of prophetic revelations as an "hypothèse de travail pour la science... [La révélation prophétique] agit plutôt sur le plan de l'action que sur celui de la doctrine" (Les Révélations 252). Volken portrays the relationship between prophetic revelations and development of dogma by means of a parable: A boy receives a violin from his uncle and becomes a famous violinist. The gift of the uncle was not the violinist career in itself but an important incitement to its initiation (Les Révélations 253). Likewise, prophetic revelations can lead to new dogmatic "careers" without the revelation equally being the dogma itself. Many examples could be given of how prophecy both inspires and confirms dogmatic developments, but we shall limit the investigation to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

2.2.3.2 Catalysing New Ideas

Volken shows in detail how the promulgation of the *Immaculate Conception* followed an impressive history of prophetic messages. Around 1070 the Abbot of Helsin undertook a mission for William the Conqueror to the King of Denmark. On his way back a violent storm threatened his life. He invoked the Virgin Mary. A messenger appeared to him and told him, that if he wanted to see his homeland again he should promise faithfully to celebrate the feast of the conception of Christ's mother (PL 159, 324). Another number of similar occurrences continued to increase the awareness of the truth of Mary's conception, reaching their deci-

sive climax at the Rue du Bac in Paris when the Virgin appeared to Catherine Labouré and requested that the Miraculous Medal be struck and its devotion spread: “Grâce à la Médaille Miraculeuse, la dévotion de l’Immaculée s’est répandue universellement.” From there it became a theological issue that ultimately led to the proclamation of the dogma (Volken 254ff).

In recent years, the Catholic church has experienced ever growing interest for the idea of Mary as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix and Intercessor, and many would like to see this idea confirmed in the form of an *ex cathedra* Papal dogmatic pronouncement. Some, although they agree with the idea, do not wish to see it defined as they believe dogmas divide, while others, Catholics and non-Catholics alike reject it all-together. The notion of the Co-redemptrix has its justification in affirming every believer’s participation in Christ’s work of redemption, thus “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col 1,24), although, it is true, the Virgin Mary occupies a special role in this regard. Paul Maria Sigl has shown that all the elements of prophetic inspiration and interaction with the dogmatic are present with this new development: The idea has roots in Scripture, and has been continuously proclaimed by great leaders and theologians of the Christian church (21ff). While the notion in this sense always has been at least a slumbering part of Catholic truth, it needed an extraordinary visionary impulse to place the notion on the prophetic catapult from which it could very well prove to reach dogmatic levels. Paul Sigl shows how this prophetic surge was realised through the apparitions of Our Lady of All Nations in Amsterdam to Ida Peerdeman (104ff). Her apparitions began on 25 March 1945. Already in 1951, the local bishop of Haarlem, Bp. Huibers approved a particular prayer associated with the apparitions. Later the two bishops Bp.

Bomers and Bp. Punt approved of the title “Lady of All Nations” while they gave no authoritative judgement on the authenticity of the apparitions, which they left every believer free to decide upon. With this, the apparitions have obtained the freedom needed to be received by the faithful. Paul Sigl shows how the apparitions have raised awareness and knowledge of the notion and that it might well be the primary urge towards the realisation of a dogma. Just as with other prophetic messages, the ones of Amsterdam were accompanied by divine signs that apparently confirmed their authenticity. Thus Ida Peerdeman vividly described the bishops’ gathering at Vatican II (121) before the new council was conceived. If the dogma will be proclaimed it will be a contemporary example of prophecy’s importance to dogmatic development. In the meantime, it shows the powerful interaction between the two, whether it leads to a dogmatic promulgation or not.

2.2.4 Confirming Dogmatic Development

As both Laurent Volken (251 ff), René Laurentin (Fonction 163 ff), and Augustinus Suh (173 ff) argue, prophetic revelations often served to confirm the validity and importance of new dogmatic developments. Thus many theologians have seen the apparitions of the Virgin to Bernadette of Lourdes as divine confirmations that Christ had wanted the promulgation of the dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception (Suh 174). In Lourdes’ apparitions, occurring only four years after the proclamation of the Immaculate dogma, the Virgin presented herself, saying: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” In the Encyclical *Fulgens corona*, Pius XII expressed the widespread opinion that the apparitions of Lourdes confirmed the dogma (Enchiridion 6/946).

2.2.5 Prophecy and Development of Pious Traditions

The spiritual life of the people is where revelation is realised in practice. Numerous new spiritualities were inspired by prophetic revelations. The Sacred Heart Tradition is a prime example hereof. Although it has roots in Scripture and early church teaching, and although Gertrude the Great had important messages on the importance of the heart of Christ, it was supremely introduced and confirmed only after the revelations to Margaret Mary Alacoque. In her time, the spirituality of Jansenism had diminished faith in Christ's mercy so that the faithful barely dared to approach the altar, hence renewed trust in his charity was greatly needed. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as symbol of his tender love became the answer to this need. According to Rahner, Margaret Mary's revelations were "una occasione storica" for the church to accept the devotion to the Sacred Heart that first was greatly opposed (Saggi 289-290). Pope XI expressed himself on the advantageousness of the devotion to the Sacred heart and of the importance of Margaret Mary's apparitions to its realisation: "Our Lord himself made manifest to the most innocent disciple of his Heart, Saint Margaret Mary, how much he, moved less by his right than by his immense charity towards us, desired that men should pay him this homage of devotion" (EE 5/240).

A similar development can be traced through the apparitions of Christ to Faustina Kowalska on Christ's mercy. We shall return to these revelations below.

2.2.6 Prophecy, Liturgy, and Sacraments

As Alois Stenzel shows, the actualisation of Revelation finds its most living expression through liturgy, the place where God's people especially through the sacraments are brought into his immediate presence. Liturgy is that forum in

which the church more than in any other way becomes itself and truly lives as church, as an icon to the eschatological life of the people of God (620). As Stenzel writes, Liturgy is the “eigentlichen Ort, der Erbauung der Gemeinde,” and as prophecy serves this purpose in particular, it is understandable that Paul in his letters, especially to the Corinthians, states that the prophets ideally should speak one by one *during* the liturgy (617, ref. to 1. Cor. 11,26,29).

Numerous liturgical feasts were instituted on direct instructions of Christ through prophecy. The revelations to B. Julian of Mont-Cornillon and the subsequent institution of the feast of the Sacrament of the Altar are important examples hereof, as they pointed both to the importance of the sacrament of the Eucharist and asked for a feast for its commemoration. In 1208, Julian, aged sixteen, began having visions. She died in 1258. Only six years later, Urban IV who had met her in Liège in 1246 and who knew her revelations, issued the Bull that instituted the feast “demandée par le Seigneur” (Saudreau 219). In 1312, the Council of Vienne confirmed this decree and in 1316 Urban IV prescribed that the feast become solemn.

Recently, the interaction between prophecy and Papal decisions on liturgical developments have come in the focus of the church once more. In the beginning of the 20th Century, Sister Faustina Kowalska who Pope John Paul II canonised in 2000, received numerous prophetic messages, mainly from Christ, in which he revealed his ardent desires that his children should believe more in his mercy. To catalyse this, he asked that a feast be instituted in honour and memory of his mercy. It should be the Sunday of Divine Mercy, following Easter. Pope John Paul II, who as a bishop had brought her Index-banned revelations back to honour, instituted in the year 2000 the feast requested by his Polish compatriot and

thereby carried out the request of the revelations that he had confirmed by canonising her. The case has been of particular interest as a number of Roman theologians were little satisfied with the Pope's decision, a resistance he defied in order to comply with the prophetic request.

2.2.7 Prophecy and Places of Pilgrimage

As already mentioned during the exposé of the historical development of prophecy, numerous religious orders were instituted by prophetic instructions from Christ or the Virgin Mary. In this way, prophecy helped to encourage and further develop a tradition in the church that has always served as an oasis of Revelation in the midst of the busy life, assuring spiritual thresholds, *limen* in anthropological terms, with the world of the Spirit. We shall return to this in the paragraph "Prophecy and Sociology."

2.3 Conclusion

We have now seen that all the partial *loci* that serve to actualise and implement Revelation in time are both prophetic in nature and have always interacted with prophetic revelations in the life of the church. Prophetic developments in the ancient church propelled the formation of Holy Scripture and influenced its content greatly. Throughout the history of the church, prophets have played a great role in shedding light on obscure or ignored important passages of Scripture and called the people of God to live according to these truths. The Magisterium, in order to carry out its proper role as authoritative expression of the Christian truth depends continuously on a prophetic influence. History has proved that this influence has been realised not only by the general assistance of the Holy Spirit that worked in

secret through the carriers of institutional offices. Prophetic personalities have kept inspiring the actions of church leaders just as the ideas that were born through true prophetic revelations in the church lastly were ultimately received by and confirmed by the Magisterium, were again confirmed in later messages. Even though theology as a scientific discipline is not prophetic in its structure, history has proved that truly great, new theology always emerged through a direct prophetic impulse. In fact, as Ratzinger showed, many of the church's greatest theologians collaborated closely with people whom they considered imbued with the prophetic gift. Closely related to this is the interaction of prophecy and new dogmatic developments. Although a prophetic revelation as a contingent historical fact does not constitute a dogma in the strict sense, inspired truths that individuals such as Catherine Labouré forwarded to the church under prophetic inspiration often were the spark that led to the rise of new dogmatic insights and promulgations in the church. Likewise, prophetic revelations to persons like Bernadette of Lourdes served to confirm and corroborate dogmatic developments. The same prophetic revelations nevertheless served a much wider purpose than the expression of dogmatic truths, as they often were the direct cause of new pious traditions in the church through which the faithful found more timely ways of practising their faith. The same must be said of the majority of pilgrimage sites that have played an immense role in both Catholic and Orthodox history. All the partial *loci* serve as windows or rooms for Revelation, channels of God's grace and signs of his truth. However, all these *loci* only realise their function when the people of God actually live God's life. In the following we shall see how prophecy has played its biggest role in the life of the church of catalysing exactly this life of God amongst his people.

3 Prophecy and Sociology

The church that with Löhner's reference to Augustine is "Sakrament der ganzen Heilswirklichkeit Christi" (545) is the general instance that realises Revelation in time. The teaching office plays a particular role in this regard, although it is the entire people of God that live and transmit God's Revelation. Vatican II brought this general task of God's people that neoscholasticism had underestimated back to the attention of mainstream Catholic theology. The concept *Sensus fidelium*, so appreciated by Scheeben (Theologische 160 ff.), covers this collective faith of the God's people. Every Christian having been introduced to Christ's mission of revealing God's kingdom shares his prophetic vocation by baptism, and all believers are called to be prophets and priests for Christ: "Although she [Wisdom] is alone, she can do everything; herself unchanging, she renews the world, and, generation after generation, passing into holy souls, she makes them into God's friends and prophets..." (Wisdom 7:27). Fisichella interprets this general prophetic vocation of the people of God in the sense that there is a difference between the Old and the New Testaments with regard to the people's prophetic vocation. In the New Covenant, Joel's prophecy that "your sons and daughters shall prophecy..." (3,1) has been fulfilled and applies to the entire people of God so that all at least potentially "are in the condition of being able to prophecy"(Prophecy 795). All are called to be prophets, wherefore the limited prophecy of the Old Testament has been extended to the entire people of God. This thought could and has indeed lead to the Christian denial of specific prophecy with its traits of particular vocation and visionary experiences. When all Christians are prophets why allow a specific prophecy with a particular vocation and empowerment? In this way it is with prophecy as with priesthood: Just as a strong affirmation of the priesthood of all believers can lead to a denial of a *specific*

ministry, so the insistence on the general prophetic vocation of every believer can lead to ignoring the specific prophetic vocation in the church. This, however, is not Fisichella's aim. Acknowledging that the prophetic vision of every believer does not eliminate, but rather enables specific prophecy, he points to classical examples of prophets in the church such as Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden.

Prophetic revelations have served all through the church's history to call the people back to the true life in God, just as he did through the prophets of the Old Testament. As mentioned, from a functional, phenomenological point of view, there is *no* difference between the two covenants with this regard, although the new covenant may have more means of grace, especially the Sacraments. As Suh has shown, prophecy calls Christians to take their faith seriously and let it permeate all aspects of their lives (167ff). Prophecy calls people to prayer and ultimately to live the life of grace in the mysterious fusion of God's gift and man's effort. However, even though prophets always preached repentance, prophecy is able to realise God's life in the church far more powerfully than through mere moral exhortation, as it is able through its inner dynamism to move the faithful to live more closely to the mystery of their faith.

Prophetic claims like those of Montanus and Muhammad often produced new movements that began as marginalised bodies within the church before their "new" revelation propelled them out of Christendom into new religious societies with independent institutions, sacred writings, and creeds. We saw that the fear inferred from such experiences may well have been the main factor in the change of nomenclature around post-Montanist and especially post-Islamic Christian prophecy as well as its scarce theological elaboration. Theologians and church

leaders could easily infer from such negative experience, which continued after Montanus and Muhammad, that all prophetic activity and preaching of revelations are dangerous to the unity of the church, and that prophecy in its very nature, whether true or false, leads people to marginalise out of the church. But is this true?

History says no. But to arrive at an answer that transcends mere historical evidence and explains *why* true Christian prophecy does not lead away from the church's core, the historical no-answer is not sufficient. We need to turn to religious anthropology and sociology in order to have an in-depth elaboration of what happens when a person claims to have messages from God and people believe him. Doing so leads to interesting answers: True Christian prophecy does *not* lead believers to the margins of Christendom but to what religious anthropologists define as the "*limen*," i.e. the threshold to the very core of religious society. Instead of being centrifugal it is centripetal. Through the prophet's experience of the Word of God, believers are led to the heart of the church, which theology defines as the mystery of that very same Word that the true prophet experiences. The prophet experiences the word of Christ, of which he is aware that it was incarnate in the past, and yet he seeks to implement it in the future. Sociology affirms this function of prophecy: it receives and transmits a historically realised mystery and word, and yet it does not stay with its concrete historical form but seeks to lead the faithful to realise its inner dynamism through a direct, ontological encounter with the Word. This continues and confirms the thesis of the former chapter, namely that the prophets' task is to lead the church through the valley of past and future fulfilment of God's Word. As a result of this experience, believers seek to gather or organise in structures that initially may appear further

away from mainstream Christendom but that they consider a more genuine response of their time as how to live in the mystery of that Word. History proves that these new movements often renewed and later became what we today define as mainstream Christendom, since anti-structures eventually prove to end up as new structures. This places prophecy in the fascinating dialectic of structure, anti-structure, and restructuring—a dialectic that prophecy proves to have a great impact on.

3.1 Alessandro Toniolo's Reception of Victor Turner

The anthropologist Victor Turner is renown for his research in primitive religion initiation rites. But can such rites, so estranged to Christendom, have anything to say to Christian theology? The answer is yes. As far primitive religions may appear from Christianity, Turner's research proves to have tremendous resonance in the Christian context. Although his research only applies in the full sense to primitive religions without sacred writings, Turner believes the term can be fruitfully applied to "processes, phenomena, and persons in large-scale complex societies" such as the Christian church, although "its use must in the main be metaphorical" (From Ritual 29). The reception of Turner's research by Christian scholars has proved that he is right. Not only does he himself apply the results of his primitive religion research to major historical religious bodies such as Christianity—many other researchers have done the same.

One of these is the Italian religious anthropologist, Alessandro Toniolo of the Liturgical Institute of Padova. Toniolo has combined Turner's research with that of Mircea Eliade and others and applied it to different aspects of Christendom. The outcome is vital new insights and subsequent publications on classical Christian

themes: Christian religious initiation (“Il tema ‘liminalità’ in Victor Turner—Un contributo antropologico-culturale alla riflessione sulle forme di iniziazione religiosa,” 1992.), the sociologic function of the catechumenate (“Il catecumenato: periodo liminale?” 1992), as well as the (mainly) Post-Vatican II phenomenon of new ecclesial movements (“Nostalgia delle origini: profezia o anarchia celebrativa?” 1997). Applying the liminal in the metaphorical sense to the Christian context sheds light on certain aspects of religion that normal theology is not able to appreciate and extract fully.

In the following we shall seek to apply this research to our theme of Christian prophecy. It proves to provide many new insights on prophecy’s sociological impetus. We shall briefly examine how sociologists define a movement within a larger structure. We shall then dwell on the notion of the ideal origin or *Golden Age* that most movements seek to implement in their time and examine which role prophecy plays to this end. From this we shall be able to describe the effects of these movements, spurred by the prophetic, and how it leads the faithful through the experience of the mythic ideal state not away from the church but towards its core. And we shall see how anthropologists consider the prophetic to do so not only through movements but in multiple ways, as *limen* proves to be a factor incorporated in different permanent “oases” such as monasteries and pilgrimage sites, where believers seek the central mystery of their faith, drawn towards the centre of the religious body to which they belong.

3.2 The Communitas as Anti-structure

Victor Turner opposes the idea that a community or a group of people can exist in their own power as a *fait total*, an organism that rests supremely in its own creed

and culture. Groups of people sharing the same approach to a creed always do so *in the dialectic with other groups* that they positively relate to or oppose. Turner words this insight clearly in an article in *Concilium*:

La comunità nella celebrazione rituale, anche se si tratta di una comunità solamente “simbolica” o “giuridica” anziché di un gruppo spontaneo scopre che “la struttura sociale” è tutta una montatura, una “bugia,” nobile o ignobile, “una costruzione sociale artefatta della realtà.” La vera realtà è l’antistruttura (La religione 143).

This puts the notion “anti-structure” in a more positive light that is amplified by Turner calling the anti-structure *communitas* of the Latin equivalent to community since the term “anti-structure” carries a notion of existing only in opposing other groups. This is not what Turner considers the *communitas* to do, just as it is not what he means with the term “anti-structure:”

I have used the term “anti-structure,” but I would like to make clear that the “anti” is here only used strategically and does not imply a radical negativity... When I speak of anti-structure, therefore, I really mean something positive, a generative center. I do not seek the eradication of matter by form as some of my French-inspired colleagues have tried to do in recent years, but suppose a matter from which forms may be ‘unpacked,’ as men seek to know and communicate (Dramas 272).

The different *communitas* exist side by side, marked as a group, by their distinct features compared to other groups but not in necessary opposition to them. In this way it could be said that the church is made out of a multitude of little communities that, however, relate to each other and form one body. In this way, movements such as the Franciscans not only began as anti-structure, but continue their

own particular charism that marks them as independent structures within the general body of the Catholic Church.

These groups are convinced of having attained a refreshed and more dynamic apprehension of the Christian mystery, and this conviction not only leads them to relate more existentially to the objects of their faith than they did before—it leads them to relate more closely to those people with whom they share the same conviction. Hence, the inner social dynamism of the *communitas* becomes the close relationship between the people in it, gathered around the same ideal. It is exactly this which Martin Buber sees as the strength of the *communitas*, namely the close relationship between individuals where they no longer only find themselves merely to stand side by side in a predefined structure but *relate* to one another:

Community is the being no longer side by side (and one might add, above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. Community is where community happens (51).

In this way the movement comes across not as a menace to the unity of the church, as it redefines and actualises the true content of faith in a union of people that have understood that they are united, not for the sake of the structure, but for the common experience of the mystery of life which they have found through faith in God. Even though there usually are tensions between existing structures and these new movements, and even though history knows of movements did leave the church, history also shows that these movements' collective experience of the Christian mystery ideally do not mutilate Christendom but renovate it to vibrate anew in its inner dynamism and hence in the long run to strengthen the

church by creating new structures in it, better built to meet new historical challenges.

Christendom knows of many such movements that were in opposition to the existing order although it was unthinkable without it. Christianity itself began as one. Toniolo shows that Early Christianity knows of two such stages (Il Catecumenato 249-252). One was the period of foundation, during which the movements around John the Baptist and around Jesus himself were the most important. Jesus expressed how the disciples were different from the people gathered in the existing structures:

If the world hates you, you must realise that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you (John 15,18-19).

The second stage that Toniolo gives as example is the apostolic age after the ascension of Jesus. The *Acts of the Apostles* provides many examples of how the group was united and shared all they had:

And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed (Acts 2,44-45)...The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common (Acts 4,32).

Christian history knows many more examples of such movements as for instance those initiated by the great Desert Fathers, the monastic movements in the middle of the First Christian Millennium, and the rise of the Mendicant Orders such as Franciscans and Dominicans, just to mention a few. After Vatican II these

movements have increased drastically and may be one of the main novelties of Catholic Christendom in the twentieth century.

The interesting thing, now, is that prophets or prophet-like individuals initiated the great majority of these movements. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Francis of Assisi are highlights on the list that keeps growing with the rise of new communities and religious orders. Thus, ecclesial movements such as Opus Dei, the Neocatechuminate, or the Focolari each have their particular leaders that the faithful often consider imbued with prophetic gifts and charismatic leadership. Even silent suffering prophets such as Marthe Robin have enormously influenced the rise of new communities. Thus she founded the *Foyer de Charité* and greatly influenced both the *Beatitude* (formerly known as *Lion de Juda*), *The Little Sisters of the Lamb*, and *L'Emanuelle* communities (Éphraïm 145ff & 163 ff.). Prophets simply have enormous power to raise the religious horizon over the petrification of thought and spirituality:

Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, “edgemen,” who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure (Turner, *The Ritual* 128).

Aldo Natale Terrin has well described the importance of these prophets to the rise of new groups within the church:

La funzione del capo carismatico è importante perché essa riassume il momento etico fondamentale della *communitas* in quanto i membri in tale contingenza non si sentono sudditi nella misura in cui riescono a far coincidere atti di massima

dipendenza—vista come pura forma di oblatività—con atti di assoluta libertà. D’altro lato, il capo carismatico si presenta con segni tangibili di autorità: la profezia, la rivelazione, la visione che corrobora la sua funzione e gli crea intorno un alone di mistero. In questo contesto alla persona del capo fa riferimento tutta la *communitas* che ritrova in esso il centro propulsore, la forza per difendersi all’esterno e per aver coesione all’interno (204).

Continuing his reception of Turner who calls the prophetic founders of new ecclesial movements “outsiders,” Toniolo contends that they are not people who lead the faithful away from the divine mystery. They may oppose existing structures but this is not their main aim. With Toniolo, they figure

in uno stato particolare di essere esterno alla struttura sociale ma nel contempo di esercitare per la struttura sociale un particolare ruolo. Caratteristica fondamentale degli *outsiders* è quella di risultare in una data situazione di anormalità rispetto al comune vivere sociale, ma nello stesso tempo di venire considerati solo un modo diverso di vivere una situazione particolare del sistema stesso (Il tema 96-97).

Most of the prophets we have examined have had other main functions than founding new movements in the church while it is also true that many of them did. For instance, Bridget of Sweden’s primary task was conferring revelations to the people of her time, battling for the unity of the church. However, she also founded the Bridgettine order that in many ways opposed the traditions of her time yet renewed it profoundly.

There is one characteristic trait that all *communitas* have in common and that according to Toniolo greatly applies to the Christian context. It is the paradigm of the nostalgia for a *Golden Age* in which the divine mystery found its most pure

and powerful realisation, the *nostalgia for the origin*. Mircea Eliade has published extensively on this paradigm from which Toniolo distils five characteristic aspects that apply to Christianity, and that for the purpose of our theme can be summarised in three: Firstly *The necessity of the destruction for the recreation of the initial perfection*, secondly *The surety of a new beginning and the eschatological tension*, and thirdly *Towards the heart of faith* (Eliade's *Regressus ad uterum*). Forwarding Toniolo's reception of Eliade, we shall briefly present these in the following.

3.3 Necessity of Destruction for Recreation of Initial Perfection.

At the basis of the nostalgia for the origin lies an improvable and widely accepted postulate, summarised by Eliade: "Esiste un periodo di perfezione che viene ricondotto alle origini, che può essere recuperato e pienamente ripristinato" (76). Toniolo continues:

È un paradiso che è stato perduto, è un periodo di beatitudine che è stato smarrito, è un momento estatico profondo e inequivocabilmente affascinante che si vuole ripristinare, che, a volte, si cerca e non si riesce a far riemergere dalla realtà storica o dal profondo del proprio io (Nostalgia 794).

This is a feature that the vast majority of religions share but that each realise in different ways. Often it is expressed in the ideas of the cyclic nature of a *cosmic year*, linked to the change of seasons, however the basic paradigm may emerge in different contexts, Eliade concludes that they share the important common feature that the perfection lies in the beginning: "L'idea che la perfezione è stata agli inizi sembra essere molto arcaica ed è in ogni caso molto diffusa" (77).

Eastern thinking carries the myth of a cycle that ends with a complete dissolution, the *pralaya*, that attains its radical climax in the *mahapralaya*, the “great dissolution” at the end of the thousands cycle, characterised by the “deterioration, annihilation, and re-creation of the universe” (Il tema 88). It is on the basis of such myths that Eliade can conclude that the paradigm of the origins contains a radical demand for the destruction of the existing order before it is possible to arrive at the *Golden Age*: “Perché qualche cosa di veramente nuovo possa cominciare, bisogna che i resti e le rovine del vecchio ciclo siano completamente distrutti. In altre parole, se si desidera ottenere un inizio assoluto, la fine di un mondo deve essere radicale” (77).

With Toniolo, I believe the Christian context to be somewhat different. Christian prophecy shares both similarities and dissimilarities with the paradigm described by Mircea Eliade. To my view, his strong insistence on the total destruction of the existing order needed to arrive at the origin does not fully apply to the messages of Christian prophets. The proof of this assessment lies beyond the limits of the present study, as it would require a comprehensive comparative analysis of the writings of several important Christian prophets, and such work lies in the future. Here it may be enough to observe that Christian prophets often presented powerful apocalyptic pictures of the ages to come with chastisement and purification of sin. However, their sole aim was not to tear down all existing structures in order to arrive at the origin. Rather, the catastrophes they predicted were seen to aim at the purification of the people and to my view this aspect is not highlighted sufficiently by Eliade. *Rather than tearing down, they wanted to build by purifying.*

The Judeo-Christian tradition knows a great corpus of apocalyptic writings that holds the *Apocalypse of John* as the most famous, but to which must be counted also apocryphal writings such as the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the fifth and the sixth book of *Esdra*, as well as the *Odes of Solomon*. To these come the writings of many Christian prophets that heralded the purification of the present evil generation with the promise of a future paradisiacal age. This is the case from the writings of Joachim of Fiore to our days Marian Apparitions and the writings of Vassula Rydén.

Bridget of Vadstena is one good example of a Christian prophet who did not call for the demolition of the existing hierarchical institution, whose legitimacy she never questioned. Rather, her prophetic call was to the carriers of institutional offices to fulfil their vocation with the dignity it required.

The research of Eliade indicates that this pattern does not serve to predict the future but to help believers in the present transcend into the realm of what he calls the mythic, that is the vibrant dynamism of religion, which theology may well define as the reality of the Word. Its aim would hence be leading the faithful not to another historical stage but to a life of faith closer to the paradisiacal mystery of God's truth realised in the present. This coincides with what we have said above, that the prediction of future chastisements and catastrophes are not independent goals but aim at the reconstruction of the present rather than the mere information of the future. Rather than breaking with concrete historical orders or institutional structures, prophetic apocalypticism seeks to lead the faithful beyond the mere historical reality to the transcendent realm of God. The aim is to implement it in the world, as synthesised by Eliade:

Questo mondo—il mondo della storia—è ingiusto, abominevole, demoniaco: fortunatamente, sta già marcendo, le catastrofi sono cominciate, questo vecchio mondo si incrina da tutte le parti: molto prossimamente verrà annientato, le forze delle tenebre verranno definitivamente vinte e i “buoni” trionferanno, il paradiso sarà conquistato (95).

3.4 The Surety of a New Beginning and the Eschatological Tension

Following the contention that prophecies of chastisement never serve punishment *per se* but the matrix of a new beginning, Toniolo writes that “l’idea della distruzione si associa al tema degli inizi e non può essere diversamente all’interno del paradigma della nostalgia delle origini che stiamo tratteggiando” (Nostalgia 795). Destruction and purification are required for the new beginning, for a return to the *Golden Age*, mostly a period of poverty that, however, excelled in virtue and spiritual plenitude. Most Christian reform movements have looked back at the early church as such a period in time that incarnated the divine in an ideal manner. Their aim can be assessed as the dialectic with structures and developments that obstructed this *Golden Age* from emerging in the present. As Toniolo shows, one could give many other examples of historical periods that Catholic reformers and prophets have looked at as manifestations of the divine in *Golden Ages*.

But not only the Christian realm utilises the myth of the origin. There are humanistic sciences, that do the same. Psychoanalysis is one example. Even though there are differences, as psychoanalysis does not build on a mythic structure and

does not accept the Christian notion of a paradise, Eliade does see a similitude between Christian thought and psychoanalysis, where

la concezione arcaica della beatitudine e della perfezione dell'origine è dovuta al fatto che Freud ha scoperto l'importanza decisiva del "tempo primordiale e paradisiaco" della prima infanzia, la beatitudine prima della rottura (lo svezzamento), cioè prima che il tempo divenga, per ogni individuo, "un tempo vissuto" (106).

3.5 Towards the Heart of Faith

Now, the interesting point for our theme is that prophecy does not lock the notion of a *Golden Age* in a concrete historic period that it seeks to realise simply by copying it mechanically into the present, but does more: it transcends history. The *regressus ad uterum* transcends the mere realms of history into what sociology defines as the mythic, but that the present theological study following the findings on Revelation and prophecy can define only as the dynamic world of God lying behind, above and ahead of the church. Mircea Eliade shows how the paradigm of the origin builds on the Cosmogogenesis, the account of the creation of the universe, best exemplified in the Biblical *Genesis* and the *Enuma elis*. He writes that the myths of the origin employ the Cosmogogenesis, but that the two are not identical—the myths of the origin “prolungano e completano il mito cosmogonico; raccontano come il mondo è stato modificato, arricchito o impoverito” (45). The future reign is mostly seen as a recovery of what happened in the Cosmogogenesis, which religious rites serve to reactualise: “La ricapitolazione è insieme una commemorazione e una riattualizzazione rituale, per mezzo dei canti e della danza, degli avvenimenti mitici essenziali che sono accaduti dopo la creazione” (47).

The constellation between the Cosmogentic myth and the myth of the origin crystallises in times of crisis. By comparing the present with the myth of the origin prophecy indicates what deviated and was lost, and what hence has to be healed. And with the words of Toniolo, the myth of the Cosmogogenesis operates within the myth of the origin *as an embolism* so that the former gives power and efficaciousness to the latter. By utilising the myth of the Cosmogogenesis, the myth of the origin not only calls to copy a historic period but truly to recreate the present in the dynamism of the Cosmogogenesis. In this way, he writes, “non si ha una semplice riparazione, un rattoppo, ma una vera e propria ricreazione. Non si ha la guarigione dalla malattia o il superamento della situazione critica, ma un ritorno alle origini, un ripristino della perfezione degli inizi” (Nostalgia 796).

It is in this way that the prophetic is able to implement the divine origin in history not merely by reconstructing a historical period but by transcending history itself:

... il mito cosmogonico sia il racconto mitico servono per superare la storia: essa è contingente e rovinatrice della bellezza iniziale e deve quindi essere annullata. Essa inoltre fa dimenticare le origini con la sua incrostazione, che deve essere tolta per far splendere il vaso nella sua gravidanza cromatica (Ibid.).

According to Eliade, the idea of the *Golden Age* builds on the myth of a prehistoric ideal stage: “L’idea implicita in questa credenza è che la prima manifestazione di una cosa è quella significativa e valida, e non le sue epifanie successive. Ugualmente, non è ciò che è stato fatto per la prima volta dagli antenati nei tempi mitici” (58).

Prophecy seeks to realise an ideal or “mythic state” that not only lies at the origin of the universe but beyond in the realm of the divine itself. Hence, prophecy

draws on the Cosmogonic myth by means of the myth of the origin in order to propel a future rebirth in the power of God's reality. The prophetic glance back in time usually does discern a concrete ideal stage in history while it nevertheless also gazes at a state prior to history that becomes the *real* dynamism of the prophetic message much more than the portrait of the Golden historical example, namely the dynamism of God. In the same way, the prophet looks ahead in time and seeks to implement this state concretely in the future present, while he at the same time always lifts his eyes above the historical horizon and peers into the eschaton, again into the realm of God, to which the church ultimately is heading. By this, prophecy utilises the nostalgia of the origin in a vibrant dynamism between past and future, which continues our findings on Revelation theology.

The time passed between the *Golden Age* and the present that are mostly seen as defiled and in which the faithful have been taken by amnesia, can according to Toniolo be overcome in three different ways:

Attraverso apparizioni o visioni che superano il ricordo e la storia, perché in questo modo il ricordo delle origini è chiaro, voluto da Dio; ripristinando l'ordine iniziale e abbattendo qualsiasi interpretazione sorta nel momento intermedio; ricercando in se stessi, nel proprio spirito, nella propria anima, nella propria mente il senso delle cose perché liberandosi della mortalità, affinando lo spirito si entra in diretto contatto con chi o con che cosa può rivelarci il senso intimo e profondo della realtà... (Nostalgia 797).

To our theme of prophecy, the first is the most important, as this helps to explain why the prophet is so important in religious society. Through charismatic gifts, he or she can provide the "memoria perfetta, che può realizzarsi solo attraverso

un cammino interiore o la rivelazione divina” (Ibid.). This quality gives the prophet immense influence:

Non c’è da meravigliarsi, quindi, se a volte accade che studiosi, siano essi teologi, filosofi o scienziati, rimangano affascinati da chi si presenta come colui che è chiamato ad avere—attraverso rivelazioni o visioni—la memoria perfetta. La conoscenza dell’origine delle cose e della loro storia conferisce un magico dominio sulle stesse. Chi è capace di ricordarsi dispone di una forza magico-religiosa più preziosa di ogni altra forma di sapere (Ibid.).

The prophet possesses insight in the prehistoric pure stage, the realm of the Creator, that can be attained only through perfect memory by means of prophetic revelations, and this recreation becomes a stage *within* history that, however, always has eschatological undertones and *transcends history* so that the prophets lead the church beyond history to exist in the dynamism of the Creator and ultimately be united with him there.

3.6 The Prophetic is in the Liminal

Having now examined the sociological notion of *communitas* as well as the paradigm *regressus ad uterum* we are ready again to turn to Victor Turner who through his research on initiation rites provides valuable insights on how prophecy sparks the nostalgia of the origin and where this spark takes the *communitas*—whether away from or rather towards the heart of the church. To portray these two different movements, Turner distinguishes between two different types of groups, namely *marginal* and *liminal* groups, one moving away, the other towards the religious core.

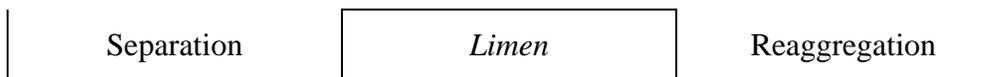
Turner borrows the term *limen*

from van Gennep's formulation of the processual structure of ritual in *Les Rites de passage*—[which] occurs in the middle phase of the rites of passage which mark changes in an individual's or a group's social status and/or cultural or psychological state in many societies past and present (Dramas 273).

The rites of passage are not limited to natural religions. According to von Gennep and Turner, they occur frequently in all religious and social structures when there is a passage from one state to another. They are characterised by having three phases that Turner defines as follows:

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated (The Ritual Process 94-95).

The *limen* is hence the prime *locus* in which an individual or a group goes from an existing stage and structural integration over a stage of passage into the fuller reintegration in the same structure, as shown on the following figure:



A *communitas* is hence a group of people who are in the phase of *limen*, united around the same experience of their fundamental belief. As Turner writes, "the spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas*—as opposed to the jural-political

character of structure—can seldom be maintained for very long.” Either the individuals of the group are reintegrated into the structure of their origin or the *communitas* itself “develops a structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae” (The Ritual 193).

The *limen* is characterised by different elements: The individual or group exists aside from and does things different from normal society with the aim of fuller reintegration into the same after the liminal phase. “The classifications on which order normally depends are annulled or obscured—other symbols designate temporary antinomic liberation from behavioural norms and cognitive rules” (Ibid.). The relationship with group leaders is unique in requiring both submission and allowing extreme freedom: “This aspect of danger requiring control is reflected in the paradox that in liminality extreme authority of elders over juniors often coexists with scenes and episodes indicative of the utmost behavioural freedom and speculative license” (Ibid.).

Both liminal and marginal groups are groups that in line with the above description of the *communitas* are clearly distinguishable identifiable from the rest of the structure in which they originate. According to Toniolo, both of them have lost their character of universality, as they seek to enclose themselves in clearly identifiable groups. “In una società industrializzata sia la marginalità come la liminalità, che trovano nel sacro la antistruttura, hanno la necessità di costruire un luogo, un forte, una città per circoscrivere” (Nostalgia 806).

The main difference between the two is the contraposition between transitory and permanent state, and the two differ in the way they relate to the structure of their

origin. The marginal groups are in their very nature already a foreign element to their original structure, closing themselves off from it with no intentions of re-integration. The one who lives on the outskirts of society in marginal structures “abbisogna per rientrare nella cosiddetta struttura sociale normale di un processo di rieducazione” (Ibid.). The liminal groups are, on the other hand, not external to their origin, although they may oppose it in one way or another—they were always part of the origin and sooner or later prove that they continue as such by becoming even more vibrant reflections of their origin than the structures they derived from. “Chi invece è vissuto nella liminalità è considerato pienamente iniziato alla struttura sociale nella quale dovrà inserirsi” (Ibid.). To this end, the liminal groups aim at short periods of separation before re-entering in the original structure, and this swiftness of the transitory stage becomes evident in the way the groups are structured with few elements that aim at securing permanent independent survival, whereas the opposite is the case with the marginal groups: “...la *liminalità* tende verso forme momentanee di separazione per la piena integrazione sociale della persona, mentre la marginalità si orienta verso di esse per configurarsi come antistruttura permanente” (Ibid.). The liminal groups form preliminary structures aiming at becoming part of a greater structure while the marginal groups become total structures. According to Ervin Goffman, one of the characteristic traits is how closed the marginal groups are through “l’impedimento allo scambio sociale e all’uscita verso il mondo esterno, spesso concretamente fondato nelle stesse strutture fisiche dell’istituzione” (34 ff.). As Toniolo writes, this means for the marginal groups that “i meccanismi di esclusione non sono superabili e non hanno alcuna finalità se non quella di identificare in modo permanente l’individuo come strutturalmente inferiore” (Liminalità

100). The individuals in the liminal groups, on the other hand, knowing that the liminal stage is transitory, “si impegnino per acquisire una piena identificazione sociale e quindi lo stato di inferiorità strutturale divine finalizzato e funzionale al momento postliminale” (Ibid.).

The best way of portraying the difference is by looking at the meanings of their nominators: Margin means that which is on the periphery of society. *Limen*, on the other hand, means *threshold*. Toniolo exemplifies them by means of a metaphor:

Chi sta sulla soglia di casa sa di occupare una posizione di attesa ben precisa : il limitare è il luogo necessario al passaggio per potere entrare. Chi invece sta ai margini di una stanza o di una casa, si trova nella posizione di chi sa di occupare uno *status* e di esercitare dei ruoli di inferiorità, ormai per lui caratterizzati e determinati (Liminalità 101).

In this way, contrary to the margin, the *limen* is a transitory phase that is structured not to last: “la liminalità tende verso forme momentanee di separazione per la piena integrazione sociale della persona, mentre la marginalità si orienta verso di esse per configurarsi come antistruttura permanente” (Nostalgia 806). People in the liminal groups, given their transitory nature, “si impegnino per acquisire una piena identificazione sociale e quindi lo stato di inferiorità strutturale diviene finalizzato e funzionale al momento postliminale.” In the marginal groups the opposite is the case, as “i meccanismi di esclusione non sono superabili e non hanno alcuna finalità se non quella di identificare in modo permanente l’individuo come strutturalmente inferiore” (Liminalità 100).

With this we have arrived at a very important delineation of two phenomena that may appear identical at first glance but that have totally different motives and

goals. The marginal seeks to exit the institution and build an independent structure apt at remaining auto sufficient. The liminal, on the other hand, never creates such structures as its aim is not to distance itself from the main structure but to become a renewed part of it. Thus, the liminal is with Toniolo an “antistrutturale all’interno della struttura stessa, voluta e finalizzata dalla struttura, un’antistruttura della struttura e per la struttura” (Liminalità 102). With this we have overcome the often simplistic and inaccurate schemata of structure and anti-structure mostly associated with prophecy, as the *limen* becomes a function that does not aim at destroying the existing structure but is like the leaven that renews the structure from within by becoming a part of it in a new way (Turner, *From Ritual 46-47*). Turner summarises liminality by saying that it “may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (The Forest 97).

The *limen* is a dynamism that drives the anti-structural *communitas* to the structuralisation that again makes it a part of the complex society from which it originates. Turner expresses this dialectic well:

We thus encounter the paradox that the *experience* of *communitas* becomes the *memory* of *communitas*, with the result that *communitas* itself in striving to replicate itself historically develops a social structure, in which initially free and innovative relationships between individuals are converted into norm-governed relationships between social *personae*... Yet when this *communitas* or *comitas* is institutionalized, the new-found idiosyncratic is legislated into yet another set of universalistic roles and statuses, whose incumbents must subordinate individuality to a rule (From Ritual 47).

The question is now, how the *limen* can do this? The answer is that it is able to lead the faithful into the *statu nascente* and thereby provide them with the primordial experience of that which is the inner mystery and dynamism of the structure itself. One of the most important differences between margin and *limen* is that the margin draws upon a reality or doctrine that is different than that of the structure's origin, whereas the liminal is oriented towards and exists through the reality, that is the structure's soul and from which it draws its life and energy. The *limen* exists in the power of that mystery just as it serves its continuous reactualisation. The margin can only oppose and expulse it since the marginal is different in substance than the mystery of its origin just as water and oil are of different substances that can only separate. This provides some interesting reflections on true and false prophecy. According to the scenario described above, prophecy gives birth to the *limen* as that room in which the faithful are led to experience the inner mystery of their faith, as it is that very mystery, the Word, that finds expression and room to act through the true prophet. The voice of a false prophet, on the contrary, can only lead away from the church as it does not express the Word of the origin and hence cannot chant the hymn of the church but must compose a different tune than the one chanted by the Christian Word.

3.7 Wider Application of the Paradigm Limen to the Christian Context

The *limen* serves actual groups to pass deeper into the church, but as a phenomenon as such it transcends the sociological borders of distinct groups within the church. This is where the conclusions of our investigations on Revelation and prophecy above flow together with those provided by sociology into the full pic-

ture of the dynamics of prophecy and Revelation. For the *limen* proves to be a phenomenon that is not limited only to movements and their possible prophets but to the very nature of the Christian religion as an inherent part of its being. Liminality is more than anti-structure to the social system. It is able to generate “myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art... [inciting] men to action as well as to thought” (The Ritual 128-129).

According to Turner, liminality is distinguished from mere structure by its creativity: “... structure tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly; while *communitas* is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas” (The Ritual 133).

There is an inherent dialectic between structure and *limen*, structure and *communitas*. Not only can the two exist side by side, they interact and are both necessary to uphold the living ambiances of faith:

There is a dialectic here, for the immediacy of *communitas* gives way to the mediacy of structure, while, in *rites de passage*, men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic (Ibid. 129).

This is because liminality enables the church to mutate so that it continues to realise its basic elements and truths amid the changing contexts of history. Turner believes this to be the main function of liminality: “...to my mind it is the analysis of culture into factors and their free or “ludic” recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is of the essence of liminality, liminality *par excellence*” (From Ritual 28).

Since this is so, it is vital that there be a healthy balance between liminality and structure. On one side, Turner writes that “exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside or against ‘the law’” as the experience of the *status nascentis* is needed in all religious structures. The dangerous outlet for the need for *limen* then would be *margin* with the danger of individuals leaving the church into marginal groups and sects. Toniolo agrees with Turner. If the church gives no space for the *limen* to unfold, the *communitas* “perde le caratteristiche tipiche della spontaneità e della autogestione, costringendo l’antistruttura a sorgere sotto forme marginali che, per difendersi, dovranno divenire a loro volta istituzioni” (Liminalità 104). To Turner, the dangerous outcome is the margin.

On the other side, exaggeration of *communitas*, in certain religious or political movements of the levelling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, over-bureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification... *Communitas* cannot stand alone if the material and organizational needs of human beings are to be adequately met (From Ritual 28).

The *limen* as a sociological phenomenon exists in numerous different forms and ways, from groups over rituals to the very inner dynamics of the church, so that the *limen* with Toniolo becomes “non solo il momento che riporta le forme religiose allo *statu nascente* ma lo spazio capace di creare forme nuove che consentono l’adattamento continuo della religiosità al mutare dei sistemi culturali” (Liminalità 103). This is why Toniolo agrees with Turner’s insistence that no religious structures can function without the *limen*: “Anche le grandi forme di religione istituzionalizzata, Chiesa cattolica inclusa, devono possedere un proprio momento di liminalità” (Liminalità 103).

The faithful continuously need to be connected with and reintroduced to the mystery of their faith, securing that creativity, which is given “da un lato dall’incontro dell’individuo con il nucleo integro originario e dall’altro dalla successiva rielaborazione prodotta nel momento di adattamento dovuto al rientro nella struttura sociale” (Liminalità 104). Without the *limen*, the archaic makes no sense and comes across as obsolete.

As Toniolo writes, this explains why the church needs the *limen* as a means of presenting inherited traditions in their original inner dynamism. The prophetic lies in the *limen*, which carries the faithful to the *statu nascente*, “il momento di incontro fra presente e passato, fra le origini, la tradizione e il mutamento” (Nostalgia 810). Liminality is not foreign to structure, but “appartiene alla struttura stessa che vuole mutarsi, come l’altra faccia della medaglia” This is why the church’s institutional forms must “cercare di comprendere le situazioni di liminalità, distinguendole con discernimento pastorale dalle situazioni di marginalità, per essere sospinte verso un continuo rinnovamento” (Nostalgia 812).

3.8 Conclusion

The church is in need of the dynamism of liminality, the dynamism of prophecy, if it is to pulsate in the dynamism of the Word, incarnate at the beginning of its history and continuously the mystery of its being *through which* and *towards which* it moves in history until the Eschaton. The church cannot continue to reflect its inner mystery without *limen*, and the primary vehicle of *limen* is prophecy.

This gives some very interesting conclusions to our topic. The results from the sociological investigation of prophecy’s effects become a river that flow together

with the other rivers of prophecy and tradition, treated in the chapters preceding the sociological investigations: Prophecy serves the realisation and re-actualisation of the fundamentals of faith that have found many concrete historical realisations in *Golden Ages* of Christendom. Prophets point back to these and call the faithful to live by faith as in the days of old. But by doing so they really point not to the historical exemplary realisation of the Kingdom but to the Kingdom itself, and this Kingdom, *the very reality of God*, lies before, above, and ahead of the present historical age, simply because it transcends history. The prophets are hence the servants of the church, through which the transcendent Kingdom of God continues concretely and powerfully to realise and unfold itself in time. It is the power of this dynamic presence of God's world within the world of humans that enables believers constantly to be drawn towards *the World to Come* although they live in the world of now.

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Contents of Entire Thesis

1 Prophetic Introduction

- 1.1 Thesis and Purpose**
- 1.2 Limitation**
- 1.3 Towards a Working Definition of Christian Prophecy**
- 1.4 Motivation**
- 1.5 Outline**

2 Prophecy and Theology

- 2.1 Dogmatic Theology**
- 2.2 Fundamental Theology**
- 2.3 New Developments in Revelation Theology**
- 2.4 Exegesis**
- 2.5 Church History**
- 2.6 Mystical Theology**
 - 2.6.1 Aurelius Augustinus
 - 2.6.2 Thomas Aquinas
 - 2.6.3 John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila
- 2.7 Conclusion**

3 Prophecy and History

- 3.1 Prophecy in Ancient Israel**
 - 3.1.1 Prophetic Words as Result of Divine Revelation

- 3.1.2 Under God's Authority
- 3.1.3 Intimate of God
- 3.1.4 The Development of Old Testament prophecy

3.2 Prophecy in Early Judaism

- 3.2.1 On the Cessation of Prophecy in Early Judaism
- 3.2.2 Apocalyptic Literature
- 3.2.3 Eschatological Prophecy
- 3.2.4 Clerical Prophecy
- 3.2.5 Sapiential Prophecy
- 3.2.6 Conclusion

3.3 Prophecy in Christianity

- 3.3.1 Prophecy and John the Baptist
- 3.3.2 Prophecy and Jesus
- 3.3.3 Prophecy and the Growth of the Early Church
- 3.3.4 Prophecy and Paul
- 3.3.5 Prophecy and The Acts of the Apostles
- 3.3.6 Prophecy and The Apocalypse
- 3.3.7 Prophecy in Q
- 3.3.8 Prophecy's Alleged Cessation in Early Christianity
- 3.3.9 Prophecy, Institution, and Holy Scripture
- 3.3.10 Prophecy and the Rise of the Christian Canon
- 3.3.11 Prophecy and The Early Church
- 3.3.12 Prophecy and Early Post-apostolic Writings
- 3.3.13 Prophecy and Hermas the Shepherd
- 3.3.14 Prophecy and Montanism
- 3.3.15 Prophecy at the Root of the Monastic Movement and the Founding of Religious Orders
- 3.3.16 Prophecy and Medieval Knowledge—Rupert Deutz

- 3.3.17 Suffering Prophets
- 3.3.18 Marian Apparitions
- 3.3.19 Differences Between Prophecy and Apparitions.
- 3.3.20 The Worldwide Relevance of Apparitions.
- 3.3.21 A Prophetic Case Story From the 21st Century

3.4 Conclusion

4 *Prophecy and Revelation*

4.1 Models of Revelation

- 4.1.1 The Epiphanic Understanding of Revelation
- 4.1.2 Doctrinal Understanding of Revelation
- 4.1.3 Vatican I
- 4.1.4 Personalistic Understanding of Revelation
- 4.1.5 Revelation as History
- 4.1.6 Dialectic Understanding of Revelation
- 4.1.7 Revelation as Inner Experience
- 4.1.8 The Mutual Complementarity of the Models of Revelation
- 4.1.9 Spinoza and Prophecy—No to Revelation, Yes to Prophecy

4.2 Revelation as Concept of Experience

- 4.2.1 Inspiration and Experience
- 4.2.2 Visions, Apparitions, Locutions
- 4.2.3 Private, Particular or Prophetic Revelations?

4.3 Revelation as Concept of Reflection

4.4 The Concept of Prophecy based on Revelation Models

4.5 Models of Prophecy

- 4.5.1 Prophecy's Edification as Phenomenological Autocriterion
- 4.5.2 Prophecy according to Fisichella's Thesis

- 4.5.3 Prophecy as Correction
- 4.5.4 Prophecy as Divine Direction or Imperative.
- 4.5.5 Prophecy Sheds Light Over the Past
- 4.5.6 Prophecy Sheds Light Over the Present
- 4.5.7 Prophecy Sheds Light Over the Future

4.6 Conclusion

5 *Prophecy and End of Revelation*

5.1 Historical Overview of the “Apostolic End of Revelation”

- 5.1.1 Early Church
- 5.1.2 Middle Ages
- 5.1.3 The Tridentine Council
- 5.1.4 Melchior Cano
- 5.1.5 The Threat to the Normativity of Revelation
- 5.1.6 II Vatican Council

5.2 Conclusion

5.3 Unfruitfulness of the Term “End”

5.4 Three Ends?

- 5.4.1 The End of Revelation With the Cessation of Christ’s Physical Presence on Earth
- 5.4.2 The End of Revelation with the Death of the Last Apostle
- 5.4.3 The end of Revelation with the Closure of Holy Scripture

5.5 Conclusion

6 *Prophecy and Tradition*

6.1 Christianity as Preliminary Stage of Salvation

- 6.1.1 Maximus the Confessor and Philipp Renczes, Prophets of the Telos
- 6.1.2 Hans Urs von Balthasar on Christianity and Eschatology
- 6.1.3 Joseph Ratzinger on Christianity's Hope of *The Kingdom to Come*
- 6.1.4 John Zizioulas on Charismatic Apostolic Continuation
- 6.1.5 Conclusion

6.2 Prophetic Implementation of Revelation

- 6.2.1 Prophecy and Scripture
- 6.2.2 Prophecy and the Magisterium
- 6.2.3 Prophecy and Theology
- 6.2.4 Prophecy and Development of Dogma
- 6.2.5 Prophecy and Development of Pious Traditions
- 6.2.6 Prophecy, Liturgy, and Sacraments
- 6.2.7 Prophecy and Places of Pilgrimage

6.3 Conclusion

7 *Prophecy and Sociology*

7.1 Alessandro Toniolo's Reception of Victor Turner

7.2 The *Communitas* as Antistructure

7.3 The Necessity of the Destruction for the Recreation of the Initial Perfection:

7.4 The Surety of a New Beginning and the Eschatological Tension

7.5 Towards the Heart of Faith

- 7.6 The Prophetic is in the Liminal**
 - 7.7 Wider Application of the Paradigm *Limen* to the Christian Context**
 - 7.8 Conclusion**
- 8 *Prophecy's Status and Types of Faith***
- 8.1 Consequence of Ecclesial Approbation to Prophecy's Status**
 - 8.2 Between Fides Humana and Fides Divina**
 - 8.3 Conclusion**
- 9 *Prophecy and Truth***
- 9.1 Accuracy of Human Experience**
 - 9.2 Intrinsic Criteria Relating to the Doctrinal Content of Revelations**
 - 9.3 Intrinsic Criteria Relating to the Person Receiving the Revelations**
 - 9.3.1 The Physiology of the Person
 - 9.3.2 The Psychology of the Person
 - 9.3.3 The Spiritual Life of the Person
 - 9.4 Extrinsic Criteria**
 - 9.5 How the Church Approves a Prophetic Revelation**
 - 9.6 How the Church Rejects a Prophetic Revelation**
 - 9.7 The Nature of the Church's Judgement**
 - 9.8 Extent of Institutional Evaluation of Prophecy**
 - 9.9 Conclusion**

10 *General Conclusion*

- 10.1** **Prophecy's Status in Theology**
- 10.2** **Prophecy In View of Different Models of Revelation**
- 10.3** **Prophecy and Time**
- 10.4** **Prophecy, Criticism and Encouragement**
- 10.5** **Prophecy and End of Revelation with the Last Apostle**
- 10.6** **Prophecy as Actualisation of Revelation**
- 10.7** **Prophet and Priest. A Phenomenology of Prophecy**
- 10.8** **Prophecy and Kairos**
- 10.9** **Prophecy's Mode**
- 10.10** **Prophecy as Charism**
- 10.11** **Prophecy and Types of Authority**

11 *Works Quoted*

12 *Index*