

Biblical Foundations of St. Thomas' Treatise on Prophecy

If St. Thomas Aquinas were living today, what could his penetrating genius, his purity of soul, his dedication to truth do with the present state of theological science? Would he still find room in his theological synthesis for the various disciplines which claim to be theological just because they are appended with that catch phrase "theology of"? Does he have to alter his methodology, change some of his conclusions, remold altogether the plan of his *Summa Theologica*? Or shall he insist that his synthesis of theology is perennially valid since it is based on the formal object itself of this science who is God *sub ratione Deitatis*? We must remember that St. Thomas wrote his *Summa* for beginners and therefore we should not expect it to be in the perfect stage. But as he himself remarked, the perfections of the perfect stage are virtually present in the initial stage just like the perfections of a full grown tree are virtually in the seed, so also his theological synthesis should have the potentiality for growth without changing anything in its structure, without destroying any essential part.

SPECULATIVE AND BIBLICAL APPROACH

St. Thomas' synthesis of theology, however, has been thought of to be predominantly speculative and less biblical. Biblical texts were just employed to be mere pegs for argumentations already structured by the speculative mind. There is always the danger that biblical texts may be quoted out of their context, taken li-

terally when in some cases it should not, abstracted from their "sitz im leben" losing thereby their intended meaning, missing the message for the medium. The tremendous progress made in biblical science during the past years was considered by some to have dealt a severe blow to speculative theology. With the aid of history which aims to be as scientific as possible and other allied sciences like archaeology, philology, hermeneutics, linguistics, the discoveries of biblical exegesis have found sure footing developing new theological concepts and restructuring some old ones. Take for instance the concept of "revelation." It has passed on from a mere communication of propositional formulas to a personal communication of God in time and space (thus historical) to a chosen community and through this chosen community to the whole of mankind. Speculative theology, it is adduced, is valid in its own sphere but it must be based on a solid biblical and patristic foundations to be afforded by the findings of biblical and patristic theology.

It would be definitely rash to conclude that St. Thomas depended more in his theological synthesis on logical constructs rather than on biblical facts. One of the most remarkable features in reading his works is the singular facility by which he cites scriptural texts, whether to boost his objections, or strengthen his arguments, or counterpose other scriptural texts in answer to his objections. It would not be surprising at all if he could recite the whole Bible from memory. His work, training, mental disposition could easily make him accomplish such a feat. Since pocket-bibles were still undreamed of in the Middle Ages as printing was not even thought of to be a future reality, it was imperative for theology professors if they wished to excel in their profession to know the Bible by heart.

ST. THOMAS' BIBLICAL FORMATION

St. Thomas began his teaching career in the General House of Studies of the Dominicans in Paris as a *Baccalaureus Biblicus* (Bachelor of the Bible) in 1252 glossing the text of Baruch: *hic est liber mandatorum Dei et lex quae est in aeternum; omnes qui tenent eam pervenient ad vitam*. In his prologue to Isaias he himself gives us the role of his office of Bachelor of the Bible:

*percurrere est expedite in finem currendo devenire. . . sine impedimento dubitationis.*¹ "He (bachelor of the Bible) taught the whole of Scripture cursorily (*cursorie*), pinning down without any digressing or raising of questions to the text alone (*textualiter*), upon which he rapidly shed light by means of the currently accepted glosses."²

After two years teaching as Bachelor of the Bible (1252-1254), he passed on to the next rank as *Baccalaurus Sententiarum* (Bachelor of the Sentences) reading and explaining the Sentences of Peter Lombard which he did for two years, 1254-1256. About the month of March or April 1256 he was promoted to the office of *Magister in Sacra Pagina* afterwards changed to *Magister in Sacra Theologia* (Master in Sacred Theology). The principal task of this office was precisely to comment on the Bible. For his solemn inaugural address he chose to expound the words of Ps. 103, 13 (Heb. Ps. 104): *Rigans montes de superioribus suis: de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra.*

During all the years of his teaching career St. Thomas was able to write lengthy commentaries on some books of the Bible. In Paris he must have written the commentaries on Matthew and Isaiah (1256-59). During his stay in Italy (1260-68) he wrote the commentary on Job and his famous *Catenae Aureae* on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which, as the name implies, are series or chains of glosses taken especially from the Fathers explaining the texts of the four evangelists. His other biblical works are commentaries on the book of Lamentations, on Jeremiah, on the Epistles of St. Paul, on the Psalms. Shortly before his death at the request of the monks of Fossa Nova, according to tradition, he explained the Cantic of Canticles which unfortunately had not come down to us, or perhaps was never put into writing. It can truly be said that Thomas was a leading exegete during his day as Pope Leo XIII expressed in his Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (Enchiridion Biblicum, no. 96), "*Thomas Aquinas inter eos habuit palmam*".

¹ *In Isaiam Prophetam expositio Prooemium.*

² M.-D. Chenu, O.P., *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, (Chicago: 1964), p. 243.

CONTEMPORARY BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Modern biblical science wants to study the Bible objectively. It is not only a historical book, nor a purely religious book, nor a book which contains revelation. The message is not only the meaning of the words, nor the meaning of the combined words forming a sentence nor even the combination of sentences making a text. Biblical historians have long found out that the Bible could not be considered a historical book in the strict sense. It would be a great error to interpret all the stories in the Bible as something historical, meaning past events which have actually occurred. The real historical events should be discerned behind these narratives and stories with the help of an objective historical method.

Biblical science in our own day has accumulated vast new data concerning the revelation of God in Sacred Scripture. With the aid of modern hermeneutics and other related sciences the biblical messages intended by the Sacred Authors or Hagiographers through the maze of different literary media used are consistently being brought to light. The intended messages of the various authors are the ones revealed, not the literary artifice employed to convey the message.

The validity of St. Thomas theological constructions may be tested if from this vast field of disclosed revealed data independent from speculation no essential changes have to be made in his system and no important theological conclusion has to be rejected.

A test case of how a particular theological subject has developed speculatively and biblically since the time of St. Thomas to our day may be presented in the case of the phenomenon of prophetism with its corresponding result, that of prophecy. We will trace how St. Thomas developed this concept in his theological synthesis using his own theological methodology and to what extent is it developed in our own day.

ST. THOMAS' TREATISE ON PROPHECY

In St. Thomas' theological synthesis which he masterly gave expression in the *Summa Theologica* his treatise On Prophecy is

found in the IIa-IIae after the cardinal virtues. It is the first of the gratuitous charisms (*gratia gratis data*) which include the gift of speech and the gift of miracles.

In comparison to the whole edifice of the *Summa* the treatise *On Prophecy* seems to be short indeed. It has only 4 questions with 22 articles. But its importance should not be minimized in the least since the existence of prophecy was the chosen medium for revelation which in itself is the very reason for the existence of theology. It is true that God could have made use of other means of revelation other than the prophetic medium but in the present economy of salvation it occupies the first place. Even the revelation of the Incarnate Word has reached us through the intermediary of Sacred Writers or Hagiographers who in a certain way received that impulse to write, which is technically called *scriptural inspiration*, a charism which is reduced to the genus of prophecy. "At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is." (Heb. I:1-2).

Prophecy is a divine charism in the order of knowledge, secondarily in the order of operations like the gift of tongues and the gift of miracles which could follow from prophecy. It would be important to note the reason for this charism: "Donum autem prophetiae datur ad utilitatem Ecclesiae, ut patet I ad Cor., (XII, 10). Unde omnia illa quorum cognitio potest esse utilis ad salutem sunt materia prophetiae, sive sint praeterita, sive futura sive aeterna, sive necessaria, sive contingentia. Illa vero quae ad salutem pertinere non possunt, sunt extranea a materia prophetiae".³

It is remarkable to compare this text of St. Thomas with the text of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* of Vatican II: "Since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and *without error* that truth which God wanted

³ *Qq. Disputatae De Veritate*, q. 12, art. 2 in c.

put into the sacred writings for the *sake of our salvation*.”⁴ These two short paragraphs in St. Thomas and *Dei Verbum* could have saved us a lot of discussion and waste of time concerning the inerrancy of Sacred Scripture.

The other work where St. Thomas dealt explicitly with Prophecy is in the disputed questions *De Veritate*, question 12. This has 14 articles as compared with the 22 articles of the *Summa*. He has also made some short allusions of this subject in the *Contra Gentes*, book III chapter 154 and in his *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ch. xiv, lesson 1.

PROPHECY IN *DE VERITATE* AND IN THE *SUMMA*

It is interesting to compare the treatment of Prophecy in the questions *De Veritate* and in the *Summa Theologica* which could perhaps give us a glimpse of the state of mind of St. Thomas on this treatise from the time he wrote the *De Veritate* (1256/59) to the *IIa IIae* (1271/72). Of the 14 articles in *De Veritate* 13 have exact parallels in the *Summa*. The headings and division in the *Summa* are more orderly, faithful to his expressed intention in the introduction to his monumental work. The 4 questions allotted to Prophecy in the *Summa* deal with a) Essence of Prophecy; b) Cause of Prophecy; c) Mode of Prophecy; and d) Divisions of Prophecy. There are then 8 articles more in the *Summa* as compared with *De Veritate*. A most notable addition in the *Summa* in the question of Prophecy's essence is a separate treatment of the faculty which is directly affected by the charism. The first article in question 171, *IIa-IIae* of the *Summa* asks whether prophecy pertains to knowledge. The first article in the questions *De Veritate* on the other hand immediately begins by distinguishing whether prophecy is an act or a habit. Another article in the *Summa* not found in *De Veritate* is the question whether the prophet is conscious of this divine charism, “whether he always distinguishes what he says by his own spirit from what he says by the prophetic spirit?” (q. 171, art. 5). In the question on the cause of prophecy, two other questions were added not found in *De Veritate*: “whether any prophecy comes from the demons?”

⁴ *Dei Verbum*, III, no. 11. Italics ours.

and "whether the prophets of the demons ever foretell the truth " (q. 172, art. 5 and 6).

On the whole St. Thomas' treatment of Prophecy in *De Veritate* appear much longer since he presents more objections and counter-objections in each article than in the *Summa*. While his articles in the *Summa* contain for the most part only 3 objections the ones in *De Veritate* have an average of 10 positive arguments. Article 3 for example in *De Veritate* has a record of 19 arguments in defense of the thesis, while article 10 has 14.

NATURE OF PROPHECY

St. Thomas was very clear in his theological synthesis about the nature of prophecy. It is a charism of knowledge included under the genus of "gratia gratis data" (lit. "freely given" charism) as opposed to "gratia sanctificans" (sanctifying grace). As a "gratia gratis data" it could not be a habit but only a transitory impression, not like the light in the sun which is an abiding form but the light in the atmosphere which depends on the sun. Secondly the term prophecy is applied to the gift of tongues or the gift of miracles in as much as they are the consequence of prophecy or tend to confirm prophecy.

As charism of knowledge prophecy should have for its object knowables. These are things which have the common aspect of not being knowable to man except by divine revelation. Not-knowables may be of three kinds. There are those which are relatively not-knowable according to a certain place or time, definitely not known to all but only to a particular person or persons. A prophet may be given a knowledge of these through divine revelation. For example he may know the doings of somebody absent like the case of the prophet Eliseus who perceived what his absent disciple Giezi had done (4 Kgs. V, 26) or discern the secret thoughts of an individual; there are also things which are beyond the knowledge of all men not only because of limitations in his faculties but the objects "are not in themselves knowable" (*quia in seipsis non sunt cognoscibilia*).⁵ These things accord-

⁵ II-II, q. 171, art. 3.

ing to St. Thomas are the future contingencies which from the point of view of man are still not determined.

I would like to add a note of clarification concerning these last objects of prophetic knowledge. It may be wondered how things which "are not in themselves knowable" could be the object of cognition. If we try to analyze carefully the wordings of St. Thomas we will see that they are very precise. He did not say, "things which are in themselves *unknowable*" but "things which are *not in themselves knowable*". Certainly there is a big difference between the two. "Things which are in themselves *unknowable*" can never be known by any cognitive faculty, while "things which are *not in themselves knowable*" can still be known in some other way, not *in themselves* but in another. Future contingencies are not in themselves knowable because they have not happened as yet but God already knows them as in the present so He could communicate them to a cognitive faculty such as man's. The prediction of future events related to the economy of salvation had been divinely communicated through the prophetic medium, notable among these are those things pertaining to the messianic era and to the Messiah Himself that the name "prophet" has been more associated with future telling. In any case God's communication can embrace the past as well as present objects.

Again as a charism of knowledge prophecy should possess the necessary elements for cognition: the representations or species which are the material elements and the light (lumen) which is the formal element. Three cases may be envisaged here; a) both the representations and the light are supernatural; b) the representations are natural while the light is supernatural; c) the representations are supernatural while the light is natural. Since the formal element in cognition is the light, it follows that if the light is supernatural the cognition would also be supernatural, verifiable in the cases of a) and b) which therefore are to be included under prophetic knowledge. The case of c) cannot be considered under prophecy since there is no proportion at all between the light and the representations. There are many examples of this case in Sacred Scripture. The dreams of Pharaoh for example could not be interpreted by him since he lacked the light which was given to Joseph. There were also many kinds of representations which had a supernatural origin. Some are sen-

sible like the writing on the wall, the visions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel and other prophets. Others are imaginary like the dreams of Jacob, of St. Joseph, of the Magi, while others were conceptual, like prophetic predictions, theological interpretations of Israel's history, etc.

CONTEMPORARY TREATISE ON PROPHECY

The treatise on Prophecy in our present-day manuals used in our seminaries is usually found in Apologetics which together with miracles constitutes one of the motives of credibility. A representative of this tendency may be gathered from the article of A. Michel, "Prophetie" in the *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*, t. XIII, cols. 708-737 which in a way follows the notion and division of Prophecy already marked by Garrigou-Lagrange, in *De Revelatione*, vol. II (Rome, 1917). It is clear that Prophecy is conceived in Apologetics as a prediction of the future whose argumentative value lies in the fact that these predictions were realized. Like miracles it is used as a most forceful proof to defend the divinity of the Church. Prophecy is also understood in this sense by Karl Rahner in his book *Vision and Prophecies*, (Herder, New York: 1963). "What we today call prophecy, that is a prediction or a foresight of a future event which could not be known by ordinary human means, occurs in the most various forms," He then enumerated five types of prophecy, 4 of which are not supernatural. "The *fifth* and last type of prophecy are genuine supernatural revelations of which God himself is the immediate cause. . . Together with miracles they are the evidence in sacred history by which God confirms his message to humanity, given through the prophets and apostles, and manifests its divine origin." This is evidently the last degree of prophecy spoken of by St. Thomas having for its object future contingencies.

A modern commentary on the treatise on Prophecy in the *Summa Theologica* which is most valuable was written by the late Paul Synave, O.P., and completed by Pierre Benoit, O.P., professor at the École Biblique in Jerusalem. This was part of the series of commentaries in French of the *Summa* for the *Editions de la Revue des Jeunes* (Pars, 1947). The French original was translated by Avery R. Dulles, S.J., and Thomas L. Sheridan, S.J.,

with the title *Prophecy and Inspiration* (New York, Belgium, 1969). This translation is also most important since, as Pierre Benoit himself states in his preface to the English edition, his "thought has been clarified, enriched, and likewise corrected on many points by useful criticism."

Pierre Benoit's profound analysis of St. Thomas' doctrine on Prophecy has given him a very important key for a better understanding of the concept of Inspiration. His mind on this matter has matured throughout the years and was given expression in a number of articles, the latest that I am aware of being the short article in the *Concilium*, "Inspiration and Revelation," vol. 10, no. 1 (December, 1965), pp. 5-14. A comprehensive treatment of Benoit' studies on Inspiration is found in his article in the *Revue Biblique*, "Revelation et Inspiration selon la Bible, chez saint Thomas et dans les discussions modernes", t. 70 (1963), pp. 321-370. This was also made available to English readers by J. Murphy-O'Connor, O.P. and Sister M. Keverne, O.P.

PROPHECY, INSPIRATION, REVELATION

A major breakthrough in Benoit's work was the clarification of St. Thomas' use of the term "prophecy" "inspiration" and "revelation." "St. Thomas distinguished two phases in prophecy: (1) An elevation of the prophet's mind whereby the range of his intellect is extended so that it becomes capable of perceiving divine truths; here he reserves the word *inspiration* to designate this elevation, which is due to the action of the Holy Spirit. (2) The actual perception of the supernatural truths, for the sake of which the inspiration has been given; to this perception he assigns the term *revelation*."⁶

The relevant text in St. Thomas where this distinction is found is in his reply to obj. 4, q. 171 of II^{II}ae: Accordingly *inspiration* is requisite for prophecy, as regards the raising of the mind, according to Job, xxxii. 8. The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding: while *revelation* is necessary, as regards the very perception of Divine things, whereby prophecy is completed; by its means the veil of darkness and ignorance is removed." Ins-

⁶ P. Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration*, p. 17.

piration and revelation, therefore, are considered by St. Thomas as two facets of the same prophetic charism. Illustration: for a myopic person, *inspiration* may be likened to the act of placing an eyeglasses to enforce the eyesight, while *revelation* may be compared to the act of seeing.

Other developments followed, first we may say, on the speculative level. Since "inspiration" was thought of to be the elevating factor of the faculty necessary for revelation the next logical step was to determine which of the three operations of the mind is directly involved. Since truth is formally found in judgment and revelation involves truth it follows that judgment is the mental operation which receives the supernatural illumination necessary for the reception of new supernatural truths. Two judgments are usually distinguished in scholastic psychology: the speculative judgment and the practical judgment. A further inquiry has reached the stage of determining which of these two judgments is the proper subject of the prophetic illumination. A survey of this contemporary debate is also given by Benoit in his article in the *Revue Biblique*, "Revelation et Inspiration selon la Bible chez Saint Thomas et dans les discussions modernes". In the English translation *Inspiration and the Bible*, this is found on pages 49-82.

Aside from this I propose to distinguish the stage of prophecy on the level of perception and another on the level of proclamation. The first is a prerequisite for the second. Isaiah for example seeing the vision is a necessary step for Isaiah proclaiming the vision. The elevation of the prophet's faculty required to perceive divine things or receive the divine impulses need not be different from the one required to transmit the divine message either through actions or through speech or through writings.

But the biblical reality as Benoit himself realized was far more complicated. The concepts of "prophecy," "inspiration," and "revelation" in the Bible are richly varied and more complex. "To begin with, revelation should not be understood as the divine truth breaking into a purely passive mind like a prediction uttered by the Pythian oracle in a frenetic state, deprived of clear conceptual powers; nor should it be regarded as a pre-existing Torah or a pre-fabricated Koran falling from the sky into a man's hands. Biblical revelation is, rather, the living perception of the Word,

the flowering that comes from the intense reaction of a man's mind raised up by the Spirit of God and transported by this Spirit to the very limits of its powers."⁷

DIFFERENT KINDS OF INSPIRATION

Knowing the history of how the Bible was composed, the concept of Inspiration has lost its rigidity which could be applied only to one category of authors. Biblical science has furnished innumerable data as to the origin of the Bible in its human aspect. It may be deemed an established fact that the whole Bible was a composite work of many writers spanning through a period of many centuries from the first inspired writer who wrote a biblical text to the last compiler who completed the unification of the biblical whole. These biblical writers or hagiographers may be categorized according to their contributions in the formation of the Bible either qualitatively or quantitatively. An Isaiah for example who had contributed chapter after chapter of biblical texts should be given more importance as a biblical author from an individual who just added a sentence or two in the biblical formation whose additions had also become a part of the Bible.

Aware of this complicated origin of the Bible with its various categories of "authors" theologians have opened new avenues in the development of the doctrine on Inspiration. Inspiration cannot be thought of now as a univocal concept claiming the same degree of predication to an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, a Matthew, or a Mark on one hand, and to an editor, or reviser, or compiler on the other. The concept of biblical inspiration has been widened to include not only scriptural inspiration but also inspiration to

⁷ Pierre Benoit, "Inspiration and Revelation," *Concilium*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1965) p. 10; cf. also by the same author: *Inspiration and the Bible*, Sheed and Ward, 1965, p. ; Other works of P. Benoit on the same subject may be mentioned here: "La Septante est-elle inspirée?", *Vom Wort des Lebens* (Festschrift M. Meinertz), Münster im Westfalia (1951), pp. 41-49, Reprinted in *Exégèse et théologie*, Paris (1961), vol. 1, pp. 3-12; "Inspiration"; *Initiation biblique*, ed. A. Robert and A. Tricot, Tournai (1954), pp. 6-44. English trans. is found in *Guide to the Bible*, trans. by E. Arbez and M. McGuire, 2nd ed., New York (1960), vol. 1, pp. 9-52; "Les Analogies de l'Inspiration", *Sacra Pagina. Miscellanea Biblica Congressus Internationalis Catholici de Re Biblica*, ed. J. Coppens, A. Descamps, E. Massaux, 1, Gembloux (1959), pp. 86-99, trans. by J. Murphy-O'Connor, O.P. in *Inspiration and the Bible*, ed. cit., pp. 94-115; "Aspects of Biblical Inspiration," trans. J. Murphy-O'Connor and S.K. Ashe, (Chicago: The Priory Press, 1965).

speak, termed by Benoit as "prophetic" or "apostolic" inspiration, and inspiration to act, called "pastoral" inspiration.

By the simple process of combining these three kinds of inspirations in an individual we may theoretically categorize seven types of inspired persons in the Bible: 1) those who were inspired only to act but not to speak nor to write; 2) those who were inspired to act and to speak but not to write; 3) those who were inspired to speak but not to act nor to write; 4) those who were inspired to write only but not to act nor to speak; 5) those who were inspired to act and to write but to speak; 6) those who were inspired to speak and write but not to act; 7) those who were inspired to act, to speak, and to write.

We will find out that every category listed above could be furnished with examples, thus making the categories not only a theoretical elucubration but biblically verifiable.

BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT

It has to be insisted time and again that the theological methodology of St. Thomas includes both the positive and the speculative approach. If for him theology is the science of God, *ratione Deitatis*, then all methods tending towards the understanding of theology's sublime object must be put to use. No other source can give us more knowledge of who God is than Sacred Scripture. An excellent article by J. Van der Ploeg, O.P., in *The Thomist*, vol. 10, (1947), pp. 398-422 could give the reader a well grounded orientation on "The place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas."

In his treatise on Prophecy, St. Thomas has quoted Scripture 140 times distributed into the 4 questions of this treatise containing 22 articles. It means that he has made use of an average of 6 scriptural quotations per article. This is quite remarkable compared to his use of scriptural texts in his treatise *De Deo Uno*, S.T., I, q. 2-26. In that treatise with 25 questions containing 149 articles this author has only counted 266 scriptural quotations or an average of 1.7 per article. It may be interesting and indicative of something to complete this textual count even starting only with the Summa. We will find out which books of the Bible

were most frequently cited, which were not cited at all. Of course the choice of biblical quotations would greatly depend on the subject matter, but some insights on the biblical methodology of the author might come out by the manner of his manipulation of the text.

In the treatise *De Deo Uno* for instance, the distribution of scriptural quotations from different books may be broken up as follows: Psalms-35; Romans-32; Matthew-15; John-15; I Corinthians-16; Wisdom-15; Job, Isaiah — 10; Jeremiah — 9; Ephesians — 10; Hebrews — 8; Genesis, Ecclesiasticus, Proverbs — 7; Exodus — 6; Corinthians, II Timothy, James, I John — 5; Deuteronomy, Luke, I Timothy — 4; Malachi, Acts, Apocalypse — 3; Numbers, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Hosea, Philemon, Titus; 2 Peter — 2; 1 Samuel, 2 Maccabees, Daniel, Micah, Galatians, I Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians — 1 each. All in all 40 books were quoted while the 30 or so remaining, had for some reason or another, had no cause to be mentioned.

In his treatise on Prophecy in the *Summa* from question 171-174 of the IIa-IIae we get the following breakdown: Isaiah — 18; I Corinthians — 17; Matthew — 9; Jeremiah — 10; 2 Kgs. — 8; Genesis, 1 Kgs., Psalms, John, Ephesians — 6; Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy — 5; Ezechiel, Amos — 4; Ecclesiasticus, II Corinthians, II Peter — 3; Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Daniel, Hosea, Luke, Acts, Romans, Hebrews — 2; Joshua, Micee, Marks, Timothy, Jude — 1.

What could be the criteria for the choice of a particular text? As we have mentioned earlier the subject matter may have much to do with it. The methodology used in the *Summa* could be also one influential factor. It consists of series of objections supported by an array of arguments from authority and reason.

Theologians, however, would not be contented nowadays just by working and re-working on the abstract concept of Prophecy. They would want to know the prophets in their real historical setting. They would like to see how they "tick." After all the prophets were not like radio-receivers which shut on and off dependent on the power station. They were individuals of flesh and blood who could smile at a joyous feeling, who could erupt when provoked. What greater knowledge could we have of the prophetic phenomenon for example if we know more about the personality of an Isaiah, or of a Jeremiah, or any of the prophets; if we could

re-produce and re-live their environment With the aid of a rigid historical method, supported by archaeological facts and comparative psychology or analogy of human behavior valid for the men of the 20th century A.D. and the men of the centuries B.C. we can re-create the biblical world, not so completely, we agree, but realistically workable.⁸

⁸ Studies are now proliferating with regards to the phenomenon of Prophecy in the Bible and also in other religions of the Middle East. The Germans are very assiduous in this regard. We may cite for example the works of L. Dün, a Catholic, *Wolle und Wirken der alttestamentlichen Propheten*, (Düsseldorf; 1926); H. Junker, *Prophet und Seher im A.T.*, (Tèves: 1927); P. Volz, *Prophetengestalten des A.T. Sendung und Botschaft der alt. Gotteszeugen*, (Stuttgart: 1938); W. Vischer, *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments*, esp. vol. II, *Die früheren Propheten*, translated by P. Klossowski into French: *Les premier prophetes*, (Neuchatel, Paris: 1951); G. Fohrer, *Die symbolischen Handlungen der Propheten* (Zürich: 1953); for vast critical reviews, one may consult the *Theologische Rundschau*; G. Sharbet, "Die prophetisch-Literatur, der Stand der Forschung", *Ephem. Theol. Lov.*, XLIV, 1968, pp. 346-406; G. von Rad, *Die Botschaft der Propheten*, revised by E. Haller together with the author, (Munich: 1967), afterwards translated into English with the title *The Meaning of the Prophets*, (London: 1968).

French and English researchers have not been lagging behind. One may consult for instance the book of J. Chaine, *Introduction à la lecture des prophetes*, (Paris: 1932), R. de Vaux, "Les Prophetes de Baal sur le Mont Carmel", (*Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*) 5, 1951, pp. 7-20; We have the English works of two Jewish authors: Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: 1955), and A. Neher, *The Essence of Prophetism*, (Paris: 1955); C.F. Witley, *The Prophetic Achievement*, (London: 1963); A study of the prophets in their historical setting was made by Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, (New York: 1964); James Muilenburg, "The Office of the Prophet in Ancient Israel," (*The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (B.M.S.), ed. by J. Philip Hyatt, (London: 1965), pp. 74-97; we can add another excellent collection, *Israel's Prophetic Heritage, Essays in honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. by B.W. Anderson, (London: 1962); we should not omit the vast synthesis of J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, (Oxford: 1963); for the philological aspect we have the works of M.A. van Oudenrijn, *Nebu'ah*, (Rome: 1926); A. Jepsen, *Nabi*, (Munich: 1934). In Spanish an original contribution was given by Angel González Nuñez, *Profetismo y Sacerdocio*, (Madrid: 1969), with a bibliography on pp. 341-358. This was his doctoral thesis in the Institut Catholique de Paris in 1959.

So far the best survey can be found in the 4 numbers (44, 45, 46, 47) from 1969-1972 with an additional bibliography of the *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible, SDB*, started by Louis Pirot and André Robert and continued under the direction of Henri Cazelles and André Feuillet, (Letouzey & Ané, Editeurs, Paris). A most important contribution was presented by Père L. Ramlot, O.P., professor of Sacred Scripture in the theological college of the Petits Frères de Jesus in Toulouse. He wrote on "Prophétisme et politique en Orient (Prophetism and Politics in the Orient)", and "La Prophétie biblique (biblical prophecy)", *SDB*, vol. 45, cols. 811-908; 910-1222. For prophetism in the New Testament (*Prophétisme dans le Nouveau Testament*) we have the subsequent article of Ed. Cothenet, master of conferences of the Institut Catholique de Paris, fasc. 46 and 47 of *SDB*.

PHILOLOGICAL SURVEY

In order to expound the nature of prophecy St. Thomas made use of an etymological proof to show that it pertains to the charism of knowledge. The text from the Bible which he cited for this purpose was that of I Sam. IX, 9: "for a man who is now called a 'prophet' was formerly called a 'seer'." 'Prophet' is the English word used to translate the hebrew *nabi* while 'seer' corresponds to the hebrew *ro'eh* the present participle of *ra'ah* which means 'he saw'. Then Aquinas pursues: "But vision belongs to knowledge, therefore, prophecy, belongs to knowledge."

This short biblical passage alone would call for a lengthy commentary which would result in an expansion of St. Thomas' foregoing exposition leading even to the extent of polishing some rough edges in his philological erudition.

As far as the etymology of the word 'prophet' is concerned, St. Thomas makes the following remarks: "ut sic dicatur esse propheta non solum *procul fans*, id est annuntians, sed etiam *procul videns*, a phanos, quod est apparitio". (Qq. Disp. De Veritate, q. 12, art. 1, in c.). He repeats this observation in the Summa, II-II, q. 171, art. 1 in c.: "Respondeo dicendum quod prophetia primo et principaliter consistit in cognitione: quia videlicet cognoscunt quaedam quae sunt procul remota ab hominum cognitione. Unde possunt dici prophetae a 'phanos' quod est apparitio: quia scilicet eis aliqua quae procul, apparent". To all appearances he took the etymology of the word 'phophet' as *procul fans* from St. Isidore of Seville: "Et secundum hoc, ut Isidorus dicit, in libro Etymol. (lib. 7, cap. 8) possunt dici prophetae "quasi prae-fatores", eo quod "porro fantur", idest a remotis fantur, "et de futuris vere praedicunt" (Ibid.).

The underlying Greek words in this etymology of St. Isidore for 'prophet' seem to be *pro* for the *prae* and *phētēs* for the Latin *fator* (pl. *fatores*). *Phētēs* came from *phēmi* meaning, I speak, I say; while *fator* is a substantive derived from *fateri* meaning to confess, to make known. *Pro*, however, was given the meaning of 'that which is from afar' (with a temporal sense) equivalent to the Greek *porrō*. This is not exact since *pro* as far as its history is concerned never had the meaning of remoteness in time.

To set the record straight, it must also be remarked that St. Thomas offered another etymology for the word "prophet" which

was not borrowed from St. Isidore of Seville as Synave and Benoit inadvertently thought.⁹ It was derived according to this etymology from *pro* and *phanos* translated as *procul videns* taken rather from Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstr. Evang.*, 1, V. *prol.*, (MG, 22, col. 336). We know now from the findings of philology that the proposed etymology is not exact. *Pro* never had the meaning of *procul* — 'far', 'remote'. It rather means 'before', 'instead of', 'in the place of'. According to J. Wackernagel, however, this meaning of *pro* as 'before', 'in the place of', 'instead of' was still a later development from a more primitive meaning of *pro* as from the outside', 'exteriorly', or 'overtly'.¹⁰ Depending, therefore, on the different meaning of *pro*, the word 'prophet' could mean in its etymological state 'one who speaks before another' or one who speaks in place of another' or primitively, 'one who speaks openly'.

CONSEQUENCE FOR PROPHECY

Will this change in etymological derivation affect the intellectual character of the prophetic charism? Not at all, St. Thomas himself is perfectly aware that etymological definitions are not in themselves expressive of the nature of the thing and that a thing may be called by different names without affecting its nature. For example the word "enthusiasm" in its original derivation means 'a possessing by a deity' coming also from two Greek words: *en*, and *theos*, latinized as *entheus*. In its present use it means 'zeal', 'ardor'. In the same way the word 'prophet' etymologically meant a "spokesman" or an "interpreter" while in our times it has received the connotation as a "future-teller" and in St. Thomas' theology "somebody who received the supernatural charism of knowledge" in whatever form this charism might have been given.

But who were really the biblical prophets? Were all of them charismatic individuals whose knowledge were elevated to the supernatural plain? Were all of them used by God as his instruments to transmit to us and to the whole of humanity his message? Were all the prophets divinely inspired? Or can we just make a simple

⁹ cf. *Prophecy and Inspiration*, (New York: 1961), p. 16.

¹⁰ Jacob Wackernagel, *Vorlesung über Syntax*, 2. Reihe, (Basle: 1924), as cited by L. Ramlot, "La Prophetie biblique", SDB, 45, 1970, col. 934.

generalization that every true prophet in the Bible were supernaturally endowed with a charism while the rest are false prophets? The study of the phenomenon of prophecy in the Bible seems to militate against such a simplification.

The limitations of this article would not, however, permit us to probe all the aspects of biblical prophetism nor allow us to exploit all the methods for a thorough study of this phenomenon. We will just make a sample survey from the philological point of view and show that even in this aspect alone we have amassed a wealth of biblical data ready to be expanded by speculative theology.

SEMITIC CONTEXT OF THE PROPHETICAL PHENOMENON

The underlying word in the Hebrew bible usually translated as 'prophet' in English is the word *nabi'* (plural: *nebi'im*).¹¹ The origin itself of the word *nabi'* is still a discussed matter in biblical philology. Some scholars following Dhorme and Albright think that it came from the Akkadian *nabu* which means "to call". *Nabi'* then in Hebrew may have been borrowed from the Akkadian permansive form *Nabi* which means 'one who has been called for from the active participle *nabi* which means 'caller', 'crier'.¹²

Père Ramlot, however, has some reservations as to the Akkadian derivation of the word. In the catalogue of Semitic inscriptions of the West compiled by Ch. F. Jean and Jacob Hoftijzer: *Dictionnaire des inscriptions semitiques de l'Ouest*, the root word has not so far been attested except in the ostraca of Lakish which unfortunately, is inconclusive for our purpose since it appeared on a date (6th cent. B.C.) when the word was already used in Hebrew, namely in old biblical texts previous to this date. What could be very significant would be a witness from the documents of Mari which is considered an intermediate stage between Akkadian and biblical Hebrew. Still at our present knowledge of the documents of Mari the results are negative. No such root has so far been attested in Ugaritic which could really mean something since Ugaritic and Hebrew are just neighboring languages.

¹¹ = transliteration of the Hebrew 'alef.

' = transliteration of the Hebrew 'ayin.

¹² cf. Louis F. Hartmann — A. van den Born, art. "Prophet," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: 1963), col. 1930.

In Arabic the root *nb'* (*nun, ba, 'alif*) exists which means 'to be high or elevated' or 'to bubble up'. This meaning is thought of to be a cognate of the Akkadian *naba'u* or *naba'um*, a word used to indicate the overflow of a river. According to von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, (Wiesbaden: 1959), 8, p. 687, it can also have the sense of 'to boil up'.

The Akkadian and Arabic root-sense of *nb'* opens up an interesting connection to a prominent feature in Israelite *nebi'im*, namely, their ecstatic behavior. This has led some scholars to compare them with modern dervishes, the mystics of Islam. "Then the spirit of Yahweh will seize on you, and you will go into an ecstasy with them, and be changed into another man." (I Sam. X, 6). The indications which are found similar to dervishes and sufis are the following: rhythmic movements and dances (Ex. XV, 20; I Kgs. XVIII, 26); these actions lead to a state of ecstasy or frenzy that resemble madness (Jer. XXIX, 26; 2 Kgs. IX, 11); shrieks and cries continuously repeated (I Kgs. XXII, 10.12); sometimes they stripped themselves naked (I Sam. XIX, 24; Is. XX, 2; Mi. I, 8), they go to the extent of cutting themselves with knives till blood flows proven by scars on their bodies (1 Kgs. XVIII, 28; Zach, XIII, 6).

This does not mean, though, that all those persons who were called *nebi'im* in the Bible were practicing these gory acts. The classical prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel seemed to be far from being frenzied and gory individuals. Could it be that this word *nabi'* was a generic term used indiscriminately to designate those individuals with extra-normal actuations? In this way it would not be necessary to understand that every *nabi'* was necessarily a spokesman of God or that he should be an instrument of divine revelation. It would be possible then that some individuals who were not strictly *nebi'im* in the sense of experiencing these "mystical," ecstatic state which could be only psychological and thus perfectly natural, were still chosen by God to be his spokesman and his medium of revelation and consequently should have received a supernatural charism. Could this explain why Amos refused to be identified with the *nebi'im* and denied being a member of the brotherhood of *nebi'im*? (cf. Amos, VII, 14).

A statistical data of the frequency of the use of the word *nabi'* in the Hebrew Bible have produced surprising results. The

word is employed 309 times in the Bible (310 according to the LXX adding 2 Sam. XII, 1) broken down into the following:

1. Pentateuch — 14 times (10 in Deuteronomy alone).
2. Joshua — 0
3. Judges — 1
4. I Samuel — II Kings — 96 (97 if II Sam. XII, 1 is added according to the LXX).
5. Psalms — 3
6. Other Wisdom Books — 0
7. Chronicles, Esdras, Nehemiah — 33.
8. Prophetical Books incl. Daniel — 158.
9. Lamentations — 4.

It can readily be observed that the pentateuchal traditions were very sparing in their use of the term excepting the case of the Deuteronomic traditions. It is totally absent in the wisdom literature except for the three cases mentioned in the Psalms. Excluding one case which is truly remarkable, the word is never employed by the priestly traditions. The lone case is that of Ex. VII, 1, a text attributed generally by biblical scholars to the priestly tradition. "Yahweh said to Moses, "See, I make you as a God for Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother is to be your *nabi*" (translated as 'prophet')." The term *nabi* in this text could easily be translated as 'spokesman' which is one of the underlying senses of 'prophet' — one who speaks in the name of another.

CONCLUSION OF THE PHILOLOGICAL SURVEY

A long way has gone since St. Isidore of Seville wrote his *Libri Etymologiarum* from whom St. Thomas borrowed one of the etymologies of the word *prophet*. Philology has progressed so much since then that it has also become an indispensable tool for biblical research.¹³

¹³ Most valuable works in this respect are those of Eric Fascher, *PROPHETES*, Giessen, 1927; Ernst Frankel, *Geschichte der griechischen "Nomina Agentis" auf -tēr, -tōr, tēs*, (Strassbourg, I, 1910; II, 1912); P. Chantraine, *La Formation des noms en grec ancien*, (Paris: (1933), 1968); J. F. Schleusner, *Novus thesaurus philologocriticus in LXX et reliquos interpretes graecos ac scriptores apocryphos Veteris Testamenti*, (1820), IV, p. 512.

The common meaning of the word *prophet* in our own day is somebody who foretells the future. This meaning is rather a late development. We should be careful, therefore, in assigning this meaning to old texts of classical, hellenistic, and biblical Greek. A good example would be the text of Ex. VII, 1 which we have already mentioned. Aaron was called the *nabi'* of Moses, translated by the Septuagint as 'prophētēs'. Definitely the term 'prophet' in this text could not mean a 'future-teller'. It may mean rather an 'interpreter', a 'spokesman', 'one who speaks in the place of another'. It is not necessary besides to understand 'prophet' as a religious word, i.e. that a prophet necessarily speaks for a divinity. Diodorus of Sicily (c. 63-30 B.C.) defines *history* as 'the prophethood of truth'; Dio Chrysostom (40-120 A.D.) eulogizes a philosopher as the 'prophet of immortal nature'. In the *Bacchantes* of Euripides we read of Cadmus telling the blind Tiresias about the arrival of Pentheus: *egō prophētēs soi togōn genēsomai* (lit. I, speaking, will be your prophet).

In the last analysis we must candidly confess that Philology and even historical criticism alone still remain powerless tools to probe deeply into the divine character of prophetism. Actually it is beyond their scope as a method. Philology may discover the basic and historical meaning behind the term to which it is applied. Still we have to cut down profoundly into the maze of a writer's testimony, interpreting his messages behind the veil of his literary medium to find out the historical reality. What we would discover may be only the surface of a deeper reality: the testimony of individuals, of an Isaiah, of a Jeremiah, of an Ezekiel, that Yahweh, the God of Israel had spoken through them. Whether their testimony was in accord with facts or not is beyond the competence of any historical method. Only a strict theological method which claims equally to be scientific and objective can penetrate this surface.

I believe we can safely assert that philological study has greatly helped in clarifying some obscure aspects in the prophetic phenomenon. We recognize its limitations and being aware of these limitations we can easily beware not to overpass the mark.

It would not be far-fetched to assume that the meaning of term *nabi'* has undergone a historical development. It is considered an interesting fact that the word is totally absent from older

biblical traditions, like for instance the Yahvist tradition. Could it be that the term originated late in Hebrew placing the *terminus a quo* after David's time? It is in fact remarkable that the Chronicle of Succession of David's family (cf. II Sam. IX-XX) considered to be ancient by biblical scholars, contemporary with the events narrated or only a little after, does not use this word. The sole case mentioned in 2 Sam. XII, 25 referring to the prophet Nathan has more the savor of an editorial insertion. In other passages of his chronicle Nathan was not given the title of *Nabi'* (cf. II Sam. XII, 1.5.7.13.15). The textual variants in II Sam. XII, 1 may have its significance hitherto unrecognized. It is true that in some Greek and Syriac manuscripts the title *nabi'* is placed after Nathan's name but this is absent in the Massoretic text and also in the Vulgate. There is, I believe, good reason to opt for the Massoretic reading.

BIBLICAL DATA COMPLEMENTED BY THEOLOGICAL SPECULATION

With our present wealth of data on prophecy gathered from a historical study of Sacred Scriptures, theological speculations have acquired new materials to work on. We have noticed in the work of P. Benoit on Inspiration that the use of the speculative method emphasized in speculative theology and historical method current in exegesis has led to more fruitful results in the understanding of biblical inspiration.

The prophets could not and never be considered a robot activated by an external power for their operations. They were men of their times, thinking according to the categories of their times, influenced by the socio-cultural values of their times. In spite of diversities in time and space the prophets had something in common: God acted through them, spoke through them, wrote through them, manifested His will through them to the community which He has chosen which in this way also became a prophetic community for all mankind.

If we take the word "prophet" to mean all those individuals who in one way or another were used by God to communicate His message or fulfill his purpose for mankind then evidently many persons could fall under this category. They will, however, differ

in degrees according to the degree God made use of them. Any biblical writer for that matter can also be included in the group.

A comparative study of prophetism among other eastern civilizations, like Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylonia, Mari, Egypt, Chanaan, and biblical prophetism and the special relationship they experienced with God would be fruitful.

All these historical discoveries are very enriching. Yet we have also to admit that the historical method alone would be narrowly limited. We could not explain for example through this method how God acted on the prophets that the results of their actions, words, or writings would be considered afterwards as his personal manifestations. We have to rely on a method which, though abstracted from historical processes, is still valid if it is based on an unchangeable reality, feature, or process common to all. A physicist for example knowing the universal law that water seeks its own level can validly conclude that the waters of the Jordan has been going down to the Dead Sea even during biblical times; a psychologist working on the assumption that the law of thought is also unchangeable may rightly claim that prophets, men as they are, thought in abstract concepts; a theologian convinced that a faculty cannot grasp anything beyond its power unless aided by something beyond its nature can confidently deduce that the prophets must have received a special charism if they were destined to act as God's spokesmen, divine interpreters, and God's chosen media of his revelation to mankind. St. Thomas, specifying this charism to pertain to the cognitive faculty, has given it the technical term of *prophecy* in his systematic theology.

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