

Reflections From The Street Corner

I

ON PROPHETISM

Glimpses

The *Nabu* or *Nabi*, as the ancient peoples nicknamed the Prophet, is "the one who has been called,"¹ the one who proclaims, the alleged friend of God favored with personal communications.² True or false Prophets, they all claim to be the mouthpiece of the divinity. They are the spokesmen of the deity's presence among the people, a prerogative that no political ruler or subject lays claim to possess. Hence that prophetism is an ever relevant factor in any religious projection as well as in any social or political milieu with an animistic view of the cosmos.³ Only the Prophet will tell us what the deity expects or rejects from our daily routine and behavior.

Claims to prophetism regularly spark in religious-political environments. What bothers the man on the street is not the

¹ Cf. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 1965, p. 61; B. Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel (Pre-Exilic Prophets and Prophecy)*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1961, p. 35.

² Cf. *Genesis*, 20:7.

³ Cf. *The Biblical Archeologist*, published by the American Schools of Oriental Research, 34 (Feb., 1971), p. 20; *Jerusalem Bible*, Introduction to the Prophets, p. 1115.

claims, but the *authenticity*. Anything else is secondary in the context of prophetism, for no solid minded human would realistically wish to oppose the wishes of the All-mighty or to ignore his warnings. Yet, he will permanently inquire within himself: *how* do I ascertain the Prophet's authenticity? Do I have within my reach any yardstick to discern the true Prophet from the false one? What are the functions of a real Prophet? What is his target?

Who Is the Prophet?

Concentrating our attention on the *Jewish background* of our Christian religion, we may outrightly state that a Prophet is not the equivalent of the popular fortune teller or foreseer, but rather someone who has been called by God and who is his spokesman. It is accurate to state that the Prophet has visions and auditions, he may even predict things that may happen in the future,⁴ yet the Prophet does not see the future like a crystal ball,⁵ but rather he is like a weather forecaster who sees in the present atmospheric conditions what will happen in the future. The Prophet knows his time and in his presence he sees the events that will develop. Thus he warns the people on time, to repent from evil and to turn to Yahweh. The primary concern of the Prophet is not the future, but the present.

The Yeast of the Prophet

The Prophet is vested with what we may qualify as the two requirements for his appointment, namely, the *divine call* and being a *spokesman for Yahweh*. Both requirements, we can say, are alien to the Prophet's personal qualifications, for both depend exclusively on God's choice, and God's choice is unbiased, indiscriminatory, unlimited by any human consideration of race, social status or sexual concern. We may say that God's choice is "catholic" (universal) and falls under no human yardstick.

⁴ Cf. D. Murphy, *His Servants the Prophets*, Melbourne: Wilke & Co., 1964, p. 10.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid*

"Catholicity" in Prophetism

The Prophets of the Old Covenant came from the northern and the southern kingdoms alike. Among them were city dwellers, rural folks, noble as well as simple people. Amos, for example, was a shepherd. Micah was a peasant. Isaiah was a statesman. Jeremiah was a priest. Thus we have chosen Prophets in the Old Testament among the shy, the young and the apprehensive (e.g., *Jonah*, *Jeremiah* 1:6; *I Sam.* 3:1-2; *Isaiah* 6; *Daniel* 1:3-21), as well as among the poor and the learned. Females are not excluded (e.g., *Ezra* 7; *Judges* 4:4). Let us not forget that God speaks in the Old Covenant even through the mouth of Balaam's donkey (cf. *Num.* 22:28-31).

This "catholicity" is worth considering in social environments where biases of one kind or another seem to be determined to limit God's choices or the efficacy of his Word. Let us not forget that certain liberation movements (as for example, the Negro's Liberation Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, etc.) have often been frowned upon in the Christian Communities or in certain ministries, and many of such prejudices are still among us hindering a true "catholicity" among Christians, the "catholicity" expressed by him who said: "The hour is coming when you will worship the Father, neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem..., true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (*Jn.* 4:21-23). It is the universality of the one who welcomes into his flock the just and the sinners, and who condemns but no one except the unbelievers who by their refusal to accept the Son are condemning themselves (*Jn.* 12:47). St. Paul describes this "catholicity" among Christians when he says: "All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and therefore no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal.* 3:27-28).

Criterion in Prophetism

Theoretically, God's appointment is the *objective measure* of authenticity for a Prophet. But then we humans are quite limited in our capacity to perceive such qualifications and often true as well as false Prophets appear in Salvation History claim-

ing authenticity to their call. Thus we are left with our own discernment to screen them through whatever signs of their true vocation may transpire through their actions.

Before going into that, though, it is worth pinpointing two observations. The first is the fact that no true Prophet can appoint himself or be appointed by any human authority. Prophecy is not a profession for human bidding. The second observation points to the fact that since a true Prophet is a "spokesman" of God's word, no prophetic proclamation can but to support God's word. In no way can a Prophet alter or contradict it.

Reincarnation in Prophetism

It is because of that conformity to God's word that prophecy is viewed as the *incarnation* to God's word, and the Prophets as the various reincarnations of that divine Truth (cf. *Num.* 27:18; *Deut.* 34:9). Only thus can one explain Herod's reaction to Jesus' ministry, claiming that he must be John the Baptist resurrected (*Mtth.* 14:1-2). And only this way can one understand the disciples' reaction to Jesus' question: "Who do the people think that the Son of Man is?" (*Mtth.* 18:13-16). It is the Truth perceived through different reincarnations. And this is good food for thought in connection with instances when we stress so much our "personal" convictions over and above others' perceptions of the Truth.

Signs of Authenticity

Transferring then our consideration to the possible signs of authenticity projected by the true Prophet, we could say that these signs are sort of an inevitable (unavoidable) reply or reaction to the divine appointment. The first sign we could pinpoint which is rather negative, is the lack of professionalism. In other religions, prophecy, like priesthood, may have such professional characteristic, but in Jewish tradition the authentic Prophet is not a Prophet by profession, but by divine impulse, and such an impulse is not subjected to human control, but it comes and goes according to the divine inspiration. This, somehow negative characteristic, the lack of professionalism, though, has a positive

side in its spontaneity, a divine spontaneity, which we may call *divine charism*. This may be considered as an offset of God's authenticity. It certainly has no monopolistic or institutionalized connotation.

An additional sign of authentic prophetism is the *zeal*. A human that has been "touched" by God's fire cannot remain "neutral", but he has to react, and once he reacts to the divine inspiration, to the divine compulsion, the true Prophet reacts with extra vigor, with extra dedication, with courage for the divine cause; it is the prophetic zeal. Hence that among authentic Prophets we have more activists than reactionaries, more doers than institutionalizers, more jailed and martyred people than well established and "prudent" bureaucrats, all this, let us not forget, has much more to do with divine compulsion and urge than with human boldness or bravery.

The third sign of authenticity is what may be called projection results. The authentic Prophet is perceived for his *divine dimension* in what he does and says, while the false Prophet will be perceived as building his own ego through his actions and statements. A Prophet would often find his earthly occupation more relaxing and appealing than the task entrusted to him by Yahweh. One has but to remember Jonah's reluctance to disengage himself from his work to embrace God's task, still the true Prophet will ultimately look sparely on the excruciating mission entrusted to him and reply: "What should I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (*Jn.* 12:27-28). The divine dimension will ultimately shine in a Prophet's performance. The immediate result would be that a true Prophet is often seen by the worldly as a loser and outcast, while the false Prophet will be viewed as a player, and a man of his time, an insider.

A true Prophet's path, we may point out, is paved with dangers and challenges. *Suffering* is not the Prophet's vocation, but trials are his daily routine and menu. We could affirm that false and true prophetism do not get along well, their co-existence re-

mains at a mile-length. One would have to think only of the no friendship lost between Elijah and the Prophet of Baal (*I Kings* 18:16-40), or between Herod and John the Baptist (*Mtth.* 14:1-12). It is a duel to death, for true prophetism does not know the term "compromise", a term so handy among the players and the insiders and people who live according to the tune of the times.

Eschatology in Prophetism

A final point of reflection on prophetism that will also help us to discern the authentic from the false Prophet, would have to do with the *objective*, because prophetism has a responsibility to fulfill.

That responsibility can be viewed in its immediate, concrete terms, and then it may refer to reforms of some evil committed by the ruling leaders, e.g., the warning of Nathan to king David (*II Sam.* 11-12), or on degenerating practices on the part of the citizenry, as with the example of Prophet Jonah with the people of Niniveh (*Jonah* 1-4). Nevertheless, there is always in the mind of the Prophet the overall riding concern which is to maintain *the integrity of the Covenant* between Yahweh and his chosen people. Ultimately then all of the Prophet's proclamations and actions are geared to that aim, and thus its objective becomes the final criterion of discernment for authentic prophetism. While on the other hand, any action or proclamation that may slow or taint that final target can be viewed but with scepticism regarding its authenticity.

It is because of this eschatological responsibility that the Prophet is often associated in Scripture with the figure of the Righteous One (*Enoch* 38:2), and even more so with the figure of the Teacher, Rabbi (*Mtth.* 27:19; *Luke* 23:47; *Acts* 3:14; *I Pet.* 3:18). In many ways their task fuses together so as "to instruct the people in the Law of Yahweh."⁶ This is the theological basis for the doctrine on the Magisterium of the Church, as well as for the prophetism of the teacher of the Truth. It is the divine Truth embodied in the Word.

⁶ B. Peña, *Soteriology*, Manila: U.S.T. Printing Office, 1985, p. 25.

II

JESUS' PROPHETISM

The Prophetic Longing¹

"Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, and so that the Lord may send the time of comfort. Then he will send you the Christ he has predestined, that is Jesus, whom heaven must keep till the universal restoration comes which God proclaimed, speaking through his holy Prophets. Moses, for example, said: 'The Lord God will raise up a Prophet like myself for you, from among your own brothers; you must listen to whatever he tells you. The man who does not listen to that Prophet is to be cut off from the people'. In fact, all the Prophets that have ever spoken, from Samuel onwards, have predicted these days" (*Acts* 3:20-24).

It was Moses who, after performing miracles and signs in Egypt, led them out across the Red Sea and through the wilderness for forty years. It was Moses who told the sons of Israel, "God will raise up a Prophet like myself for you, from among your own brothers" (*Acts* 7:36-37).

After the death of Moses, the great Spokesman of Yahweh, a cry was often heard among the believers, "We have no Prophet in Israel" (*Lam.* 2:9; *Ps.* 74:9; *Ez.* 7:26). It is significant to notice how such a cry was felt most acutely during times of deep national crises.

Then a longing developed in the hearts of the faithful for a return (a reincarnation?) of the great Prophet. And somewhere along those years, the flame of expectancy arose. Yes, indeed, the great Prophet of Yahweh will come at "the appointed time", at the fulfillment of time. This expectancy was further enhanced by the pronouncements of other spokesmen: Jeremiah, Elijah, Isaiah, Joel and most of all we see it fulfilled in the pronouncements quoted from Acts (*Acts* 3:20-24; 7:36-37).

¹ O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1969.

And so it came to be that among the loyal "remnant" of Israel a firm belief existed. The overall Prophet of Yahweh will come.

In the Messianic like of hope, a question, though, arose: will the expected great Prophet be the Messiah himself, or would he rather be the great herald proclaiming that "the appointed time" was at hand? One thing, though, is certain in the minds of the believers, that both the Prophet and the Messiah are related to the arrival of the fulfillment of time. Theologians call it "the eschatological time".

"Are You the Prophet?"⁸

The question was posed to Jesus by the emissaries of a great Spokesman of Yahweh, John the Baptizer, "the greatest among those born of a woman" (*Mtth.* 11:11). He was being held in prison. But somebody else, who had met Jesus before, had the Spirit telling him: "And you, child, will be called the Prophet of the Most High" (*Luke* 1:76). Would he really be THE Prophet?

Some people had pointed to John as the Prophet (*Jn.* 1:19-27). But he had denied it. As a matter of fact, he had said not only that he was not the one, he was quoted as saying: "I am not even worthy of undoing his sandals strap" (*Jn.* 1:27), of being even his servant. But the longings and minds of the people never ceased to wonder every time a man of Yahweh appeared in their horizon.

What the Others Say

Of Jesus was often said: "A great Prophet has appeared among us" (*Lk.* 7:16) and "He is the Prophet" (*Mtth.* 21:10). These were cries that were heard whenever Jesus was the performer of a great wonder among the people. The cries and rumors were such that they even reached the king's ears (*Mark* 6:14 ff.), and Jesus himself could not remain immune to them, to the point that at a given moment he asked his disciples:

⁸ Cf. B. Peña, *Soteriology*, Manila: Univ. of Santo Tomas Printing Office, 1985.

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (*Mtth.* 16:13). Until, under the impulse of the Spirit, Peter blotted it out: You are the One, "You are the Messiah" (*Mtth.* 16:16).

Was this a confirmation of who Jesus really was, or was it an enthusiastic and emotional reaction of his followers? Was Jesus the incarnation of the Prophet, or was he "The one who is to come," the Messiah? Was he, perhaps, both, the Prophet and the Messiah? Jesus is the Logos, Jesus is the incarnated Word. But who says so? Only the people in the crowds?

Heavens Witness to It

When the encounter between John and Jesus takes place in the waters of the river Jordan, heavens open and a voice is heard: "This is my son, the Beloved, my favor rests on him" (*Mtth.* 3:16-17). It is the anointment of the Prophet as the chosen of the divinity.

This is his own ministry, a moment of the true glory appears on Mount Tabor and once again a voice from above comes forward to give witness to the Truth: "This is my Beloved Son on whom my favors rests. *Listen to him*" (*Mtth.* 17:5). What the people perceived in their faith, the heavens proclaim solemnly: Jesus is the Spokesman, the Word of Yahweh. And for the ones seeking the Kingdom of God, one task remains: "*Listen to him.*"

Jesus' Position

Could he remain unconcerned to all the rumors from among the people, and to the pronouncements from above? And if he will take the stand, what signals will he send? Will the answer be perceived by all?

To the emissaries of John, he tells them: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear; dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them" (*Mtth.* 11:2-5).

With the detectives sent to John by the native leaders, who insist on having something to report back to their bosses, the following dialogue takes place: "When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?', he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ,' 'Well then,' they asked, 'are you Elijah' 'I am not,' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No'. So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make straight way for the Lord.' Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you -unknown to you- the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap'" (*Jn.* 1:19-27).

To his own followers, Jesus announces: "For I have not spoken on my own; not, the Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to speak" (*Jn.* 12:49). I am the mouthpiece of my Father, "Whatever I say is spoken just as he instructed me" (*Jn.* 12:50). That is what THE Prophet is all about, the Mouthpiece of Yahweh (*Jer.* 1:9) incarnated in human flesh.

The Proclamation⁹

What then, comes out of Yahweh's incarnated Mouthpiece? What kind of prophetism is Jesus' prophetism? What are his more prominent features?

One could satisfy all the answers by simply stating that Jesus' prophetism, unlike the prophetism of the previous prophets, is not partial, but *total*, and also that it is not partial but total incarnation of the Word, the Truth. Hence that he says: "I am the Truth" (*Jn.* 14:6). Still, to clarify the questions, one has to search for that totality, and the search cannot center but on one issue: Jesus' mission, or as John calls it: "The Hour" (*Jn.*

⁹ Cf. C. Stihlmüller, "The Prophet and the Word of God", *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 143 ff.

2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1), the appointment for which he has come to dwell among us.

Signals of the Prophet

Basically, one can reduce all signals of Jesus' prophetism to three, with an end-consequence.

Denunciation. The first among those signals, if one wishes to start with the negative, is the denunciation of evil. One can see that denunciation already in the threshold of Jesus' public appointment at the moment of his confrontation with evil in the desert. (*Mtth.* 4:1-11). It is an open confrontation and it is disguised in the worst kind of sheep's cloth; it is disguised with God's words: "Scripture says...".

If we were going to heed Augustine's words, in such a confrontation we see in a comprehensive way the two forces of evil and goodness.¹⁰ For neither the devil speaks only for himself, nor Jesus is there but as the total incarnation of the branches in the Vine, of the redeemed in the Redeemer, and of the risen in the Life (*Jn.* 15:1-17).

In a more advanced stage of the Hour, then, we are called to witness Jesus' denunciation of the desacralization of the holy, of the Temple turned into a thieves' den (*Jn.* 2:13-16).

In a third stage of the Hour, one sees Jesus' temper rising to its high and lambasting "hypocrisy" of any kind (*Mtth.* 23:1-36). One could accurately say that while Jesus could get along fairly well with gluttons, tax collectors and sinners of all kinds (*Mtth.* 11:16-19; 9:9-13), he could hardly stomach the presence of the hypocrites.

But the climax of Jesus' denunciation is what we could call the apex of cynicism, what Jesus himself calls a sin against the Spirit: the attribution of good deeds to Beelzebul (*Mtth.* 12:22-32), the attribution of light to darkness, the attribution of life to death. That is, in one word, unforgivable!

¹⁰ Cf. *Commentary on the Psalms*, Ps. 60:2-3, CCL 39, 766.

Proclamation of the Gospel. The second of Jesus' signals is the announcement of the Good News, the Gospel. That announcement, though, has a peculiar note: "The blind see, the lame walk... and most of all the Good News is announced to the poor" (*Mtth.* 11:2-5). The poor are the oppressed, the ones abused by society, the uprooted, the emigrants... the servants... the outcast. To them all, the Good News is announced, they are welcomed, blessed, saved in God's Kingdom; "For he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly" (*Lk.* 1:51).

That was the message proclaimed by Zechariah (*Lk.* 1:68-79) and by Mary in her song of exaltation (*Lk.* 1:46-55). That was likewise the opening platform of Jesus' ministry, of his Hour, as proclaimed from the Mountain (*Mtth.* 5:2-12). That is, after all, the yeast of all of his parables of the Kingdom (*Mtth.* 13) and his words about having come not to be served, but to serve (*Mtth.* 20:24-28).

Eschatological Proclamation. The third signal of Jesus' prophetism is the eschatological projection of his proclamation. That eschatological aspect is intimately connected with the previous signal, the proclamation of salvation to the outcast, for it is a prophetism of uplifting to the down trodden and oppressed. Besides that sense of uplifting or liberation, there is also the eschatological aspect of futuristic victory, a projection that, although at present things may not go "right" for the believer, in the long run the final victory belongs to Yahweh and to those who have cast their loyalty beside him.

Kenosis in the Prophet. Added to those three signals, there is a kind of follow up in Jesus' prophetism common to all authentic Prophets of the Old Covenant, the "*kenosis*," the suffering of the Prophet. This follow up or consequential aspect is best exemplified on the Cross, for after all that was the final "appointment" and the direction of the Hour. For as Jesus said: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already. There is a baptism I must still receive, and

how great is my distress till it is over" (*Lk.* 12:49-50; cf. *Lk.* 22:14-16).

One could state that Jesus' final sacrifice was not necessary, but a close scrutiny of his ministry, all but points to such a climactic outcome. The Prophet's denunciation of evil, often incarnated in the ruling classes, is bound to provoke ire and wrath, and historically people in power do not take denunciation with arms crossed.

From among all in the crowd, nobody perceived such danger better than Jesus himself. He often warned his followers about the final outcome of his mission (*Mtth.* 16:21; 17:12; 17:22; 20:17-19). When he saw the trauma coming, even though he did not call for it, Jesus tried to avoid it, for his Hour had not arrived (*Jn.* 7:8-10; 11:54-57; 10:39; *Mtth.* 12:15-16). Still, when the Hour came, he did not run away or withdrew, but face it head on (*Mtth.* 16:21-28; *Jn.* 18:4-5).

Reflections

From Jesus' prophetism, the present Community could easily draw a few considerations. To start with one has to realize that the Prophet does not appear overnight, but rather he shows up only after a long and persevering longing from the faithful: "We have no prophet" (*Ps.* 74:9). He is very much called for at times of national crises.

When the Prophet comes, though, only a few recognize his signals, and among the few only the chosen perceive him in the correct context (*Lk.* 2:24-28). For the rest, he is just but another "charlatan", even crazy (*Mark* 3:21), or a sign of contradiction and conflict (*Lk.* 2:34-35) that ought but to be eliminated (*Mtth.* 12:14).

The true Prophet never heralds himself as the Prophet, he simply launches the signals. It is up to the others to catch the sparks. As expected, opinions about him would vary, and con-

fusion will somehow be produced. Still the true believers, the remnants, will acknowledge his proclamation and know where it ultimately comes from.

The criterion of the great Prophet is his own harvest (*Mtth.* 7:15-23). "Go and tell John what you see and hear," Jesus had said (*Mtth.* 11:2-5). But to start with, the abidance to God's covenant is beyond reproach, since for him not even a dot of the Law will be done away with (*Mtth.* 5:17-19). The real Prophet does not come to destroy or to replace, but to fulfill and uplift (*Mtth.* 5:17). He is not out to project himself, but to be the Spokesman of Yahweh (*Jn.* 12:19-50).

The Prophet does not search for trouble and confrontation. His target is to restore the Covenant, to bring about reconciliation. Still, in his denunciation of evil, whenever and wherever he perceives it, he is uncompromising. He is, in the eyes of the "learned" and of the "wise" (*Lk.* 10:21) all the way imprudent.

Pessimism or negativism is intrinsically frowned upon by the real Prophet, for his task is to uplift and redeem, and not to suppress and depress. Hence a mystic hollow of optimism always surrenders the Prophet. It has been pinned down by some as "the opium of the People," but for the true believer it is the fourth dimension of his life that is projected way and beyond the horizons of the present struggle.

The Prophet is not a masochist. He does not search for pain and when trials come his way, he does not delight in suffering. What the Prophet does is what only a believer can do besides what non-believers find senseless, to draw good out of evil and redemption out of oppression. In doing this the Prophet is a genius.

III

PROPHETISM IN THE CHURCH

Did Prophetism Die with Jesus?

From its inception, prophesying was a characteristic mark of the primitive Christianity interpreted as an evident fulfil-

ment of promises of the Old Testament that it would revive in the last days. The gift of prophecy was not however the possession of all Christians, but a peculiar spiritual endowment (charism of a selected number) whether men or women. The author of the Acts (*Acts* 11:28 & 15:32) preserves the names of a few like Agabus, Judas and Silas who originally belonged to the Jerusalem Church and the four daughters of Philip, one of the seven. He speaks of Prophets among the earliest leaders of the Church in Antioch and tells us of the twelve disciples at Ephesus who prophesied immediately after their baptism by Paul (*Acts* 19:7). The author of Acts appears to have been mainly interested in the predictive features of the Prophets' activities and the outward sign of their behaviour. It is not altogether clear that he distinguished, as did Paul, the gift of "speaking in tongues" from the prophetic charms.

For Paul, prophecy was one of God's greatest gifts to his Church for edification, and ranked the Prophet second only to an Apostle in honor and importance (*Eph.* 2:20; *I Cor.* 14:1-40). By prophecy Paul understands intelligible preaching that builds up the Church in faith, explains mysteries and imparts knowledge. For Peter, the Prophet's concern is the searching of the scriptures for the testimony of Christ (*I Pet.* 1:10-11). The entire book of Revelation is a classic example of Christian prophecy. Though cast in an apocalyptic form, it is the proclamation of man in the Spirit who expounds from the imagery of the Old Testament the new revelation of God's victory in Christ and those who belong to Christ.

Prophecy continued to exert a potent influence in the Church throughout the post-Apostolic period. Not only does the issuance of the revelation of John testify to this. Also, at Rome, a Prophet named Hermas imparted persuasively his visions that taught a second repentance after baptism. Ignatius has left us an example of his own inspired utterances about the ministry in his letter to the Philadelphians and the Church of Smyrna where he described their martyred leader, Polycarp, as an "Apostolic and prophetic teacher and bishop of the Church".

Nevertheless, the ministry of Prophets exhibited a noticeable decline in effectiveness in the post-Apostolic age. Already in the Deutero-Pauline letter to the Ephesians, there is evidently a tendency to look back upon the Prophets, as upon the Apostles, as belonging to a past generation of founders of the Church.¹¹

The Didache, a document of the early years of the second century, discusses at some length the problem of false Prophets and provides simple tests for true Prophets who visit Christian Communities from those who are spurious. But the Didachist has in mind not so much unorthodox Prophets, as "charlatans" of the profession who impose upon the hospitality of unwary churches.

This kind of view about prophetism as a free charism is difficult to discern and it is somehow overwhelmed by the teaching function of the Church. Hence, Prophets are considered from that period on as something of the past.

St. Thomas describes prophecy not as a sanctifying grace, but as a free charism;¹² hence that according to him one may possess the "free gift" of prophecy without possessing charity or sanctifying grace.¹³

Somehow, though, such a view does not jibe well with the true concept of prophetism. For, as Karl Rahner says: "Prophecy is not alien to the Church, because the Church itself is the permanent presence of the word of the Prophet, Jesus Christ. It is the Church in which the word effects what it signifies and is therefore a prophetic word. For the sacraments of the Church are also the supreme actuation of the efficacious word, both as regards the ministering Church and the recipients of grace. The 'closure' of its apostolic kerygma and the permanence of its basic institutions are not due to a refusal of prophecy, but to its belief and hope that Jesus Christ is the one incomparable Prophet, and that the Church is definitive (in this age), inasmuch as it

¹¹ Cf. A. von Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, N.Y.: Thomas Crowell, 1965.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 68, 3 ad 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II-II, 6, 2 ad 3; 172, 4 c.

holds firm to the definitiveness of Jesus Christ and is again given this steadfastness by Him."

"Within this fundamental prophetism, there is again a prophetic element, inasmuch as the charisms are of the essence of the Church, in spite of and throughout all its institutions. Of their nature, the spontaneous charism which work in and for the Church are prophetic. They do not cease to be prophetic because they must remain within the 'order' of the Church, though possibly only at the cost of grave conflicts. For the 'order' of the Church is itself nothing else than a participation in the prophetic charge of Christ. This charismatic prophecy in the Church helps to make the message of Jesus new, relevant and actual in each changing age. It does not matter whether the representative of this charismatic prophecy in the Church -the authors of religious renewal, the critics of the Church and the society of their day, the discoverers of new tasks for the Church and the faithful- are called Prophets or are given other names. They are mostly comprised under the title of 'saint'. If such men do not merely reaffirm general principles and apply them to new cases, but display in their message something creative and incalculable, with the force of historic turning-points, so that they are legitimate and effective in the Church, we may say that the Church has had a 'major' or a 'minor' Prophet."¹⁴

Prophetism then in its "visionary" aspect may have receded into the background of the Church, but in its aspect as the "mouthpiece" of the Truth, it is still very much alive and an essential part of the Community's mission.

Bases of Ecclesial Prophetism

When an "unbeliever" is called to the Community, he is challenged, in the words of St. Peter: "You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ" (*Acts* 2:38).

That baptism is in itself both the gate to the Community and the summary of the prophetic role of the believer. Before

¹⁴ Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1975, pp. 1288-1289.

the catechumen is bathed with the baptismal water, he is challenged with the twofold target of prophetism: renunciation and rejection of evil on the one hand, and proclamation and acceptance of the Gospel on the other.

This baptismal celebration in the Community is but the implementation of Jesus' final command to his followers: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (*Mtth.* 28:18-20).

Proclamation. How has prophetism been historically implemented in its proclamation task? From Jesus' commandment, we see Peter, filled with the Spirit, rising up and challenging the people at Pentecost to turn to Jesus (*Acts* 2:38).

That task is first directed to the Jews from Jerusalem and from the Diaspora (*Acts* 2:5-11). After all, Jesus himself had insisted that the Good News should first be directed to the house of Israel (*Mtth.* 10:5-6), and the food be given first to the children, not to the dogs (*Mtth.* 15:24-26).

The time comes, though, when Peter has a vision, and as a result, Cornelius and his non-Jewish family are welcome to the Community of Jesus' believers (*Acts* 10:11-48). "Because God has granted life-giving repentance even to the Gentiles" (*Acts* 11:18).

A debate developed, though, among the members of the early Community concerning not only the acceptance of "Gentiles", but also some Jewish rituals, particularly the circumcision. Under the Apostles' leadership it was finally settled that both Jews and Gentiles ought to be evangelized and that the non-Jews were in no way obliged to perform any of the rituals related to the Old Covenant (*Acts* 15:1-29; cf. *Rom.* 7:1-6).

From then on, the history of Missionology or Evangelization is the history of the prophetic proclamation in the Church. Along the centuries we meet Prophets of the Good News in people like

Patrick and Benedict, Dominic and Francis of Assisi, Francis Xavier and Bartolome de las Casas.

Times of relative quietness often set in the Church, but voices never totally ceased to be heard in the overall concern of the Church's task to proclaim the Good News. Such were the latest statements of Vatican II,¹⁵ and the words of Paul VI: "The Church is the depository of the Good News to be proclaimed... not in order to keep it hidden, but to communicate it."¹⁶ And John Paul II says: "The Church has always considered Catechesis one of her primary tasks."¹⁷

That constant thrust of the Church has as of late been coined in the so-called the Church's final "option for the poor", in the Good News announced to the outcast (*Mtth.* 11:2-5). In its authentic thrust that is what Liberation Theology is supposed to be all about.

Denunciation. The denunciation cry has not been lacking in the prophetism of the Church. But it is necessary to remember that this prophetism in its authenticity was never negative, that is, purely accusing, but redemptive. It has been a denunciation equivalent to a call to conversion in the best of Jonah's tradition.

At the very opening Pentecostal salvo, Peter's prophetic voice is heard: "You must reform" (*Acts* 2:38).

When Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, there was the early denunciations of evil in Paul's letters condemning the un-Christian practices of paganism (*I Cor.* 6:12-20), or the scandalous behavior of the incestuous member of the Community (*I Cor.* 5:1-13; 8:1-13).

When the Roman rulers call for obedience to their laws, Paul proclaims subjection on the part of the Christians to civil authority (*Rom.* 13:1-7), but when those very rulers usurp their pre-

¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8; *Ad Gentes*, n. 5.

¹⁶ *Evangelization in the Modern World*, n. 15.

¹⁷ *Catechesis in Our Time*, n. 1.

rogatives and demand "worship", the young Community in unison stands to the forces of the empire and proclaims with her Master: "You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone" (*Mtth.* 4:10).

Similar errors of faith or morals spring along the different stages of ecclesial history, but then we witness once again "re-incarnations" of John the Baptist in prophetic figures like Ambrose denying entrance to the Church to emperor Theodosius, or denunciations of evil like those aired by prophetic voices like Vincent Ferrer, Catherine of Siena, Jerome Savonarola or Bartolome de las Casas.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in more recent times, prophetic voices continue being heard at the highest levels of the Community, denouncing publicly the evils of Communism in its atheist philosophy,¹⁸ or the exploitation of the poor by colonial and capitalist structure,¹⁹ of the different forms of dreadful totalitarianism, call it Nazism, Facism or Apartheid.²⁰

Similar or even noisier cries are heard at less universal levels in the not so often very much understood denunciation of local dictatorships, caciquisms and abuses as we hear in Latin America, Africa and other parts of the world under the over all umbrella of the so called Liberation Theology.

Suffering. The consequential harvest of prophetism, suffering, can easily be attested to in the different stages of history, for not only we can think of how Peter and his companions were beaten up and jailed for their early Pentecostal proclamations (*Acts* 4: 1-22; 5:17-41). We can likewise bring to memory the age of the Catacombs with the history of official persecutions in the first three centuries of the Community.

¹⁸ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931.

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967.

²⁰ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967; John Paul II, *Puebla Message*, 1979; Idem, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981.

How much people like Vincent Ferrer, Las Casas and Savonarola had to suffer, historians could certainly enlighten us on the no small share of pain and torment they had to undergo.

In more recent times, we are more familiar already with the strain, anxiety and persecution inflicted on the Church by totalitarian regimes throughout the world. It is not in vain that for long decades certain large areas of the globe dominated by those regimes have led to the acknowledgment of the Community living in the condition of "Silent Church" or the "Underground Church". Names like Cardinal Mindzenty, Theresa Neuman, Arzobispo Romero of San Salvador and the like are not too far away from our memory.

One has to remember, though, that modern techniques are not so much geared to bring about blood shedding and physical torments. Modern sophisticated tortures are more related to less visible, but not necessarily less vicious and painful, the psyche tortures.

A Hurdle

This historical analysis is bound to be plagued with lagoons and oversimplicity for one cannot but give a bird's view of ecclesial prophetism. Still, it is imperative to acknowledge the presence in the history of the Church of a big "hurdle" to prophetism since the Constantine era. It is what we may call the Constantine syndrome or the insertion of the Community in the secular establishment. This syndrome has had an undeniable bearing on the projection of ecclesial prophetism for the past seventeen centuries.

Historically that syndrome came about first with the decree of peace signed by Constantine and Licinius in the year 313.²¹ Such proclamation brought the Church out of the Catacombs and into the open air. From being an outcast and persecuted religion, it was granted the social acceptance.

²¹ Cfr. J. Marx, *Historia de la Iglesia*, Ed. by R. Ruiz Amado, Barcelona: Ed. Lib. Religiosa, 1949, pp. 54-55.

Then, due to political circumstances and historical developments that brought Constantine to total control of power, a further imperial proclamation took place where by from an outcast, and from the now socially accepted status, Christianity was given the seal of officialdom.²² Christianity became the official religion of the Roman government and empire and was inserted in the secular establishment.

This initially welcome status of freedom will historically often turn sour, since soon Christianity will be identified with the secular power and all its secular mistakes. It will lead to the exaltation of what may be tagged as the "utopia" of ecclesial-secular relationship: a perfect coexistence within the most intimate union (identification?) between Church and State, often felt with an inner satisfaction of the "spiritual" lightening the way to the "secular" and political order. Let us not forget that in not so distant times, the "theology" heralding the separation of Church and State was not particularly welcome in official circles. The union of Church and State is still often dreamt as the most "desirable" situation.

What role would prophetism be able to play in its free proclamation of the Gospel but most of all in its role of denunciation? Obviously, whatever role it would always have to be from the "periphery", from outside the "establishment", often in conflict with the establishment and therefore as revolutionary, for this is how often those prophetic voices were and still are considered in the history of the Church.

Present Prophetism

Vatican II comes with its "fresh" air let in by the charismatic pilot John XXIII, and a new outlook is shaping up.²³ "Hetical" views are now introduced in the solemn pronouncements and proposition of the Church. There we have such innovative stands like the *Decree on Ecumenism* in its dialogue with non-

²² Cf. J. Marx, *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²³ *Documents of Vatican II*, Edited by W. M. Abbott, N.Y.: Guild Press, 1966.

Catholics, the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religion* (nn. 1-4), the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, with its guidelines on the role of the Church in affairs of man and modern society, and most of all the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* telling us that the voice of God (prophetism) is spoken fully,²⁴ but not exclusively within the boundaries of Catholicism, but even in the most intimate dwellings of the individual conscience.²⁵ And it is in Vatican II where we are told that the secular state has a peculiar role to play and likewise the Church. Thereby posting the Church in its most "desirable" position of "separation", but in dialogue and freedom between the Church and the State.²⁶ In other words, the Constantine syndrome seems definitely in the way to extinction.

From this "fresh" position of the Church a new "fresh air" is blowing where prophetism is once more breathing expansively both in and out of the establishment. For it is in and out of the establishment where the voice of the Spirit speaks without the binding of the Constantine hurdle.

IV

FILIPINO PROPHETISM

"The land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence" (Ez. 7:23). "The people will oppress one another, every man his fellow and every man his neighbour; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the base fellow to the honourable" (Is. 3:5). "Their partiality witnesses against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it" (Is. 3:9).

Those words, quoted from the Holy Scripture, if printed in a metropolitan journal, could easily be taken for a description of our country or city in times not far gone. And yet, they are but

²⁴ *Decree on Ecumenism*, n. 3.

²⁵ *Religious Freedom*, nn. 3 & 4; *Constitution on the Church*, nn. 14-16; *Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, nn. 1-4.

²⁶ *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 76.

prophetic denunciations of the old Israel, not quotations from any ecclesiastical quarter attacking the state of affairs in our society.

An ecclesial complacency seems to pervade even before the most revolting abuses and crimes, to the point that pessimistic remarks like these have been heard: "We consider the results of the conferences of Bishops held at Medellin and a few years back in Manila to have gone to the rocks".²⁷

"Despite the cry for change," it was said, "lamentably the Church has remained resolute in her traditional approach to the problem. It is truly indeed 'recalcitrant' even when an urgent change is demanded so as to fulfill her mission.... As an off-shoot, rampant ideas formulated into articles, books and manifestos have been circulated, resulting to the confusion of the faithful and even of the clergies themselves."²⁸

The end result, as Bonifacio de Ocampo viewed at the time, was rather negative: "Perhaps it is quite late even if now the Church comes out to start fulfilling faithfully and relevantly her apostolic mission."²⁹

Isolated Cries

Is Ocampo's view of Filipino prophetism historically justified? The assertions, being so universal and sweeping, may easily be refuted, since the very presence of such restlessness in the midst of the priestly training in the Filipino Central Seminary is already a healthy sign that prophetism is not really dead, but perhaps merely dormant.

As a matter of fact, without prejudging in any way the historical merits or demerits, from a purely prophetic point of view, it would be rather undeniable that names like Gomez, Burgos, Zamora and Aglipay could easily be categorized as prophetic voices against some patent colonial abuses. And what else could be said of present voices and actions like Balweg's, Edicio de la Torre's,

²⁷ *Position Paper on the Need for Real Prophets*, presented by Rev. Bonifacio de Ocampo, Manila: USTCS, 1971.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Salgado's and Jalandoni's? One could endlessly debate about procedures and methodology, but hardly can those voices be dismissed as unprophetic. Still one has to accept that they have been historically echoing the great Prophet's lament: "Voices crying in the desert" (Mtth. 3:3).³⁰

Dormant Prophetism

Why such "cries in the desert"? It can not be said that it was so because of absence of evils to denounce. They have been, and still are, too rampant to be ignored. The reason for a general attitude of dormant prophetism has to be found somewhere else, and perhaps one can pinpoint it in a twofold area.

Historical Contempt. First is the historical contempt of the prophets. Ocampo has said it this way: "Any time a minister makes it clear that he takes seriously the Gospel and intends that it shall result in decisions in individual and community life, he is in trouble. He's going to be the target of people who want to get rid of him."³¹

Ocampo is saying nothing special; he is simply verbalizing in modern terms the attitude taken by the rulers at the time of Jesus, THE Prophet of all the Prophets (*Jn.* 11:45-54; *Mtth.* 12:14).

We have ample evidence in the history of the Church to establish this kind of contempt and even repression of prophetic minds. Any pioneering ideas have often been seen as revolutionary, subversive, and therefore repressable targets. There we have instances like the condemnation of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) by some ecclesiastical and academic circles of the Sorbonne, the silence imposed on Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the condemnation of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). Even if one wishes to speak of not so distant eras, he can bring to attention the warnings issued

³⁰ John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1979, pp. 193-333; Pablo Fernandez, *History of the Church in the Philippines*, Manila: National Book Store, 1979; Pedro S. de Achutegui & Miguel Bernard, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines*, Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1966.

³¹ B. Ocampo, *l.c.*

on scholars like M.J. Lagrange, Teilhard de Chardin, Yves Congar and so many other pre-Vatican II Prophets.

When one reads about the "dialogues" to which contemporary pioneers are subjected to, like in the instances of Hans Kung or Edward Schillebeeckx, he gets a feeling of what "Christian freedom" in prophetism is all about. I am sure that even in our midst, people like Balweg, Salgado, Jalandoni and De la Torre have a rather colorful story to relate about the isolation of present day prophetism, for not too seldom such Prophets have gone over the fence not so much because they fell in love with radical revolutionary stands as because of their disgruntled feelings about the repressive environment within.

Official Satisfaction. Aside from the isolation felt by prophetic voices, there is a second area of reassessment that may help to explain the state of dormant prophetism, and that is the classic satisfaction of the officialdom.

It has been said that one does not have to be but a superficial learner of history, both universal and national, to see the generally good-living conditions of the people expected to be the pioneering voices to denounce abuses. Since time immemorial, the clergy (bishops and priests) in the country have been identified with the learned and the powerful, with the good living conditions of those in the establishment.

It has been voiced that hardly can it be denied that most of our people in the country cannot afford the satisfying living conditions of the clergy, of those whose example of poverty and virtue ought to shine for others to see and follow:

In a dramatic way, Salgado expresses it with these words: "Herein lies the difficulty of documents written by the Church hierarchy regarding the problems of the poor. Members of the hierarchy are generally rich people. How can rich people speak well in the name of the poor? How can they speak well of what is good for the poor, when this is generally opposite to what is

good for the wealthy? How can they be expected to sacrifice themselves wholeheartedly for social transformation, when it is clear they have so much vested interests in preserving the *status quo*?"

"It would be different were the Pope and the Bishops poor or, at least, were living more often with the poor. If the Pope and the Bishops would have the smelly, rickety houses of the slum dwellers of the big cities, or the small huts of the farmers in the forgotten barrios of our country; if they had to feed themselves with but salt and rice, or only *lugaw*; if they cannot get redress for injustices as the farmers, due to the government's disregard of farmers' rights; then the poor, I believe, will not begrudge them if they speak in their name about their problems and the solutions to them. Wealth, and power, and the privileged position the Pope and the Bishops hold in the present society; these are obstacles that could easily blind regarding the truth of the social problems."³²

Favored Status. Aside from the official satisfaction and the good living conditions, there is an additional factor that helps explain the dormant status of prophetism, and it is the favors often enjoyed by those primarily called upon to raise their prophetic voices.

One does not have to discuss allegations like first class treatment (for the corresponding stipend) given to the rich through special baptisms, first class weddings or first class funerals. One does not have to air that ministers of the Gospel are rather available (for an expected treatment) to bless mansions and lead enthronements in high places. One does not have to mention rumors about tax-free imported vehicles for "official use" by the ministers, or of other tax-free items for the service of the Church. One hears of the entire membership of the clergy of a diocese on the monthly "payroll" (it is called donation for the Church) of a wealthy businessman in the area. One hears of the "lovely"

³² Pedro Salgado, "Some Comments on the Vatican Instruction", *Witness*, 4 (1985), 68.

envelops to the celebrants and concelebrants attending official receptions, or of the free air tickets plus pocket money to the clergy entourage accompanying the influential on "pilgrimages" to holy places.

In short, if those allegations would prove to be accurate, how could those same ministers, profitting from such (un) holy favors, be able to go on the stand and denounce the ruling evils?

Longing for Prophets

And yet, God's voice is like the roaring forces of a volcano. It may be delayed or silenced for a while, but sooner or later it finds a crack and bursts open in forms and ways that one may least expect, for after all the Lord has always preserved his "remnant" of the Covenant among his chosen people.

The cries of the poor have kept raising up to the high skies and throughout the times a longing for authentic Prophets has been maintained. Authentic Prophets to denounce the abuse of the sakadas, or the denudating of the national forest, the squandering of the national treasury, the salaries of starvation or the scandals of palaces in the skies.

A longing for Prophets was felt. Prophets who would announce to the faithful the true position of the Gospel on class struggle and active revolt against oppressors. Military powers, dictatorial regimes, it has often been observed, do never reach a point of total satisfaction, neither a point of readiness to voluntarily step down. And the cries of the people kept raising, longing that authentic Prophets would not only denounce oppression, but confirm them in positions of struggle for liberation.

Awakening

The national awakening to prophetism in the Philippines has taken a long and slow process, leading it from the isolated historical cries to the present solemn stand. The process has been mainly a process of concientization, brought about by combined deteriorating factors, namely: growing social inequalities that

have gradually, but dramatically, widened the gap between the have-all and the have-nothing; political manipulation that has exposed the people for several decades to the pharsical show of "choosing" what had been previously acted upon; the economic slavery that has led the country from modest poverty to international slavery through emigrant workers, local sex tours and IMF's dictations; militaristic situation, where the sacred law of the land has been changed for the rule of the gun; the institutionalized corruption that seems to have placed an unwritten tag on all transactions either in the legislative, executive or judicial branches and the traumatic play with life, where all unwanted elements were systematically removed either through midnight "salvaging" or on plain day light, like the murders in Cotabato (e.g. Father Favali), in Escalante (the sugar workers), in Antique (ex-governor Javier), or in the International Airport (Senator Aquino).

The presence of prophetism grew up to international levels, from the ecclesial pressure due to the disappearance of Father Rudy Romano and the murder of Father Favali, to the diplomatic influence during the show trials of the Bacolod priests and lay-workers, to the high level astonishment of the "Agrava Board" and the Aquino trial. The silent but unprecedented manifestation of prophetism was expressed in the funeral of senator Aquino. Still, "only those with ears could hear"; the climax of the awakening were the masses of people making carnivalistic comments like the foretelling of the decision of the Sandigan Bayan that would come out with a criminal verdict that it was Aquino who had killed Galman; or the comments of the Galman's family counsel, stating after the verdict that he had won, because he knew from the beginning what the outcome would be. After all, the final sentence was not too far away from the worst expectations since all the suspects came out judicially innocent.

The Eruption

The outlet valve that was (erroneously) precast as sufficient was the call for "snap elections". The timing, the manipulation of the mass media, the activation of the political machinery, the rolling of the Central Bank printing offices, the appointments to the Supreme Court and Comelec, all those and more were "omi-

nous signs" that the outlet-valve had been properly set in place and a big show or *lutong makao* was in the making.

The skepticism of the people could be touched and weighed. Then fire started catching up; prophetic voices became loud and clear through people like bishops Escaler, Quevedo, Fortich, Claver and Labayen. NAMFREL put on a grand stand through a mixed support of international pressure, Church backing and personal honesty. Cardinal Sin came out with an advanced pastoral letter,³³ foretelling what the prophetic voice of the Church will stand for.

The Warning

Added to all those factors, a joint pastoral letter, issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, came out on January 25, 1986. The substance of the letter is prophetic. It is basically a warning to avoid evils, evils which are looming in the immediate national horizon: "It has been our sad experience that God's will has been flagrantly transgressed in the past through the violation of our electoral process. Registration anomalies and flying voters, vote buying and selling, bribery, unwarranted pressures, serious lies, black propaganda, the fraudulent casting, canvassing and reporting of votes, snatching and switching of ballot boxes, physical violence and killings have often characterized our elections."

"It is with grave concern and great sadness that we see signs of these happening again now in a concerted manner, and threatening to escalate to a level never experienced before. These practices are sins against the Lord. They violate in a serious manner the dignity of human beings with whom the Lord has united himself."³⁴

A call is issued to all parties involved, to renounce evil and to heed the voice of (the people) truth and honesty: "This will [of the people] must be expressed and respected. For the power to choose our leaders comes from God. From him all authority derives. In a democracy, he chooses to designate the bearers of

³³ "A Call to Conscience", January 19, 1986.

³⁴ "We Must Obey God rather than Men", January 25, 1986.

this authority through the free and honest expression of the people's will. Hence, voting is a sacred right and duty. To exercise this right is to do God's will. To respect this right is to respect God himself."³⁵

It is the call of proclamation of the Gospel values: "Vote into office the persons you believe God wants you to put in office as president and vice-president of this land. Vote for persons who embody the Gospel values of justice, humility, truth, freedom, courage, love, peace; respect for human rights and life."³⁶

Prophetic Judgment

The climax of the political exercise was reached without any of the denounced evils showing any signs of receding. And at that point Filipino prophetism reached its apex through all forms of denunciations coming from members of NAMFREL, through the mouths of nuns, priests and ordinary laymen. When the bishops, fulfilling their previous agreement, met for a second time to examine the reports arriving from all sorts of life, the judgment was finally rendered in a clear voice. The system is evil (immoral), and Christians are called upon to act accordingly: "In our considered judgment, the polls were unparalleled in the fraudulence of their conduct."³⁷

"According to moral principles, a government that assumes or retains power through fraudulent means has no moral basis. For such an access to power is tantamount to a forcible seizure and cannot command the allegiance of the citizenry.... If such a government does not of itself freely correct the evil it has inflicted on the people then it is our serious moral obligation as a people to make it do so."³⁸

Comments

Additional comments could be made at this point of time. When these thoughts were being organized and the February

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ "Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines Post Election Statement", Feb. 13, 1986.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

events had not yet taken place, a stage of further purification (perhaps even civil war) was forecast before evil would be cleansed. Now events have proved (fortunately) otherwise.

A comment was further projected about the increased polarization of forces where honesty and truth were perceived as the enemies of the system. A very sad situation indeed for anyone claiming to have a covenant with his people.

A further comment could be added about the dissenting opinions of some bishops concerning the CBCP's judgment statement. One has only to remember that it is in this fashion that the prophetic spirit works. Not a single document of a solemn ecclesial council has ever been approved by a one hundred per cent agreement. Still what the Community stands for remains in the solemn pronouncement.

A sequential suffering is the usual follow-up to prophecy. Will it not arrive to the Filipino Church? All Prophets had hoped that it would never come, and yet it came. If events or signs subsequent to the revolution of the "people's power" will not prove wrong, sufferings will come, although it may be too early to predict where will they come from, from former allies or enemies, or from present friends and adulators.

Future of Prophetism

What role is in store for the Filipino prophetism? One could openly say that the role of the Church continues being prophetic. The immediate task is healing and reconciliation. In this regard the bishops of Manila, under the leadership of Cardinal Sin, issued a press statement relevant to the situation: "Let us bind the wounds that the recent election and its aftermath inflicted on the national soul. Let us stretch our hands in friendship and amity to others so that the healing process may begin."³⁹

Beyond that healing role, the Church ought to continue exercising the prophetism that she played so brilliantly during the

³⁹ "Press Statement of His Eminence, Jaime Cardinal Sin and the Auxiliary Bishops of Manila", *Malaya*, March 2, 1986.

last months of 1985 and up to the end of February of 1986, with a prophetism of "catholic" denunciation, regardless of color, culture, social or political tone, truly catholic, and with a prophetism of "catholic" proclamation of the Gospel values for all men (*Mtth.* 28:19), without exception, but with a clear option in orthodoxy and orthopraxis "for the poor."⁴⁰

In practical terms, the Church's role is never to identify herself with any political party or economic class, but to project herself with the freedom of the Gospel with the end target of *total* liberation to be proclaimed particularly to the "oppressed" with any kind of oppression. That is what the Good News of Jesus is all about.

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⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, May 15, 1981; Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1983.