

*CONSECRATED LIFE :  
MYSTICISM AND PROPHECY*

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## PREFACE

Antonietta Rauti

*Original in Italian*

**T**he article by the Benedictine monk and well-known writer, **Fr Anselm Grün**, is at the beginning of our Bulletin no. 141, dedicated to prophecy and mysticism in consecrated life.

As prophets have always risen up in times of crisis to proclaim the will of God to the people of Israel, so in the history of the Church religious orders have always had a prophetic vocation. They have offered a response, in the Church and in society, to peoples' yearnings, and they have placed their finger on the wound when the Church has adapted itself too much to the spirit of the times and has become turned in on itself.

Fr Grün writes, "As consecrated religious, we have a prophetic task in the Church. We do not exist only to affirm people in our world and to confirm the Church's expectations of us. We are called to take the side of the word of God and the will of God in this world, as the prophets did".

*"The task of the prophet is to keep hope alive"*, continues **Michael McCabe**, member of the Society for African Missions, who after having tackled the origin and the nature of Christian hope, concentrates on the topic of mission, interpreted from the perspective of Christian hope, that is, as the transformation of the Church and the world in the light of the Christian hope for a new heaven and a new earth.

*"Mission invites and sustains an active participation in God's plan for humanity in the here and now. We must discover how the Kingdom is already present in an initial form, as a seed. We must discern and nurture these seeds of the Kingdom, using our resources and energies. In discerning and nurturing these seeds of the Kingdom, contemplative prayer and presence must balance active social and political participation"*.

Two examples of active social and political participation come to us from the conference of **Mgr. Antonio Maria Vegliò**, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Travelling People, and of **Stella Morra**, theologian and teacher of theology. These two talks were presented at the Congress of Religious Networks Against Trafficking, held in Rome from 15<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

This is how Mgr. Vegliò addresses the Congress members in his opening address: “Above all, I would like to repeat that religious women can be extraordinarily gifted by their prophetic charism in shaping a way not only to care for the persons involved, but also to change the situation.” Later, he says, “ *In taking care of the needs of women over the centuries, religious congregations, especially female ones, have always paid attention to the signs of the times, rediscovering their value and the relevance of their charisms in new social contexts*”. (*Orientations for the Pastoral Care of the Road*).

Stella Morra offers us some reflections based on a Biblical story of violence, the story of Susannah, taken from the book of Daniel, chapter 13. The hope is that this reflection “can help us on the one hand to bring together our lived experiences and the persons that we meet in the light of our faith, and on the other hand can encourage us, through our faith, to listen with a heart that is more and more open to the silent cry of many abused and enslaved women and children”.

The Bulletin concludes with the striking human and spiritual life of Elijah the prophet, a synthesis of contemplative prayer and presence, of mysticism and prophecy. In union with God, Elijah’s mission finds its strength and its source. “*To unite oneself to God remains the main concern of God’s instrument*”, writes the Carmelite Father **Maria-Eugenio of the Holy Child Jesus, OCD** (1894-1967) in his turn a man of prayer and action. “*The prophet continually seeks God and is constantly abandoned to God’s exterior or interior action. He abandons himself: that is his whole occupation. He is at God’s disposal, either to stay with God in solitude or to be sent by God hither and thither*”. (*I Want to See God*)

We continue our reflection on the topic of mysticism and prophecy in view of the coming UISG General Assembly, which will take place in Rome from May 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> 2010, and with reference to this, it is not unnecessary to recall the topic inspired by the Spiritual Canticle of St John of the Cross: “I know well the fountain which springs up and flows.. even though it is night”. *Religious life is living today in a situation of deep searching, of creativity and pruning*.

The Spirit, who dwells in us, does not cease to quench our thirst with the water from this Fountain. A Fountain which he continually fills and with which he seduces and leads us into a loving relationship, calling us to shed a prophetic light on situations of darkness and to dwell courageously in new horizons. The future of religious life is to live fully its mysticism and its prophecy” (Convocation of the UISG General Assembly, May 2010).

# CONSECRATED LIFE AND PROPHECY THE IDENTITY OF THE PROPHET

Fr Anselm Grün OSB

*Father Anselm Grün OSB, born January 14th 1945, is member and cellarer of the Benedictine Abbey of Münsterschwarzach (Germany). He is consultant of spiritual issues, clerical advisor and course instructor for meditation, contemplation, fasting. Father Grün is one of the most read Christian authors of today.*

*Original in German*

(Conference given to participants of the Congress CISM-USMI Piemonte-Valle d'Aosta, Torino 2009)

## Introduction

**J**ust as prophets have always arisen in times of crisis to proclaim the will of God to the people of Israel, so in the history of the Church religious orders have always had a prophetic vocation. They have offered a response, in the Church and in society, to the longings of the people. They have put their finger on the wound when the Church has been too turned in on itself. The first monks responded in this way to the worldwide spread of the Church. Benedict, at a time of migration, set up places of community which brought stability to their surroundings. Confronted by the feudal structure of the Church and of society, Francis reawakened a sensitivity to poverty. Dominic made his own the desire of the Cathars for a pure and clear faith. Ignatius wanted to respond to the Reformation and direct life again only towards the figure of Christ. And many religious orders in the nineteenth century responded to the needs of their times. It is always a question of a prophetic response, a response which comes from God, an attempt to put the will of God into practice in a particular time.

I would like therefore to explain how religious orders can carry out their prophetic vocation today. First of all I would like to look at the Bible and say something about the nature of the prophet and his function within the people of Israel and in the early Church. Starting from there, we can compare this with the prophetic dimension of consecrated life and the identity of each

consecrated person as a prophet.

## 1. The nature of the prophet

The figure of the prophet exists in all religions. The nature of the prophet consists in the fact of being called by God to proclaim the will of God to the people. Prophets receive the proclamation of God through visions, voices or dreams. There is no formation for becoming a prophet. On the contrary, the call of God often comes about unexpectedly and often against the prophet's will. The prophet is completely taken over and must respond with his whole being to God's call. He is not a prophet in addition to everything else he does. Quite often he has to leave his work and consecrate himself only to the task of listening to the word of God and proclaiming it. Furthermore he has no human authorisation. What is solely and uniquely decisive for him is the word of God. However the prophet can never say with certainty that he is listening to it in the right way and explaining it correctly. He can only place himself at God's service with all his honesty and loyalty.

Even if there are prophets in Egypt, in Buddhism and other religions, and even if Mohammed and Mani designate themselves as prophets, it is above all Judaism that offers the real picture of the prophet. The prophet is called by God and taken away from his place in society. Jeremiah had to give up the life he was leading in society. He often felt alone and opposed by people. But he could do nothing other than listen to what God was saying to him and announce it to the people. We can see already in Jeremiah that he places himself completely at God's disposal and that his life is determined by God, which is often very painful for him. He laments this in his confessions. On the one hand, he has devoured the word which God has suggested to him: "Your word was my delight and the joy of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). But then he feels as if God had abandoned him: "For me you are a deceptive stream with uncertain waters" (Jer. 15:18). God is the central point of his life. But if God withdraws, then he experiences profound despair and wants only to die. He feels misunderstood and opposed by the people. And yet he does not go far from God and God's call: "You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced; you have overpowered me; you were the stronger. I am a laughing-stock all day long, they all make fun of me" (Jer. 20:7). But when he moves away from God, it is for him "a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones" (Jer. 20:9).

The task of the prophet is to proclaim the word of God. This word may describe God's plan for every single person. But it can also be a criticism of society, of a practice of worship which has become empty, or of behaviour that people have adopted which is in contradiction to the will of God. The

will of God can be salvation or misfortune, judgement or promise. In the face of catastrophe the prophets open the eyes of people to recognize the wrong path and the false politics which will bring them to ruin. Prophets are hated because of their proclamation of misfortune. People prefer to be affirmed. Everything must go on in the same way. The prophets criticize a worship which offers God only an outward service, but is no longer truly open to God. Above all they criticize the worship carried out by priests who no longer take care of the poor. Worship becomes a substitute for love and care for the poor and marginalized. Thus the prophets take up above all the cause of the poor, of widows and of those who live on the margins. As prophets of misfortune, they must enter into debate with those who prophesy salvation and always say things that will please the people.

After the catastrophe, their proclamation changes. Now they offer hope to the people. God will change everything for the good. He will give salvation. This salvation already occurs in history, but it also has another dimension which goes beyond time. It is not a question of a consolation that comes from beyond, but of hope that in any case God remains victorious and his salvation will come about. It already happens in history in such a way that we already experience it, or it will happen in a salvation beyond this earth, the salvation which awaits each of us at the moment of death. Then the light of God will enlighten us for ever and we will be surrounded by his eternal love.

The phenomenon of prophecy is known in the New Testament and at the same time it is transformed. Peter, in his discourse at Pentecost, recognizes in the miracle of tongues the action of the Holy Spirit who is raising up prophets in the Church. In that event the promise of the prophet Joel becomes a reality: "I will pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, your old people will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). The early Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, who continually raises up prophets in the Church, like the sons of Philip, the itinerant prophet Agabus and Jude, Barsabbas or Silas. Luke interprets the prophets of the early Church as people to whom the Holy Spirit speaks in visions and dreams and who communicate to the community what they have seen and heard. It is above all the Holy Spirit who is at work in and through the prophets.

Paul is concerned with the phenomenon of prophecy in the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul appreciates prophecy and gives it an exalted position in the community. Faced with speaking in tongues, Paul emphasizes the prophet's task of interpreting the message of Jesus. In the structure of the community, prophets and teachers are the supporting pillars. In Corinth, prophecy faces the threat of being superseded by the phenomenon of glossolalia. Paul recognizes that glossolalia is certainly brought about by the Spirit.

However what is lacking here is interpretation. The prophet uses his intelligence as well and communicates what God wants to say to the community in understandable language. Glossolalia (speaking in tongues) is an ecstatic phenomenon. However for Paul the role of the prophet is more important. People must understand what the Holy Spirit wants to say to them. They should not simply remain in ecstasy. "Someone who prophesies speaks to other people, building them up and giving them encouragement and reassurance. Those who speak in a tongue may build themselves up, but those who prophesy build up the community" (1 Cor. 14: 3-4). Here the task of the prophet becomes clear. He does not depend on his own words, he is not concerned with himself and his own experience, but he speaks to people. He is always in relationship with others. And he has taken on the three tasks of comforting, encouraging and consoling. He is at the service of people. He does not place himself above them, but he places himself at their service and at the service of God, for their good. Without interpretation by the prophet, glossolalia is a waste of breath. It does not change people. The person depends only on himself and his own experience, but this does not become fruitful for others. It does not shape the world, but seeks refuge from the world in a religious experience which can easily become a narcissistic focusing on oneself. It is a phenomenon we also know today. Ken Wilber, an American psychologist, says that the last twenty years in the USA have been a narcissistic focusing on self and one's own well-being. But this is also useless for society. Perhaps this is true also of some religious communities which are narcissistically centred on themselves and on their spiritual experience, but no longer have any effect on the world. The prophet always has a function in society; he wants the world to be shaped and changed according to the Spirit.

According to Paul, the prophet has another task. He brings to light what is hidden in the heart (1 Cor.14:25). The prophet is aware of this because he knows the heart. He knows the thoughts of human beings and he brings them to light. This leads the people to prostrate themselves before God and to pray to God. It is God, not the prophet, who is at the centre. The prophet wants to direct people to God through God's gifts. Then the person can decide freely to say to another what he has received from God or he can keep it for himself: "The prophetic spirit is to be under the prophet's control" (1 Cor.14:32). God does not want ecstatic disorder, but peace. Therefore the prophet must have a good intuitive ability in order to understand whether it is opportune to say something, and he must always be aware of the danger of placing himself at the centre. The Swiss therapist C. G. Jung thought that it was dangerous for people to identify themselves with an archetypal model, because then I become blind to my own particular needs, that I express hiding them behind the screen of the archetypal model. For the prophet, this means that it is

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 dangerous if I identify with the model of the prophet, because I think I am the only person who knows the truth and has the courage to make it known. But I do not realize that behind the screen of the prophet, I am expressing in a hidden way my own desire for affirmation or my own violence. Therefore it is always necessary to have an honest self-knowledge, by which, through the gift of prophecy, I place myself at the service of people, and not above them.

## 2. The prophetic dimension of religious life

The task of the prophet is not to predict the future but to proclaim the will of God for the present and for the situation of today. The prophet proclaims the “today of God” for people. This “today of God” is often in contrast with the world. Honesty (parrhesia) is necessary in announcing the word of God. Prophecy must always reveal; it is directed against the occult and repression (Werbick, 634), against forces that do not want to recognize the truth, in the world as well as in the Church. Furthermore prophetic discourse does not exclude argument; it is not interested simply in proclaiming the word of God. We must also use our reason and analyze our times in order to understand where there is a refusal to see the will of God and where there are tendencies that limit and place obstacles in peoples’ lives.

Consecrated life has always had a prophetic dimension in the history of the Church, but we cannot rest on the fruits of the past. How can we live this prophetic dimension today? I would like to look at some aspects:

### - *placing God at the centre*

The prophets placed themselves completely at God’s disposal and proclaimed the will of God, whether it was welcome to people or not. Our task today is to keep open the question of God. We are not doing a favour to people if we only want to adapt or to seem modern. The world must see in us that we are interested in God. If we place God at the centre and create places in our society where we are interested in God above all, then we render a useful service. It is only when God is at the centre that people reach the centre of themselves. Max Horkheimer, the founder of the philosophical school of Frankfurt, speaks of the fact that religions, with their sometimes incomprehensible rites, have the function in society of keeping alive peoples’ yearning for something totally other. Thus they keep society from becoming inhuman. It is our task to keep peoples’ yearning alive through our seeking for God, because there is a longing for God in every person. This desire is often repressed, and then it becomes a mania. We also contribute to making human obsessions become once again a longing. But with all of this we render a service to society, because we keep open the question of God. All

societies always have authoritarian characteristics. Either the economy or the law or maybe politics have a tendency to determine social life. Every time that we keep the question of God open, we preserve society from these authoritarian characteristics and from its tendency to make itself an absolute.

A woman student told me that she liked to come to our monastery in Münsterschwarzach because it was one of the few places in the Church where people were interested in God and not in typical social or ecclesiastical questions about seeking better structures. Albert Biesinger has written a book on education with the title: "Do not betray the children of God". We do not offer any service to children if we reduce the religious fact simply to a common humanity. We betray them if we do not address their deepest longing for God.

In consecrated life, it is not a question of speaking of God, but of persuading people by our whole existence that we are interested in God. Each order will give a different emphasis. For Benedict, the essential task of the monk was to seek God throughout his life. His prayer and work have the aim that God should be glorified in all things. Monks must place absolutely nothing before Christ. For Ignatius, it is a question of the will of God, for Francis the love of God that appeared in Jesus Christ. For others, it is the Holy Spirit who must shape everything, or the mystery of the Trinitarian God who has opened up so that we can live in communion with God. But everything always revolves around God. In every reform of external aspects, we must not forget the question of God. Our consecrated life depends on this: that people can see in us that God interests us.

- *the religious orders' function of criticizing society*

The prophets have always exercised a critical function in society. They have given the rich lessons in morality and revealed unjust structures. Thus the prophet Amos accuses the rich and the nobles who live on Mount Zion who are so carefree and sure of themselves: "Lying on ivory beds and sprawling on their divans, they dine on lambs from the flock, and stall-fattened veal; they bawl to the sound of the lyre and , like David, they invent musical instruments" (Amos 6:4-5). And he directs words of condemnation to those who oppress the weak, who "make the bushel measure smaller and the shekel weight bigger by fraudulently tampering with the scales" (Amos 8:5). The prophets reveal without respect the injustice that exists within society, and they take the part of the poor, the weak and those without rights.

If today we adopt the preaching of the prophets, which is often moralising and accusatory, we become boring. It is not a question so much of accusing individual people, as of discovering in society and in the world the structures that prevent people from having dignity as persons. This requires sociological

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and political analysis, deep reflection and above all an accurate understanding of the socio-economical context. Accusations alone produce nothing. On the contrary, they will lead to a hardening of positions. It is necessary to have a good technical knowledge of the problems in order to be able to contribute to the prophetic criticism of society and the economy. Simply having demonstrations with banners and accusing banks and businesses does not take us very far.

In my opinion, there are three tendencies above all in our society which prevent a truly human life: an ever-growing “commercialization”. Everything is seen only from a financial angle. All advice, every skill in treatment is calculated. Money becomes the highest value. The second tendency is “legalization”. Every aspect of life is more and more covered by norms. And everything is challenged by legal means. Pascal Bruckner has called this tendency “victimization”: I am always a victim; the others are always to blame. And so I must fight to defend my rights. The third tendency is an ever-increasing control. Management control in business has become the most important instrument of the economy. But this control finds its way even into the area of private life. All these three tendencies are signs of fear, of power and of longing. The longing to have more and more money has brought about a financial crisis. Fear leads to ever greater control. And power is losing its social dimension more and more. Power is in itself something positive. If I have power, I can achieve something. But power can also become absolute and thus tyrannize people. We must name these tendencies in society which are an obstacle to life and show their fatal effects, without accusing individual persons. And we must ask within religious orders how we can create a counter-culture opposed to this culture which is becoming more and more inhuman. Of course, we are often involved in healthcare, in education and social services. Here mere accusations are not helpful, but what is useful is imagination, developing other ways of working and of organising the economy and not simply following the demands of the State. And with regard to our living together, we must look at how fully we ourselves are signs of these tendencies.

One test to see whether we are adapting to the world or whether we are building a prophetic counter-culture is language. Language betrays us. I gave a course to a Catholic foundation on “Being guided by Christian values”. The foundation wanted to honour Christian values, but their language was not Christian. It was only the cold language of business. In many businesses – and sometimes even in the Church and in religious communities – we speak a cold language, a language which judges, full of reproof, which despises persons. The language that the Spirit desires to awaken in us is a language which warms, a language from which a spark arises, because the Spirit came

at Pentecost upon the disciples with tongues of fire. Only people who hold within themselves the flame of the Spirit speak a language which warms and speak beyond the words from a heart which loves. By our language people know whether we speak through the impulse of the Holy Spirit or are simply driven by a spirit of aggression or arrogance.

***- The task of religious life of criticising the Church***

The prophets always criticised worship and with that the religious leaders, above all, the priests. Religious orders have a critical function in the Church. Again, this does not mean that we accuse the Church or place ourselves above her. It is a question above all of developing those models of community life that correspond with the model of early Christianity that Luke – even if he idealizes a little – describes for us in the Acts of the Apostles: “And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone” (Acts 2: 44-47). The task of the Church today, in a world which is becoming more and more anonymous, should be to form communities in which people feel accepted, in which we gather round Christ, taking part in his gift of himself that is experienced in the breaking of the bread, and praising God together. But instead the Church is too focused on itself, on its power, on its structures and norms.

Prophetic criticism is always twofold: naming what leads us to take wrong paths and ourselves living what we proclaim. This does not mean that we accuse individuals, but that we bring to light tendencies in the Church that are in contradiction with the original idea of the Church. Therefore in individual cases it may be quite legitimate to oppose a bishop or a priest whenever they publicly promote norms and teachings that are in contradiction with the spirit of Jesus. But at the same time it is never a question of placing oneself above others, but rather of pointing out that in our teaching and our Church practice tendencies are constantly introduced that are opposed by the message of Jesus. This is true of all tendencies that are born of fear and produce only a restricted vision and for all aspirations which use violence. But what is even more essential is that we in religious orders show the world by our lives how a community can work. And then we see that it is not so simple to bring together people with different spiritual formations and with their own histories and build a community that is open to individuals and yet has a clear direction.

Religious orders have always created spaces of freedom in the Church.

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 We must be grateful that we are not subject to the hierarchy. This gives us the freedom, without being concerned for our career in the Church, to proclaim the message of Jesus as we have understood it with our own conscience. We do not need to look around fearfully for what a bishop might say about one statement or another. We are bound to the message of Christ. This gives us the freedom, but also the responsibility, not to be bound by Church regulations but rather to respond to the Spirit of Jesus.

The prophets proclaimed the will of God to individuals. They saw and recognized very attentively the situation of persons and within that concrete situation they proclaimed the word of God. We as religious orders have the task of listening above all to persons, of feeling their longing so as to be able to proclaim the message of Jesus in a language which responds to and touches their yearning. We often hear in the Church the complaint that people are no longer believers. In my opinion this complaint is the expression of one's own lack of faith and often also the sign of a ghetto mentality. When we have difficulties with faith, we do not recognize faith in people. When we live settled in our Church ghetto, we lose the capacity to sense people's desire for God. For St Augustine, pastoral work consists above all in listening to people's longing. And there is in everyone, even in those who have no religious language or practice, a longing for love, for security, for happiness and in the end a longing for God, the only One who can completely fulfil our longing. Among ourselves we must have this language which touches people's hearts; we must exercise our prophetic mission, our task of criticizing the Church. We do not accuse others, but we seek, as prophets, to listen to God and to people in order to proclaim God in a way that enters peoples' hearts.

### ***- The eschatological dimension of the prophetic task***

The prophets proclaim the salvation that God has prepared in these days for our history. But in their proclamation they look beyond history. They always look to the saving coming of God who acts beyond time. The Christian Church sees the accomplishment of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ. But Jesus calls himself a prophet who points beyond himself and proclaims the coming of the Reign of God already in the present and its coming at the end of the world.

In the seventies there was a way of understanding religious life as an eschatological sign. Consecrated persons referred beyond themselves to the coming of Christ at the end of the world. They therefore already foretell his coming by chastity, poverty and obedience. However a brother once said with some scepticism that he did not want to be an eschatological signpost. Religious life must have a meaning in itself and not only refer to the end time. His statement certainly has some validity. We live now as persons who

seek God and who await the coming of the Lord, a coming which is both today and at the end of the world. This end of the world comes for each one at the moment of death. But the end of the world reveals itself also in everything we do which is transient. Thus we as religious are Advent people, who experience God continually here and now, but who at the same time reach out to the coming of the lordship of Jesus which Jesus himself proclaimed in his eschatological discourse: “ then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk.21: 27). Our task is to stand up and hold our heads high, because our liberation is near at hand.

We must not make people hope for a hereafter, but we must not either proclaim the salvation brought by Jesus as if it consisted only in our happiness on earth. In our proclamation and in our life there is a necessary tension between the already and the not yet, between today and tomorrow, between initial salvation and its fulfilment at the end, at our death and at the end of the world. In our commitment to people, in our building of this world, we must always be aware that everything is transitory, and that fulfilment passes through many stages. This gives our life a welcome tension. We offer a realistic hope in the face of the futility of many promises of happiness in this world. Thus the hope which we communicate not only in our words but by our whole lives fulfils our prophetic mission in the clearest possible way.

### **3. The individual consecrated person as prophet**

In baptism we have all been anointed kings and queens, priests and prophets. We are persons with royal dignity, who have control over ourselves and do not allow ourselves to be ruled by needs and expectations. We are persons with priestly dignity, who guard and protect in ourselves and in others all that is holy, who guard the fire of love in this world. And we are prophets, who recognize and name the signs of God in human life. The prophet expresses not only something about our tasks, but about our existence. The prophet is not primarily someone who predicts the future, but rather someone who reveals God. If we are prophets, this then means that each one of us in our life must express and reveal something of God, something that can only be expressed through us. Each one of us has a word which is unique, which God has pronounced only over us. And it is our task to make visible in our life that unique word, that password. We therefore respond to our prophetic identity when we imprint in this world the original living impression which God has ordained for us. Each one of us is unique and individual. Each one of us, with our life, has a mission in this world. This may consist in specific tasks or in projects which each one considers to be their proper vocation. But it may also simply come about through the fact that we consciously leave in this world the imprint of our own life through what we

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communicate, through the language we speak, through the way in which we think, feel, behave, through the way in which we meet one another. Through our life's journey this world should become more luminous and more saved, ever more marked by the Spirit of God.

According to St Luke's gospel, it is in prayer that we recognize our prophetic mission. Luke is the only evangelist to relate that Jesus was transfigured during prayer (Lk.9:28-36). The Transfiguration means that we reach what is particular to us, that the original image which God has made of us shines forth in us. Moses and Elijah appear during the Transfiguration. Moses is the lawgiver and the guide towards freedom. When we pray, our life is in order and we become free from peoples' expectations. Elijah represents the prophet. In prayer we develop our prophetic mission. There we recognize who we truly are and what God wishes to express and show through us in this world.

We should not therefore look only at the prophetic mission of the community. Each one of us is responsible for living our own prophetic identity, for making visible the uniqueness that God has intended for us. The prophetic mission is always a mission for people. If we are ourselves and at the same time we live in an authentic way, we become a blessing for people. But at the same time we must continually ask ourselves what signs of God we wish to leave in this world; what do we want to hand on to people around us? What should they read in us? What message of God becomes perceptible through our life and action in this world?

Jesus has shown us how to recognize our prophetic mission. He invites us to enter by the narrow gate and to journey by the hard road (Mt. 7:13-14). The narrow gate does not consist in the fact that we respect as far as possible all God's commandments. The narrow gate is much more the gate through which we must enter in order to journey on the hard road, the unique one that God has planned for us. A certain effort is necessary to find that gate. It is not enough only to rely on others. I must ask what God considers me capable of and for what God has called me. The wide road is not the bad road, but the road which everyone takes. Jesus believes that each one of us is capable of finding the unique way in which our life can become a blessing for people.

The essential role of the prophet does not consist in feeling called to communicate our own vision of things to the world. Jesus warned against self-designated and false prophets: "They come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves" (Mt.7:15). We become prophets by vocation. Each one of us is called by God to develop in this world what God has planned for us. This can come about through the style and method of our preaching. At the same time we must avoid speaking to people only in words.

We have the task of proclaiming what we have felt of God in our heart, and we must place ourselves completely at God's service. Just as the prophet Jeremiah throughout his life experienced the need to be a prophet at the service of God, it will happen quite often in the same way for us too. The prophet is alone. There is no proof that what the prophet says and lives is right. The prophet is bound only by God and his own conscience, where he hears God's voice. He must therefore listen attentively in order to hear what is truly the word of God and not words which correspond to his favourite ideas. Quite often the prophet experiences times of dryness and emptiness in which he feels nothing and is struck dumb. And then what is important are not the words, but the witness of our life. People should be able to read in our lives what we are referring to, whether it is ourselves or the God of Jesus Christ who in the end always proclaims salvation, but a salvation which also includes judgement, the state of being orientated towards God.

## Conclusion

As consecrated religious, we have a prophetic task in the Church. We do not exist only to affirm people in our world and to confirm the Church's expectations of us. We are called to take the side of the word of God and the will of God in this world, as the prophets did. And quite often, as prophets, we are elements of conflict, not only in the world but also in the Church. As prophets we are not people who know better than others how we should behave in the Church and in the world. We as prophets are often made to face our powerlessness. Outside of ourselves we do not know how Christian life is being lived today. However we want, as prophets, to listen to what God has to say to us, to the Church and to the world today. There is a need for humility and honesty, for openness and sensitivity, for listening to God and to the signs of the times, for a growing awareness of what is happening in our times, and there is a need for the power of the Spirit to be able to fulfil our prophetic mission credibly and effectively by listening to God and by analysing our times. So I express a wish for all of us: that we – each one of us for ourselves – and as communities listen to the voice of God and proclaim it by our words and our lives, so that this world may be more open to the Spirit of God and that people may be invited in their hearts to set out on the road of conversion to God.

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*MISSION AS ACTION IN HOPE.  
A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON OUR  
COMMITMENT TO THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE,  
PEACE AND THE INTERGRITY OF CREATION (JPIC)  
IN OUR WORLD TODAY*

P. Michael McCabe, SMA

*P. Michael McCabe served as a member of the General Council of the Society of African Missions, SMA, from 1989 – 1995 and from 2001 – 2006. He was President of the Executive Committee of the Africa/Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) from 2002-2004. He is the author of several articles in the areas of Mission Theology, Interreligious-Dialogue and JPIC commitment. He is currently teaching courses in Mission Theology at Tangaza College, Nairobi, and resides at SMA House of Studies, Nairobi.*

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*Original in English*

*“Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*

## **Introduction**

**T**he promotion of social and ecological justice, reconciliation and peace forms an integral dimension of the mission of the Church - a mission grounded in and giving concrete expression to the hope we proclaim every time we say in the Our Father: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This hope is a distinctive and unique hope forged in the crucible of the Judeo-Christian experience of God’s active engagement in human history, a hope shaped by and patterned upon the Paschal Mystery, the passage of Jesus from life, through death, to new life. Christian mission flows from and gives concrete expression to this hope. It is, in the words of David Bosch, “action in hope.”<sup>1</sup> It is the means by which the future for which we hope is brought into a transforming relationship with the present in which we live. It is “God’s bridge to a world which has not yet come home to the place prepared for it.”<sup>2</sup>

Our commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation (jpic) is not a humanist political agenda. It is not an expression of some foolish utopian dream of a better world made by human hands. It is, rather, an essential and integral dimension of Christian mission, giving concrete witness to this ultimate hope of the kingdom of God. This is the central argument of this essay which is divided into two parts. The first part will focus on the genesis and nature of Christian hope; the second part will show how this hope shapes our understanding of mission, underpinning our commitment to peace and reconciliation, to social and ecological justice.

## First Part

### The Genesis and Nature of Christian Hope

#### *Christian Hope Eclipsed*

Christianity entered the world of history as an eschatological faith,<sup>3</sup> a faith that offered a sure and universal hope, and hence a faith and a hope to be proclaimed to all humanity. A dominant and defining characteristic of the life and mission of the early Church was this eschatological thrust. The first Christians situated and interpreted their experience of Christ within the framework of Israel's historical eschatology. In the coming of Jesus and in raising him from the dead, God's eschatological act had already been inaugurated, but it had not yet been completed. Jesus' resurrection and ascension into glory signified the beginning, the first fruits, of a fulfillment still to come - a fulfillment of which the gift of the Spirit was the pledge. Only another future intervention by God would wipe out all the contradictions of the present. Moreover, the early Christian Church believed that this final intervention [*the Parousia*] was imminent.

With the delay in the advent of the *Parousia*, and under the impact of Greek philosophy, this eschatological perspective of early Christianity was pushed aside, played down, or radically re-interpreted. The Christian message was transformed from the proclamation of God's imminent historical reign to the proclamation of the only true and universal religion of humankind. Faith in God's promises yet to be fulfilled was replaced by faith in an already consummated eternal kingdom. Christ's resurrection came to be viewed as a completed event. The early Church's expectation of "a new heaven and a new earth" was forgotten or ignored.

The eclipse of historical eschatology manifested itself in other ways as well. The early Church's distinction between the present age and the age to come was revised *into a distinction between time and eternity*. Christians

now focused their expectations on a heaven beyond this world, rather than on God's involvement in history; instead of looking forward to the future they looked up to eternity. Attention shifted from the historical Jesus to the pre-existent Logos, and the message of Christ became spiritualized. It became a message about saving one's soul from the world rather than transforming oneself and the world by love.

Furthermore, in regard to the practice of the faith, the accent shifted from giving witness to the future God was going to bring about to doing good deeds in order to earn heaven. We might summarize these developments in the following words of David Bosch: "The expectation of a 'new heaven and a new earth' was spiritualized away. Emphasis was laid instead on the spiritual journey of the individual believer and on a *post-mortem* afterlife rather than on a future resurrection from the dead. The Church was increasingly identified with the kingdom of God; it became the dispenser of the sacraments and the place where, through the sacraments, souls were won for Christ."<sup>4</sup> With this development the understanding of mission was altered. Mission became the extension of the Church as it existed rather than the proclamation of a new creation patterned on the resurrection of Christ and of which the Church is called to be the sacramental sign. Unfortunately, traces of this distortion of Christian hope and of the understanding of mission have been characteristic of Christian theology until recently, and perhaps lie behind the continuing hesitancy we note in our commitment to the jpic agenda.

### ***Christian Hope Recovered***

One of the striking characteristics of twentieth century theology has been the recovery of the eschatological, hopeful perspective of early Christianity, first in Protestant, and later in Catholic theology. No theologian has done more to rehabilitate Christian hope than the great German Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. In his best known work, *Theology of Hope*, published in 1964, he wrote, "From first to last, and not merely as an epilogue, Christianity is hope, forward looking and forward-moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present."<sup>5</sup> Moltmann took issue with a tradition that had so spiritualized the Christian hope as to render it of little or no earthly use and underlined the socio-political relevance of this hope. Carl Braaten, too, has underlined the critical importance of eschatology, stating that "it cannot be isolated from other themes of faith and dealt with in a treatise on the last things. Instead, it determines the horizon of all Christian understanding and is thematically structural for all the contents of faith and action."<sup>6</sup>

One of the great changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council

was the recovery of this hopeful, eschatological horizon within which the Christian message took on a new, powerful and integrated meaning. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world*, broadened our understanding of the Church's mission, highlighting its economic, social and political dimensions. This vision was further developed by Catholic theologians like Johannes Metz, Edward Schillebeeckx and the Liberation theologians. Unfortunately it has lost ground in more recent times and needs to be reaffirmed, for it is a vision with a long and sure pedigree as I will try to show in the following pages, grounded in the biblical concept of God and his relation to the world.

### ***The Experience of Israel***

From its foundation, Israel's experience was one of hope, a hope grounded in the belief that YHWH, the God of Israel, had entered its history and was leading it towards a definite future. The Israelites' experience of God was thus, in Moltmann's striking phrase "harnessed between memory and hope."<sup>7</sup> The Israelites recounted and interpreted past revelations of God as anticipations of a reality yet to be, as promises of a future to be disclosed. In Moltmann's pithy phrase, they spoke of God historically and of history eschatologically.<sup>8</sup> The God of the Israelites is characteristically the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the God of Moses and the prophets, above all, the God of the Exodus. The Exodus was understood, not as a mythical event, but as an historical event which pointed beyond itself to a greater future.

The naming of God in relation to that event is particularly significant. YHWH appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush and commissions him to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses asks God to identify himself by name, so he can tell the people who it is that is sending him. God replies:

*'I AM WHO I AM. ... Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you." ... This is my name forever and thus I am to be remembered throughout the generations'* (Ex. 3:14-15).

In this text, the word translated 'I AM' consists of four Hebrew letters YHWH which represents some form of the Hebrew verb 'to be'. The exact form is not known. For most biblical scholars, the meaning of YHWH is best expressed in the statement "I am the one who will be there with you.... in the way I will be there," thus linking God name and identity with future events yet to unfold. Thus, Old Testament discourse on God gives prominence to the future "as the mode of God's existence with us."<sup>9</sup> Like his Kingdom, God is coming, and it is "only as the coming one, as future, is he already present. He is present in the way in which his future in promise and hope

empowers the present.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is precisely in this way of being present that God is experienced by the Israelites as a liberating God, a God of hope.

### ***Keeping Hope Alive: the Role of the Prophets***

Throughout its history, Israel received many promises from God. Some were fulfilled, others left behind, and still others were reinterpreted and expanded through partial fulfillment. For example, the Exodus event, as remembered, recounted and celebrated, became a pledge of an even greater hope. This process of refinement and reinterpretation can be seen especially in the prophets, who draw attention especially to the ethical implications of Israel’s hope. Tapping into the rich reservoir of hope, expectation and longing associated with the covenant, they pointed out that these hopes could never be realized as long as Israel failed to conform to God’s will as expressed in the covenant. They also deplored the narrowing of Israel’s hopes and expectations to the sectional interests of the ruling classes, while the poor, the orphan, and the widow went needy.

And yet, however harsh the criticisms and condemnations of the prophets are, condemnation is not their last word. The bottom line of all the great prophets is that, even though the Israelites may have abandoned God, He will never abandon them. He will intervene once more to establish his rule of peace, justice and love. He will make a new covenant, written this time not on tablets of stone, but deep within their hearts. This hope for the definitive establishment of God’s rule of peace and love is associated with the coming of the Messiah.

Israel’s messianic hope is movingly expressed in Isaiah. For Isaiah, the Messiah will be a wise, holy and peaceful King “who will judge the poor with justice and decide in favour of the land’s afflicted” (Is.11:1-10). He will put an end to conflict and bring lasting peace. With his coming, warring factions will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks (Is. 2:4) and the lamb and the lion shall lie down together. The word that Isaiah uses for peace is “shalom,” and it has a much richer meaning than we normally give to the term ‘peace’. It signifies not merely the absence of war or violence, but the full presence of harmony and integrity, both for the individual person and for society. It embraces all the dimensions of life, personal and social, national and international. It means more than political security. It comprises justice, peace, the integrity of creation and their interdependence – all gifts of God. For Isaiah there is no peace worthy of the name without justice (Is. 9:7), and the peace which the Messiah shall establish among people will be accompanied by the rejoicing

and flowering of the desert and the dry land (Is. 35:1-2). Eventually this messianic hope came to be identified with Jesus and his Kingdom Mission.

In his best-selling book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict argues that Isaiah's vision of a healed and peaceful world, in which warring groups "will beat their swords into plowshares" (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3), is an outdated aspect of the Jewish Messianic ideal, falsified by the facts of history. Jesus, says Benedict, did not bring "world peace, universal prosperity, and a better world." Instead what he brought to the nations of the earth was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the true God."<sup>11</sup> However, the vision of the Isaiah and the mission of Jesus should not be opposed. In Jesus we see, as N.T. Wright puts it, "the biblical portrait of YHWH come to life: the loving God, rolling up his sleeves (Is. 52:10) to do in person the job that no one else could do, the creator God giving new life; the God who works *through* his created world, and supremely through his human creatures; the faithful God dwelling in the midst of his people; the stern and tender God relentlessly opposed to all that destroys or distorts the good creation, and especially human beings, but recklessly loving all those in need and distress."<sup>12</sup> This is abundantly clear when we focus on the mission of Jesus.

### ***The Kingdom Mission of Jesus***

Jesus conducted his mission against the background of Jewish restoration eschatology. He took its key symbol of the kingdom of God, and made it central to his message and ministry. The Synoptic Gospels introduce Jesus' public ministry with the concise phrase: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent. Believe the Good News" (Mk 1:14-15; Mt. 4:17; Lk 4:43). The kingdom was so obviously central to Jesus' life and ministry that Karl Rahner could observe: "Jesus preached the Kingdom not himself." In his teaching Jesus appears as the representative (cf. Lk 17:20-21), the revealer (cf. Mk 4:11-12; Mt 11:25-26), the champion (cf. Mk 3:27), the initiator (cf. Mt 11:12), the instrument (cf. Mt 12:28), the mediator (cf. Mk 2:18-19), and the bearer (cf. Mt 11:5) of the kingdom of God.

Yet, Jesus never defined exactly what he meant by the kingdom of God, a concept we find nowhere in the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is clear that he counted on his audience to be familiar with the symbol at least in its conventional meanings. As John Bright has observed:

For all his repeated mention of the Kingdom of God, Jesus never once paused to define it. Nor did any hearer ever interrupt him to ask "Master what do these words 'Kingdom of God,' which you use so often, mean?" On the contrary Jesus used the term as if assured it would be understood, and

indeed it was. The Kingdom of God lay within the vocabulary of every Jew. It was something they understood and longed for desperately.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of Jesus the kingdom of God, had become a kind of overarching metaphor for a variety of hopes and expectations, ranging from the liberation of Israel from Roman rule (nationalist-political expectation) to the destruction of the present age and the emergence of a new heaven a new earth (apocalyptic expectation). By his life and death, his preaching and symbolic actions (activities such as table-fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners, healings and exorcisms, forgiveness of sinners), he gave a new shape to this familiar symbol. As Sean Freyne points out, Jesus' life and ministry not only affirmed Israel's hope but reinterpreted it. In the first place, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God as a hope for the present, and not just for the distant future, and secondly he purifies it of "aspects such as domination, majesty, power, conquest, destruction of enemies" and puts in their place values such as peace, justice, meekness, single-mindedness.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus speaks of the Kingdom, not as a distant dream, but as a hope that is being realized as he speaks and acts. In the words of John Fuellenbach: "Jesus declares that what Isaiah had promised as God's final messianic future is now at work. Reconciliation and deliverance are not distant songs of a utopian future far removed from present reality. The promise is invading the world now in every relationship and circumstance of our lives."<sup>16</sup> Jesus' way of establishing the kingdom of God was in stark contrast to the often violent pursuit of specific political objectives by contemporary Jewish groups – groups who laid claim to the hopes of Israel as the legitimation of their activities. His life-style have clear witness to a new way, a different way. He abandoned the security of house, family, and possessions for the insecure life of an itinerant preacher. The life-style he chose was thus a protest against the prevailing value-systems in the Palestine of his day: the naked greed and opulence of Herod and his court; and the view of the temple-based aristocracy that material possessions were signs of divine blessings. Greed and acquisitiveness were totally inappropriate in light of a God who cared for the smallest and most insignificant of his creatures.

### ***Jesus' Revolution***

As manifested in Jesus' words and deeds, the kingdom of God meant good news for the poor, healing for the sick, and liberation for the enslaved and oppressed. He inaugurated his mission by citing one the Jubilee texts from the Prophet Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives,*

*sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord (Lk 4:18-19).*

Jesus' evangelical practice represented an absolute reversal of the scale of values of Palestinian theocratic society. The afflictions of the poor, then as now, were in large measure caused by repression, discrimination and exploitation by the rich and powerful, the upholders of the *status quo*. In his ministry Jesus turned deliberately to those who have been pushed aside: to the sick who were segregated on cultic grounds; to tax-collectors who were excluded on political and religious grounds; and to prostitutes and public sinners who were excluded on moral grounds.<sup>17</sup> In his compassionate outreach to outcasts, Jesus concretely embodied God's kingly rule as good news for them; God's rule signaled the end of their misery and the introduction of a new order of social relationships based on the principle of inclusion. No one is excluded from the love of God "who causes his sun to rise on bad as well as good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike" (Mt. 5:45) What amazes one again and again is the inclusiveness of Jesus' Kingdom mission. It embraces both poor and rich, the oppressed and oppressor, both the sinners and the devout.<sup>18</sup> His mission is one of dissolving alienation and breaking down walls of hostility, of crossing boundaries. It is a summons to think beyond the narrow limits of greed and fear, to cross national, cultural and social boundaries and build authentic human community in the light of God's ultimate rule of the universe.

While Jesus' Kingdom message and ministry repudiated the way of violence, it nevertheless envisaged a radical change in the existing social and political order, Jesus' words and actions represented a "consistent challenge to the attitudes, practices and structures that tended arbitrarily to restrict or exclude potential members of the Israelite community."<sup>19</sup> Some theologians have argued that Jesus had no social or political agenda, that he did not wish to make the world a better place. The well known biblical scholar, N.T. Wright, reaches a different conclusion. Jesus, he points out, clearly had a political agenda. In the Judaism of his day religion and politics were inseparable. As his contemporaries would have expected, he wanted to bring God's kingly rule to bear on the present world. In the "Our Father" he taught his disciples to pray: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

According to Wright, Jesus' words, works and prayers all had immense social and political implications. He was not proclaiming a private or personal reign of God's spirit in the souls of individuals. He was launching a revolutionary movement which would turn Israel and the world up-side-

down. He wanted to establish God's reign of justice, peace, truth and love in Israel and (through Israel) among all nations on earth. What he rejected were the ways in which his contemporaries envisaged God's rule being established. He rejected the politics of violent revolution, of easy compromise, and of narrow nationalism and chose instead the path of redemptive suffering. His way would be to turn the other cheek, to walk the second mile and to take up the cross. He would defeat evil by letting evil do its worst to him, by suffering evil in love and forgiving his enemies.<sup>20</sup> Here we come to the profound paradox at the heart of Christian hope and Christian mission. It has little or nothing to do with human optimism or any form of utopian thinking. It is ultimately a paschal hope, a hope against hope, a hope fashioned in the midst of violence and death.

### *From Kingdom Hope to Paschal Hope*

Jesus' kingdom message did not meet with universal acceptance. It met with fear, suspicion, hostility and rejection on the part of the Jewish political and religious leaders of his time. Finally, it led him to Calvary where he prayed for forgiveness for those whose fear had led them to destroy him. If the Cross can be said to represent Jesus' supreme witness to God's kingly rule, it is his resurrection from the dead which is the foundation and guarantee of its victory over the power of evil, and the ultimate symbol of Christian hope. The disciples of Jesus met him again on Easter Sunday morning and caught a glimpse of a new world where the promise of the kingdom would be realized. The world as they knew it was passing away and a new creation was about to be born. All the relevance and urgency of the early Church's mission was derived from this paschal hope, which was now not simply the hope of Jesus but hope in Jesus and in his victory over sin and death. The proclaimer of the kingdom had become the one proclaimed; the messenger had become the message.

The Christian hope, then, is hope for the kingdom of God, but this hope must not be identified with secular hopes for a better world. It is a hope fashioned from the crucible of the paschal mystery, the mystery of Jesus' passage from death to new life. It is vitally important never to separate the resurrection of Jesus from his death on the cross. To ignore or play down the passion and death of Jesus is inevitably to end up with a superficial understanding of the central event of our salvation and to misrepresent the nature of Christian hope. The true meaning of the resurrection is not grasped until we come to terms with the revelation of God's face in the death of Jesus on the Cross.

Jesus lived and died to show us the Father and inaugurate the Father's

loving rule on earth. It is relatively easy to see the face of a compassionate and loving Father in the public ministry of Jesus, in his words and deeds. It is altogether more difficult to see the Father's face in the horrific death of Jesus. But the Father was involved in the death of Jesus. In his suffering and death Jesus was supremely the revealer of the Father. It was the Father in him who was drawing him to this end, and it was the Father's loving face that was ultimately revealed in this dramatic display of logic of love in a sinful world. On the cross, Jesus represents the utter vulnerability of a God whose only power is love entering a world whose strength is hate. Thus on Calvary, as Noel Dermot O Donoghue has so well said "we are at the place of the tears of God, not of his triumph and vindicating anger. The loving Father cannot escape from his unloving and destructive children; he is imprisoned by his love as surely as they are imprisoned by their hate."<sup>21</sup>

In the cross of Christ, we are confronted by a God made weak and helpless (at least in the common sense understanding of these terms) by the very intensity and relentlessness of his/her love for us. In the words of Dorothee Sölle: "God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us."<sup>22</sup>

But how does a suffering God, a weak God, heal and redeem us? The answer to this question is perhaps more likely to be gleaned from the intuitive perceptions of a loving heart than by the rational deductions of a logical mind. Nevertheless, a mind that is in tune with a loving heart may come to some appreciation of the strange logic of the cross. Here I offer a few thoughts which may serve to illumine this logic. The vulnerable God revealed in the cross of Christ throws into bold relief the basic sin of human beings, which is essentially a loss of heart. As Moltmann puts it, "survival of the fittest is our eschatology."<sup>23</sup> The world in which we live is a competitive world, which, in the main, rewards toughness and the will to succeed. To succeed in the world we have to subjugate the more sensitive and compassionate side of our nature to the inflexible canons of progress, profit and success, we become hardened against our fellow-creatures. Our heroes and heroines are the go-getters, and the grabbers with the beautiful smiles and the armoured hearts, who overcome all obstacles in their relentless quest for success. We have created a society that rewards ruthlessness and the ability of prevail at all costs. Such a society regards the meek, the weak and all who fall behind in one way or another as failures.

In our sinful consorting with the God of success, we quickly become apathetic (unfeeling) men and women of action, capable, because of our lack heart, of bringing a great deal of unnecessary suffering into the lives

of others. Somehow, we need to be brought to realize the suffering we cause to others (and indeed the damage we do to ourselves), and made to feel compunction. It is, as Moltmann points out, when we are confronted and challenged by the revelation of the cross – the culminating point of God’s love affair with us – that we are brought to see, at one and the same time, the frightening heartlessness of our relentless pursuit of success and the awesome pathos of God’s vulnerable love for his/her fallen children. It would seem that the toughness and apathy of a sinful humanity find their only antidote in a love which does not hide its vulnerability, but rather bears its fragile flame to the bitter end.

While the cross reveals the strange logic of divine love at work in a sinful world, it is the resurrection that reveals the victory of that love. The power to transform us into compassionate men and women, capable of becoming partakers in the drama of divine pathos, comes from the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection shows the suffering of our compassionate God to be, in truth, divine power made perfect inhuman weakness. The resurrection is the basis of Christian hope because it reveals the victory of a love which decisively turns its back on success, and pursues to the last its utterly vulnerable course of identification with those whom society casts aside as failures.

### *Summary*

I have traced the genesis of Christian hope from its beginning in the hope of Israel through various stages of development and transformation to its climax in the paschal mystery of Christ. It is a hope grounded in the experience of a loving and compassionate God who chooses to become engaged in the drama of human history and who is pre-eminently a God of the future, God who comes to rule the earth. It is a hope, not for a distant and unreachable future, but for a future that is breaking into the present and that involves a radical transformation of the world as we know it. It is a hope for “a new heaven and a new earth,” that summons us to active engagement on behalf of the poor and oppressed for the creation of a more just and loving society on earth. It is a hope which is shaped not only by the life and ministry of Jesus, but especially by the paschal mystery, and by that peculiar logic of the divine confrontation with sin and evil disclosed in that mystery. It is therefore not only a hope that is compatible with suffering but which is found in its supreme form in the heart of suffering. Finally, it is a total hope because it is based ultimately on the resurrection of Christ, on his decisive victory over sin and evil and is therefore sure and unconquerable.

## Second Part

### Mission in the Light of Christian Hope

In the first part of this paper, I dealt almost exclusively with the genesis and nature of Christian hope. In this part my focus will be principally on the theme of mission, but mission interpreted from the perspective of Christian hope. Up to relatively recent times, mission, in the Catholic Church at least, tended to be ecclesiocentric. Mission meant the extension of the Church as it was known to the ends of the earth rather than the transformation of the Church and the world in the light of the Christian hope of a new earth and a new heaven. However, this was not always the case. The early Christian mission, especially that of St. Paul was, as we shall see, inspired and directed by the Christian hope.

#### *Erecting signs of God's New World*

In Paul's vision, mission and the hope of God's kingdom are intimately linked. Mission paves the way and prepares humanity for the final stage of God's reign, when not only humanity but all creation will be liberated and transformed on the model of Christ's resurrection. For Paul, mission means announcing the Lordship of Christ over all reality and inviting people to respond to it. It means the proclamation of a new state of affairs that God has initiated in Christ, a state of affairs that concerns the nations and all of creation and that climaxes in the celebration of God's final glory. But proclamation is not enough. God's final victorious reign offers no justification for ethical passivity. Mission invites and sustains an active participation in God's plan for the liberation of humanity in the here and now. In Paul's theology of mission, as Bosch points out, Christians are challenged to combat "the oppressive powers of the structures of sin and death, which in our world cry out for God's world of justice and peace ... by being agitators for God's incoming reign; they must erect, in the here and now and in the teeth of those structures, signs of God's new world."<sup>24</sup>

Viewing mission in the light of God's reign demands that the scope of the Church's mission become more comprehensive than has traditionally been the case. Service of God's reign provides missionaries with a theological framework which makes commitment to justice, peace, reconciliation and the integrity of creation essential and integral dimensions of the Church's mission, rather than preliminary or secondary elements. In the words of Carl Braaten, mission viewed from the perspective of God's reign will "mean something more than saving souls and planting churches; it will mean something more than emergency relief and charitable works. Mission

will assume the role of advocacy, tracking down causes of global injustice and violence... If faith is radical dependence on God, mission is total interdependence among people, overcoming all idolatry in the one case, and all systems of domination, oppression, and exploitation of the many by the few on the other.”<sup>25</sup> Mission in the horizon of the Kingdom combines, in the words of Braaten, “both the passion of the evangelicals for the uniqueness of the Christian message and the vision of the ecumenists for the universality of its scope.”<sup>26</sup> It brings together evangelization and humanization, Gospel and social concern, faith and political action, religious worship and secular work.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Continuing the Mission of Christ***

Our mission today is, as N. T. Wright puts it, to build on the foundation established by Jesus, not simply to repeat what he did. What God did in Jesus, the Messiah, was unique, climactic and decisive, and hence unrepeatable. Wright uses a striking image to capture the relationship between us and Jesus. “We are”, he says, “like musicians called to play and sing the unique and once-only-written musical score. We don’t have to write it again, but we have to play it.”<sup>28</sup> We are called, not so much to imitate Christ but to live by his Spirit and reflect his light to the world, so that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All mission in Christ’s name is directed towards the integral transformation of this world in which we live. As we have already seen, there was nothing escapist or private about the message and ministry of Jesus. He lived and died and rose again in order to establish God’s kingdom on earth, and our task is to continue that work. The words of Jesus to Pilate in John 18:36, often mistranslated as: “My kingdom is not of this world” have sometimes been used to support the view that God’s kingdom is not concerned with this present world. However, Jesus did not say these words. What he said was “My kingdom is not from this world”. This means that his kingdom did not start with this world. It started from God, but it is meant for this world. As disciples of Jesus, our task is to announce in word and deed that God’s Kingdom has indeed come and, in the power of the Spirit, to act boldly to shape our world in accordance with that Kingdom. However, the way we act in the world, and for the sake of the world, must be the way of Jesus – the way of the cross.

### ***Obedying the Logic of The Cross***

Centered on the following of Christ and the embodiment of Christian values, our mission constitutes a deliberately chosen and lived witness of

contradiction to the unjust *status quo*, and of opposition to those who seek to uphold it because they benefit from it. It is also equally opposed to those tough minded utopians prepared to resort to any means to topple the ‘powers that be’ and usher in the Kingdom.

As a continuation of Christ’s mission, our mission is fuelled by a love which incarnates itself in action for justice, and by a concern for justice which will settle for nothing less than a civilisation of love. Thus, it will avoid, on the one hand, an inept moralism which would reduce Christian love to mere sentimentality, and, on the other hand, a fanatical concern for the righting of wrongs that can so easily degenerate into a loveless pragmatism, blind to any standard other than sheer political success.

Our mission, directed towards the kingdom of God and shaped by the paschal mystery, will be concerned with the conversion of individuals to the mind and heart of Christ, but it will not confine itself to this activity. It will also confront, challenge and seek to change those institutionalised forms of greed and selfishness, which we often refer to today as ‘sinful structures.’ However, as paschal missionaries, we are not naïve about the inevitable ambiguity of all ethico-political commitments. We realize that the voices of liberating grace and sinful self-assertion are co-mingled in all such commitments, and that a profound spiritual discernment is required if we are distinguish between God’s liberating plans for us and our own selfish interests. The soil of such discernment is prayer. Prayer need not be a retreat from the real world and its problems. If it is genuine listening to God, it will lead to a deep and enduring commitment to the world – a commitment that truly transforms the world because it obeys the logic of the cross rather than the logic of Marx or Adam Smith.

### ***In the Light of our Ultimate Future in God***

The kingdom of God is ultimately not something we can finally establish on earth. As Karl Rahner has said, the kingdom of God for which Christians hope is the absolute future which is God himself. “God himself ... wills to be the infinite future of humanity, infinitely transcending all that human beings could ever plan or fashion for themselves.”<sup>29</sup> This orientation to God as our absolute future challenges us to adopt a critical stance towards the historically given state of any society. “Such a critical stance”, says Rahner, “can be radical, patient and courageous; it implies neither a conservative glorification of the present situation, underpinned by ideology, nor a destructive impatience which seeks violent means to force a new world into existence by sacrificing the men of today.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the affirmation of God as our absolute future, far from undermining

the value of our socio-political commitments within history and our efforts to transform the world, provides a perspective which can guarantee their enduring significance and true value. This it does in three ways: first, by offering a framework of meaning profound enough to do justice to the complexity of life and to support human efforts to transform the world; second, by functioning as a critical perspective which de-absolutises all human achievements of justice; third, by providing a positive incentive to human beings in their efforts to transform human life in history. Since God is our absolute future and the ultimate horizon of human freedom, no historical achievement, however great, is unsurpassable or beyond criticism. At the same time, precisely because we have an absolute future in God, all our efforts to transform human life within history have enduring value. This view of the relationship between the absolute future (God) for which Christians hope and human efforts to transform the world seems to me to find an echo in the following statements from Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

*Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectation of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society.*

*When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise — human dignity, sisterly and brotherly communion, and freedom — according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom 'of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace'. Here on earth the kingdom is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter its perfection (no. 39).*

Furthermore, God is bringing about this transformed world now, far beyond the frontiers of the Church. Our task is to get in tune with what God is doing. We have to find out where the kingdom is already present in an initial and germinal way. We have to discern and nourish such seeds of the Kingdom by putting our resources and energies there. In discerning and nourishing these seeds of the Kingdom, contemplative prayer and presence will have to balance active social and political involvement.

## ***Through the Power of Suffering Love***

John Fuellenbach reminds us that the words ‘success’ and ‘optimism’ are not part of our tool kit as witnesses, signs, and instruments of God’s kingdom: “Our faith tells us that it is hope against hope that keeps us going and gives us the necessary courage and even the audacity to believe that the kingdom will win.”<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Moltmann expresses this profound conviction of our faith in these words: “Where people suffer because they love, God suffers in them and they suffer in God... Where God suffers the death of Jesus and thereby demonstrates the power of his love, these people also find the power to remain in love despite pain and death, becoming neither bitter nor superficial.”<sup>32</sup> The way of suffering love, then, is profoundly hope-filled. For its hope is grounded in the experience of God’s power made perfect in the utter vulnerability of compassionate loving, releasing men and women from apathy and despair to live new purposeful lives – lives that are compassionate, joyful and free.

## ***Conclusion***

In spite of all that has been and is being done by the Church, and especially religious and missionaries congregations and institutes, to promote social and ecological justice in our world today, the tide of human suffering continues to rise, inducing in us a sense of helplessness. Regional conflicts reap a cruel harvest of death and destruction in many countries. Hundreds of thousands are killed in acts of wanton violence. Millions are rendered homeless or displaced. The gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. Basic human rights are suppressed at the whim of dictators. Global warming and the exploitation of nature are endangering human existence on this earth and depriving future generations of their rightful inheritance. Dark and demonic forces seem bent on spoiling the achievements of many years of local effort and missionary endeavour.

Furthermore, a particularly dangerous form of Christianity is sweeping through the developing world today. It preaches that God has decreed the sufferings of the poor, that this world is not our concern, that Christian morality should be restricted to personal and private matters, and that politics is not the business of the Church. In practice this form of Christianity supports the present unjust status quo and is being financed and promoted by foreign interests and local elites who benefit from the present system.

In such a context we might wonder if anything we can do will make a difference. Our deepest Christian resources of faith, hope and love provide the answer. The God of Jesus Christ is an ever faithful God, who is to be found even at the heart of human destruction and failure. Human beings are

never abandoned by God. In Christ, God has taken unto himself the sufferings of the world and embrace both victims and victimisers. The God who is always with us, continuing to transform death into life and chaos into new creation, calls us to become his co-workers in the re-creation of the world.

As members of religious and missionary institutes who strive to witness to the total Gospel of Christ who liberates and unifies, we must extend and deepen our commitment to social and ecological justice. We must be artisans of hope for the suffering and marginalised peoples of our world: a practical and effective hope that combines faith and justice, that challenges the unjust *status quo* and identifies with the poor and oppressed in society; a hope that finds expression in concerted programmes of action for the creation of an alternative future and struggles for the structural changes required if such an alternative future is to emerge.

<sup>1</sup> *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, N.Y., 1991, p. 498

<sup>2</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *The Flaming Centre*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1977, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Carl Braaten, *The Flaming Centre*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Transforming Mission*, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> *Theology of Hope*, SCM Press, London, 1967, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *The Flaming Centre*, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope*, SCM Press, London, 1975, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> *The Experiment Hope*, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Jesus of Nazareth*, Doubleday, New York, 2007, p.44

<sup>12</sup> *The Challenge of Jesus*, SPCK, London, 2000, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> J.P. Meier points out that "the kingdom of God" is not a concept, but a symbol. It "does not have a definition but tells a story... a story that stretches from the first page of the bible to the last." Cf. *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. 2, Doubleday, New York, 1994, p. 241.

<sup>14</sup> *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1953, 17-18.

<sup>15</sup> Sean Freyne, "Jesus Christ: Witness and Embodiment of the Hopes of Israel" in *Christian Resources of Hope*, ed., Maureen Junker-Kenny, Columba Press, Dublin, 1995, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *The Kingdom of God: The Central Message of Jesus*, Orbis, New York, 1995, pp. 81-82.

- <sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Orbis, New York, 1989, pp. 21-25.
- <sup>18</sup> D. Senior & C. Sthmueller, *The Biblical Foundations of Mission*, Orbis, New York, p. 148-149.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, SPCK, London, 1996, pp. 564-565; cf. also, *The Challenge of Jesus*, SPCK, London, 2000, p. 61.
- <sup>21</sup> *Heaven in Ordinarie*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996, p.146.
- <sup>22</sup> *Christ the Representative*, SCM Press, London, 1970, p.150.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Experiment Hope*, p. 71.
- <sup>24</sup> *Transforming Mission*, p. 176.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Flaming Centre*, p. 89
- <sup>26</sup> *The Flaming Centre*, p. 87.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Flaming Centre*, p. 91.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Challenge of Jesus*, p. 140.
- <sup>29</sup> *Theological Investigations*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, vol. 12, 1975, p. 239.
- <sup>30</sup> *Theological Investigations*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, vol. 16, 1979, p. 242.
- <sup>31</sup> "Be Compassionate!" in *Religious Life Review*, November/December 2008, p. 360. 368.
- <sup>32</sup> *The Experiment Hope*, p. 80.

“NETWORK OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS  
AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSON”

OPENING MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS 2009

H.E. Mons. Antonio Maria Vegliò

*President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and  
Itinerant People*

*Original in Italian*

**F**irst of all, I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity of speaking to you at the opening of this Congress. I would also like to thank those who are directly committed in some way to bring relief to those caught up in people trafficking, which is a new form of slavery.

Many of you already know that the *Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People* shares your concern, knows your needs and is doing everything possible to support the work of the Church in combating this serious humanitarian problem. First of all, allow me to recall the word of Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the 93rd World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2007. He says:

*“Women who end up as victims of trafficking of human beings and of prostitution are not few in number. In family reunification, social workers, especially religious women, can render an appreciated service of mediation that merits our gratitude more and more.”<sup>1</sup>*

We certainly have to be clear on what “not few in number” means, in the words of the Pope concerning the trafficking of women and children, a current phenomenon that is widespread in all the continents. Recent statistics show in fact that there are more than 4 million victims of whom more than half are actively engaged, without their consent, in the sex industry.

Even in Italy, there are said to be more than 10,000 victims of human trafficking, the majority of whom come from Africa. There can be no doubt that trafficking in women is a criminal act that violates fundamental human rights and destroys human lives both spiritually and materially.

I am glad that in the coming days you will deal with this topic that you

have chosen and identify ways of continuing the formation of women religious in this important ministry. Allow me to add my own opinion to the words of the Holy Father, by saying that the Church has not only an important role to play in this field, but a prophetic one.

For too long, human trafficking has been hidden under the structures of power and control that cover up the shame and hypocrisy of some elements of society. Let me explain: human trafficking, for the most part, uses the transportation of women and children for sexual, financial, selfish and dishonest purposes through exploitation, force and violence. It is never truly a matter of “choice” and almost invariably this type of life ends with psychological trauma. The majority of countries touched by trafficking do not even acknowledge that it supports local sex industries, and vice versa. This is reinforced by the “*widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality*”.<sup>2</sup>

For many, such things are not easy to recognise and to speak of and even less to face because they reveal the dark side of the human condition. However, we need to speak of them and act with confidence and certainty in the awareness that, as Christians, we cannot remain silent in the face of such a horrifying phenomenon.

In 2007, the Pontifical Council published “Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road”, seeking to make a synthesis of the different pastoral needs of those involved directly or indirectly in different aspects of life on the streets and with those involved. There are women there involved in prostitution, many of whom are victims of human trafficking. In order to respond to their needs, the “Guidelines” affirm the following:

*“Specific training courses are needed for pastoral agents to develop skills and strategies aimed at combating prostitution and trafficking in human beings. Such programmes are important initiatives aimed at committing priests, religious and lay people to prevention of the problem and to the social reintegration of the victims. Collaboration and communication between their Churches of origin and destination are essential.”<sup>3</sup>*

In a very concrete way, this is what you are about to begin today and I am grateful to you for doing so.

In your invitation, you kindly asked me to “present” briefly to the participants some elements that would be useful in relation to the topic you have chosen for the Congress. Allow me to do this briefly by suggesting six avenues for reflection which I hope will be helpful in the discernment of some formative aspects that are essential for you.

**Knowledge.** For an effective pastoral response, it is important to know the factors that encourage or attract people particularly to prostitution, the strategies utilised by the recruiters, traffickers, intermediaries and exploiters. This requires an understanding of the kinds and techniques of movement from the countries of origin to those of destination. This requires not only the knowledge of facts and circumstances but also of culture and language.

**Commitment.** This particular pastoral work requires time, energy and money. It is not a minor issue. You need to be fully aware of what your Sisters are undertaking. Such a commitment will absorb their time and energy and will require your human and physical resources. It will also require money. This is not an ordinary task; there cannot be a tentative approach because you will be dealing with women who have been deeply wounded and distressed. Those who are already involved in this area know that the lodging, re-education and reintegration processes do not take shape easily or quickly. You or your Sisters will have to face not only the women involved but also powerful and perhaps violent networks. You need to be prepared and prudent but also courageous in offering your help.

**Personal and spiritual development.** Those who are involved in this mission will need ongoing personal and spiritual care. I do not mean by this just education, but also emotional and spiritual growth. You will listen to difficult stories and share reflection on broken lives. You will need to learn to listen even more, to share your compassion and faith, because you will journey together with those who have been trafficked in the process of their reintegration. Pope Benedict affirmed it in his encyclical "*Deus caritas est*", when he said: "*If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God.*"<sup>4</sup> This involvement in networks will challenge you in many ways to become ever more rooted in the Word of God and the sacraments, so as to strengthen your human and Christian virtues. You certainly cannot nurture others if you yourselves are not continually nourished and sustained.

**Collaboration and sharing of information.** This is absolutely essential. Many of your Sisters are already doing excellent work in this field. You need to know this and to share more widely at a national and global level. The "Guidelines" referred to remind us of this in the following words:

*"Renewed solidarity among Christian communities and religious congregations, ecclesial movements, new communities, and Catholic institutions and associations is needed in order to raise the visibility of the pastoral care of women exploited for prostitution. Such care is at the heart of unequivocal proclamation of the Good News of full liberation*

*in Jesus Christ, namely of Christian salvation.”<sup>5</sup>*

This is not always easy and will require time and energy as well as commitment. The more you work together, exchanging information, good practice and so on, the more you will be able to achieve. And not only at this gathering here in Rome but as you return to your own contexts there will be other levels of collaboration with the local Church throughout the world. Well-established collaboration and sharing of information between countries of origin and destination will be a valuable tool for combating the traffickers. Bishops and Episcopal Conferences will therefore need to be “mobilised”. Whenever possible, it would be desirable also to have ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration. Lastly, as has clearly already been happening, it is essential to relate effectively with local authorities, national governments and NGO’s in this area.

**Formation.** Above all, it is essential to carry on exploring strategies for tackling the underlying causes and the related factors that encourage trafficking in women. Some of these are not easy to identify, such as social attitudes towards women, sexual discrimination in education, high levels of poverty and unemployment in the context or the country of origin. Another area where work is required concerns the preparation of appropriate programmes for schools, aimed at presenting the reality of trafficking and the defence and promotion of human dignity of persons exploited through prostitution.<sup>6</sup> Above all, it requires reflection on the re-education of the “demand side”, adopting vigorous and creative approaches so as to be able to change hearts and minds.<sup>7</sup> Also there need to be opportunities to work with men religious in this regard. Collaboration in schools, universities and local governments seem to me essential.

**Publicity and advocacy.** Linked to what has been said thus far, there is a need for programmes and campaigns that offer a greater understanding of this phenomenon. This requires working with the mass media in order to ensure accurate information about this serious problem. The more it remains hidden, the longer it will last. There are already excellent projects, literature and informative material on the commitments already made and on the reality that touches the lives of those who are the objects of trafficking. With publicity and collaboration, there is also the possibility of advocacy. Today, more than ever, we need persons who are practical and well prepared in order to defend this cause of liberation and redemption.

I have simply tried to “suggest” some topics and questions that could help you in discernment with a view to common programmes of formation for those who, in the Lord, want to face this specific and urgent pastoral challenge. Above all, I would like to repeat that women religious can be

extraordinarily gifted by their prophetic charism in shaping a way not only to care for the persons involved but also to change the situation. I would therefore like to quote the Guidelines again: say:

*"In taking care of the needs of women over the centuries, religious congregations – especially female ones – have always paid attention to the signs of the times, rediscovering their value and the relevance of their charisms in new social contexts. Today, women religious – in faithful meditation on the Word of God and the Church's social teaching – are seeking new ways of bearing witness to the dignity of women."*<sup>8</sup>

I thank you once again for this opportunity of speaking to you. Be sure of the support and admiration of the Pontifical Council for your work and do keep us informed about your progress and also your difficulties. We too need to know and share the way you are working so that in our turn we can contribute to this great undertaking

God bless your work and grant you a rich harvest of good things.

<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the 93<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 102, December 2006, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to women*, 29 June, 1995, § 5, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_29061995\\_women\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women_it.html)

<sup>3</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road*, § 101, *People on the Move*, suppl. 104, August 2007, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> BENEDETTO XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 2005 § 18, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html)

<sup>5</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, *op.cit.* § 99, p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. *ibid.* § 97, p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. *ibid.* § 94-96, p. 172-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* § 100, pp. 173-4.

*LISTENING TO THE SILENT CRY...*  
*REFLECTIONS BASED ON A STORY OF VIOLENCE*  
*IN THE BIBLE*

Stella Morra

*Stella Morra is a theologian and a teacher of theology, the author of many articles and publications. She was a member of WUCWO/UMOFC (World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations) from 2001-2006.*

(Stella Morra gave the following conference to participants of the Congress of Religious against Trafficking, Rome, 15-18 June 2009)

*Original in Italian*

**I**would like to offer you some reflections, based on a story of violence in the Bible. These reflections can help us, on the one hand, to bring together our lived experiences and the persons that we meet in the light of our faith, and on the other hand, can encourage us, through our faith, to listen with a heart that is more and more open to the silent cry of many abused and enslaved women and children.

Let us read this story from the book of Daniel, chapter 13 (we will omit some parts...).

- 1 In Babylon there lived a man named Joakim.
- 2 He was married to a woman called Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, a woman of great beauty; and she was God-fearing, for
- 3 her parents were worthy people and had instructed their daughter in the Law of Moses.
- 4 Joakim was a very rich man and had a garden by his house; he used to be visited by a considerable number of the Jews, since he was held in greater respect than any other man.
- 5 Two elderly men had been selected from the people, that year, to act as judges. Of such the Lord had said, 'Wickedness has come to Babylon through the elders and judges posing as guides to the people.'
- 6 These men were often at Joakim's house, and all who were engaged in litigation used to come to them.

- 7 At midday, when the people had gone away, Susanna would take a walk in her husband's garden.
- 8 The two elders, who used to watch her every day as she came in to take her walk, gradually began to desire her.
- 9 They threw reason aside, making no effort to turn their eyes to Heaven, and forgetting the demands of virtue.
- 10 Both were inflamed by passion for her, but they hid their desire from each other, [...]
- 15 So they waited for a favourable moment; and one day Susanna came as usual, accompanied only by two young maidservants. The day was hot and she wanted to bathe in the garden.
- 16 There was no one about except the two elders, spying on her from their hiding place. [...]
- 19 Hardly were the maids gone than the two elders sprang up and rushed upon her.
- 20 'Look,' they said, 'the garden door is shut, no one can see us. We want to have you, so give in and let us!
- 21 Refuse, and we shall both give evidence that a young man was with you and that this was why you sent your maids away.'
- 22 Susanna sighed. 'I am trapped,' she said, 'whatever I do. If I agree, it means death for me; if I resist, I cannot get away from you.
- 23 But I prefer to fall innocent into your power than to sin in the eyes of the Lord.'
- 24 She then cried out as loud as she could. The two elders began shouting too, putting the blame on her,
- 25 and one of them ran to open the garden door. [...]
- 28 Next day a meeting was held at the house of her husband Joakim. The two elders arrived, full of their wicked plea against Susanna, to have her put to death. [...]
- 34 The two elders stood up, with all the people round them, and laid their hands on her head.
- 35 Tearfully she turned her eyes to Heaven, her heart confident in God.
- 36 The elders then spoke, 'While we were walking by ourselves in the garden, this woman arrived with two maids. She shut the garden door and then dismissed the servants.
- 37 A young man, who had been hiding, went over to her and they lay together.
- 38 From the end of the garden where we were, we saw this crime taking

place and hurried towards them.

- 39 Though we saw them together, we were unable to catch the man: he was too strong for us; he opened the door and took to his heels.
- 40 We did, however, catch this woman and ask her who the young man was.
- 41 She refused to tell us. That is our evidence.’ Since they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly accepted their word: Susanna was condemned to death.
- 42 She cried out as loud as she could, ‘Eternal God, you know all secrets and everything before it happens;
- 43 you know that they have given false evidence against me. And now I must die, innocent as I am of everything their malice has invented against me!’
- 44 The Lord heard her cry
- 45 and, as she was being led away to die, he roused the holy spirit residing in a young boy called Daniel
- 46 who began to shout, ‘I am innocent of this woman’s death!’ [...]
- 60 Then the whole assembly shouted, blessing God, the Saviour of those who trust in him.

### ***Why this text?***

Why did I choose this text? I could have made a more solid theological presentation on the basis of other “positive” texts, texts that reaffirm the equal dignity of man and woman, texts where we find a positive expression of the will of God that no one should be abused, texts that affirm the freedom and dignity of each person based on the fact that everyone is created by God in God’s own image. I could also have chosen to deal with the topic fully and exhaustively from a more theoretical perspective, examining the many aspects contained in it.

I have chosen instead a text that had two characteristics: first and foremost, a text that is an anecdote, a narrative, a personal event, with a specific name, a story: in fact, the first thing of which our faith reminds us is to remember always that there is no “general theory” of suffering, that every suffering or violence is always a dramatic personal story, that behind every “problem” there are always persons, stories, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends, days and lives. Violence, especially against the weak, against women and children, is always something that leaves its mark on the body of the one who experiences it and on their loved ones, on the perpetrators and the indifferent who by their silence do nothing to break the cycle.

The second characteristic is that it is a violent and negative text. Of

course, in the end, God brings about justice, but in the meantime, Susanna is desperate and feels she has no way of escape. We have to realise that the Scriptures are not a beautiful book of good feelings, but a text that tells us about ourselves and does not close its eyes to harsh realities. Too often, it happens that in our search for an innocent outlook, we end up having an ignorant one that denies and refuses to see.

However, there is yet another question we would need to ask ourselves before we look together at some aspects of this story: Why is this text in the Scriptures? And as well as this text (which in any case has a happy ending!), why are there other texts in Scripture that appear to justify violence, texts where women are treated without respect and without dignity? Why do the Scriptures contain such harsh texts which, we know, scandalize men and women of our time, mainly because they are sensitive to the dignity of everyone and find it difficult to tolerate a faith that justifies such violence?

These texts are there because in the Scriptures there is room for the whole of our life and, as has already been said, Scripture does not close its eyes, and God knows of what we are made. One day, reading the Bible with a group of women living in a shelter for abused women and going through a text which I really did not know how to justify, one of them said, “ So there is a place in this Bible even for me and my story, it is not only for women who are happy”. This then is the reason why such texts are present in the Scriptures.

### ***Everything is working together for evil?***

Let us then begin to bring together some concerns, some emphases among the many to be found in the text.

“Two elderly men had been selected from the people, that year, to act as judges. Of such the Lord had said, “Wickedness has come to Babylon through the elders and judges posing as guides to the people.” The starting point seems to be that everything works together for evil and violence: the elders and the judges, called to be guides of the people, are themselves corrupt and are the source of violence. Women and children cannot endure it and cannot break the spiral of violence because of the existing imbalance of power. At times, women cannot take it any more simply because the violence that has been generated is too strong and the control of events is completely in the hands of men: at Shechem, in the ‘terrible case’ of Dinah, deceit and war occupy the scene (Gen. 34); at Ebenezer, where another woman dies in childbirth (1 Sam. 4: 20), Israel is at war with the Philistines and the Ark falls into the hands of the enemy. There is no space for the mediation of women and for their wisdom in situations of open war: violence is not only borne by women and children, it extends to the entire system that surrounds these

events. Today, we would say that it is the logic of economic interests of powerful and unprincipled organizations far greater than ourselves. In other words, it is a power that can discourage us and make us what Pope John XXIII called “prophets of doom”, people who see only evil around them.

At times, even some areas of the Church appear timid and fearful in combating violence and injustice, capable only of speaking apparent words of wisdom but incapable of dirtying their hands.

This is a feeling that many abused women and children have every day: that everything conspires to keep them imprisoned, that it is not possible to find a way out, that well-meaning people in good social positions, who are apparently (how central this word is!) guides and points of reference are, at best, uninterested in their fate and, at worst, accomplices.

Psychologists tell us that this feeling is often triggered in those who are abused. It is almost a sense of guilt, a conviction that they should not resist, that a different life is not and will never be possible. This is another burden of the tragedy: the inner life has been extinguished; there is an inability even to wish that something might change.

### ***Are men unreasonable?***

Let us continue: “The two elders, who used to watch her every day as she came in to take her walk, gradually began to desire her. They threw reason aside, making no effort to turn their eyes to Heaven, and forgetting the demands of virtue.” Is that really true? Men throw reason aside, avert their eyes and want to forget just judgements? It is true that there is still a patriarchal structure in societies which tends to consider women as objects that can be bought and sold, and does not fully recognize their dignity as persons; it is true that at the level of culture and education, we still have a long way to go in order to learn to live as true human beings, capable of seeing the other as an interlocutor worthy of respect and attention. It is true that this mentality not only harms women but ends up convincing men that they are unable to control themselves, that they are spoiled adult children who have not grown up and who are at the mercy of their passions. Thus an image of diminished humanity emerges in men, and women enter into an irrational complicity by turning their eyes away from Heaven. All of us, men and women, can benefit from a society that acknowledges equal dignity and diversity in the richness of humanity; all of us can benefit from raising our eyes towards heaven and remembering just judgements.

### ***The power of blackmail***

Let us continue: “I am trapped whatever I do. If I agree, it means death

for me; if I resist, I cannot get away from you”, says Susanna. It is the power of blackmail, the power that takes away the possibility of choice, either physically or psychologically, taking advantage of situations of ignorance and poverty. What can be seen immediately and what makes it difficult for Susanna is that she is alone: her maids have gone; weakness arises also from this, from the lack of relationships and above all the lack of a dialogue among women that could contain and exorcise violence. In cases where violence can be contained and at times even neutralised, the presence of the “other” is essential. Often, it is an “insignificant woman”: the little girl of the wife of Naaman (2 Kings 5: 2), the “girls” of Esther (Est 2: 9; 4, 4: 4, 16).

The starting point for beginning to break the spiral of violence is above all this: the presence of the “other” or someone by one’s side, a dialogue, an exchange of words and ideas. It is enough to think of the disciples of Emmaus to recall how much a shared conversation can create space where the spiral of distrust can be broken. Besides, a shared conversation among women can create solidarity and strength, a true network that limits violence. You, women and sisters who live in the most forgotten places of the world and in the great cities, you who are the true sentinels on the ground, you who commit yourselves to the cause of improving the lives and the days of women and men, what strength you draw from sharing words and ideas!

We need therefore to fight the lack of awareness or “consciousness” within us - if women do not “know” or do not “care” for each other, they cannot intervene. Rachel was not aware of the death sentence pronounced by Jacob against the unknown “culprit”, when Laban accused him of stealing the “gods” which she had taken away without the knowledge of her father and her husband (Gen. 31: 32 - 34). Rachel and Leah, who were concerned only with giving birth to sons for Jacob, were not feminine figures of reference for little Dinah, who, barely into her adolescence, “went out” to look for “other girls of the place” and fell a victim to violence which led to other acts of violence (Gen. 34:1). We have to open our eyes, make efforts to understand, exchange ideas, be there and not leave alone those who risk being abused.

### ***God is on the side of the poor***

Let us consider the prayer of Susanna who is unjustly tried. “Eternal God, you know all secrets and everything before it happens; you know that they have given false evidence against me. And now I must die, innocent as I am of everything their malice has invented against me! The Lord heard her cry”. We know and we believe that God knows the truth, that he is and will be a just judge. Like Susanna, we can turn to God even in the name of those who have lost their voice and their confidence, those who have been abused and enslaved to such an extent that they no longer have the strength to protest

their innocence. Above all, we can become a prayer for those who have as their prayer only the pain of their life, their woundedness and their blood.

God knows and understands: we must never forget that we have to re-learn to recite the psalms of cursing and to pray our anger because God is on the side of the poor, God is not neutral and cold: God is moved with anger when the poor and the weak are abused.

But the text tells us that there is more to it: “The Lord heard her cry”. The Lord has a strange way of listening to and answering prayers: when the just in the Old Testament ask for death (like Elijah in 1 Kgs 19: 4 or Sarah in Tob. 3: 11ff.) the Lord listens and answers their prayer but does not make them die; instead he “invents” for them a life that is undreamt of, a new story that was impossible even to think of. The Lord listens to the voice of Susanna and, through Daniel, a new justice is done, the power of blackmail is broken and the chains of slavery to evil are shattered. And what of us? Are we in a position to listen to the silent cry of women and children, the cry that rises from their lives? Are we in a position to understand the desire for life coming from self-destructive behaviours, of going further than their request just as God does?

### ***The turning point: speaking out***

This is the final step. The turning point begins here, when Daniel enters, the scene as the text says: “Daniel who began to shout, ‘I am innocent of this woman’s death!’ ”. Daniel, a young boy, (in Scripture, this means someone who has little wisdom and is not a point of reference for others, women and children in fact do not count!) is docile to the Spirit of the Lord who calls him, he knows and wants to see the truth, he does not deny nor is he fearful or cowed by an established authority which is violent and unjust and which appears to dominate. He speaks out. And this is the action that marks a change, which breaks the logic of violence. He speaks out for those who cannot speak, he does not accuse, but he separates, divides and detaches himself from the responsibility of what is “normal” (or generally accepted) to the extent of creating silence.

He speaks out and in so doing he unmasks complicity, ignorance and tacit consent.

Of course, words are followed by action: he takes on the responsibility of judging them, uses his intelligence and even cunning in order to show the deceit of the elders. This is in verses 47 to 59, the part which we did not read. You can discuss and share on this during this Congress: what intelligence do we need to use for networking, what actions and what coordination need to be put in place. This is what concerns us, women and men: it is the work of

our heart, our intelligence and will, our projects, our evaluations. We even have to use cunning in order to oppose evil and defend life and dignity.

However, it all begins with speaking out, with the refusal to remain silent and become tacit accomplices of those who think that they are not concerned, that the problems are too big and cannot be faced and that it is enough to be well-meaning and prudent (like Susanna?) in order to avoid certain situations.

May our Master, Jesus, the Christ who is the Word of the Father for the world and who is a word of blessing and judgement, grant us the strength never to be silent.

### ***So that we can all bless God***

I would like to end with the verse that concludes the narrative: "Then the whole assembly shouted, blessing God, the Saviour of those who trust in him". How far do we still need to journey so that these words become a reality and everyone may praise God and know that He saves those who hope in Him through His powerful hand and the commitment of Christians? The way ahead is long and perhaps difficult, but we know that together, speaking out and giving back the possibility of speech to those who have been deprived of it, listening to their silent cry and taking it seriously, spending our lives together with the poorest and the broken, we can journey as sisters and brothers.

I would like to conclude with a short text, written by an Evangelical woman, which I feel expresses well the realism needed and the hope in the Lord that abides in us and which we hope will continue to dwell in us:

*"I have always read the psalms at home. I say to myself: they are poems, they are prayers, words that rooted in faraway experiences; if you want to understand the text, study it, put it in its context! And yet.... Today, I have been asked to speak about violence, about men's violence to women; I could have looked for one of the many psalms that cry to God of suffering and failure; instead, my memory continues to insist on a different verse: «My God, my King... I shall bless your name for ever and ever». I look for it in the Bible and it is the beginning of the psalm of praise 145.*

*Every day. .Every day I will bless the Lord, even when I know of wives who are beaten, daughters who are sold, girls who are genitally mutilated, adolescent prostitutes, elderly people who are raped, persons dying of bombs or of hunger, living skeletons...*

*What kind of praise, Lord?*

*The human condition is so strongly marked by injustice, robbery, abuse*

*of power that it seems inevitable that where possible we enclose ourselves in our own nests, family or community, or on the other hand, instead of standing up for judgement, we give vent to our frustrations, foment hatred, seek revenge, find scapegoats. Unfortunately, history repeats itself.*

*What kind of praise, Lord? We seem to know only ritual words: words that are true, but traditional. Praise to you, Lord, says the psalmist. Perhaps the ancient verse is on our lips even when it is difficult to praise because we know that day after day, the Spirit, in freedom, opens new horizons to those who invoke Him. Every difficult day, every disheartening day and every day of resistance we will praise your name, Lord, and we will continue the journey with our heads held high.” (Franca Long)*

## ELIJAH THE PROPHET – THE PROPHETIC SPIRIT

Father Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, OCD

*Henri Grialou (1894-1967) entered the Order of Carmelites in 1922. He took the name of Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus. A man of prayer and action, taken over by the prophetic and Marian grace of Carmel, he was to serve the Church and his order passionately, holding major responsibilities. The constant desire of this tireless apostle would be to open up to everyone, men and women of all backgrounds, cultures and countries, the ways of intimacy with the living God and to give to the Church contemplative apostles. In 1949 he published *Je veux voir Dieu (I Want to See God)*, a compendium of spiritual theology inspired by Carmel, at present translated into six languages. Father Marie-Eugène is also the founder of the secular institute *Notre Dame de Vie (1932)*.*

*Original in French*

(Extracts from the writings of Father Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, OCD).

### Elijah the Prophet

**H**e was called Elijah the Tishbite and lived among the sons of Galaad. He rises up suddenly like fire and presents himself before King Ahab, the faithless king of Israel, and says to him:

*“By the life of Yahweh, God of Israel whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain these coming years unless I give the word”.<sup>1</sup>*

And the prophet flees into solitude, first of all by the torrent of Cherith, east of the Jordan, where he drinks the water and is fed by ravens, and then at Zarephath with the widow whose flour and oil are miraculously multiplied until the end of the famine.

After three years, he comes before Ahab again. He will bring the drought to an end, after having defended the honour of his God. Let the king convoke on Mount Carmel the people and the priests of Baal. (...) The king obeys the prophet’s command. Two altars are erected, two victims immolated, one to Baal, the author to Elijah’s God. The one consumed by fire will be that of the true God.

The priests of Baal pray and cry in vain. Elijah prays and fire descends

from heaven, consumes the burnt offering, the altar and the water flowing around. Elijah's God is proclaimed the true God.

While the prophet is in prayer, a little cloud rises from the sea, grows and brings fruitfulness to the land of Israel.

The prophet now flees before the threats of Jezebel and goes on into the desert. An angel brings him bread and strengthened by this he reaches Horeb, where God reveals himself to him in the light murmuring sound and gives him the mission to anoint Hazael as king of Aram and Jehu king of Israel, and to choose Elisha to succeed him as prophet.

He comes before Ahab a third time to reproach him for the murder of Naboth.(...) He still exercises his prophetic ministry during the reign of Ahab's successor, Ahaziah, whose death Elijah announces because of the king's impiety. The king sends fifty soldiers to take hold of Elijah. Elijah brings down fire from heaven on the first two groups; the third obtains mercy by pleading with him. This is the last action of the great prophet. Soon a chariot of fire separates him from his disciple who insists on following him, and takes Elijah up to heaven.

This is the prophetic ministry of Elijah, the defender of God's rights.

To the Hebrew people who were still ignorant and weakened by the servitude of Egypt, God had sent Moses, with his power full of gentleness, to the ungodly Ahab and his people God sends the strength of Elijah.

The hiding place of Elijah was not known, but he suddenly appeared fiery and terrible, clothed in animal skins with a leather belt, having at his disposal, it appeared, all the elements of nature and especially the destructive strength of fire. He reproached the people and the king with their sins and avenged the honour of God.

*"Then the prophet Elijah arose like a fire, his word flaring like a torch".<sup>2</sup>*

This outward aspect of the mission of Elijah has lost its significance for us; we prefer to go to the prophet's soul.(...). His spirit is one of prayer and zeal. Let us look first at the qualities of this zeal in order to go back to the spring which nourishes it.

Twice on Horeb the Lord asks of the prophet;

*"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

And he replies:

*"I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh, God Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars*

*and have put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me”.*

This cry of pain allows us to guess at the flame which consumed the prophet’s soul.

His zeal will be exercised in actions, but always under the movement and the control of the Spirit of the Lord. A prophet in Israel is essentially an instrument of God (...).

As a prophet, Elijah depends only on God, but his dependence is absolute.

He only acts on God’s orders. He is eaten up with zeal but he allows himself to be consumed, waiting for God to speak and to establish an aim for his activity. One could say that his normal position is one of waiting. (...)

He conserves all his strength for the work directly commanded by God. To use it for a personal work, however good in itself, would be for him to take away something from his mission. (...)

He is only an instrument of God, but this is not without its merits. This constant submission requires complete abnegation, the sacrifice of all temporal and spiritual goods. So that God can command and be fully obeyed, the instrument must lose himself.

The missions the prophet receives are not without danger. The prophet risks his life by presenting himself before Ahab, first of all to announce the drought and then after three years of famine to demand that he convokes the people and the false prophets on Mount Carmel.

By giving the order, in establishing the goal, the Lord does not suppress the difficulties of carrying it out, and he wisely allows the darkness of mystery to enfold his designs. The prophet, more than anyone, lives by faith and this faith in darkness fills his soul with felt terrors and intellectual anguish that are more painful than anything. The will of God is his light and often his only support.

It is in union with God that this apostolate finds its strength and its origin.

Uniting oneself to God is the main concern of the divine instrument. (...)

On Mount Carmel, the prayer of the prophet is immediate. The land of Israel has been dried up for three years. The soul of the prophet too thirsts for the life-giving dew of the Just One who is to come. *“Sivit anima mea ad Deum fortem vivum”*; the soul is like land without water before her God.

She lives through faith in promises; she will not see the fulfilment, but could she not penetrate the mystery?

Now the servant points out a little cloud rising up from the sea, like a man's hand; this is the fruitfulness that is ensured for the land of Israel.

The penetrating gaze of the prophet does not stop at visible things. In the old law, everything is only a shadow and a sign of the realities to come. It goes beyond the symbol and becomes lost in the reality which it represents. A cloud will arise which will bear the Just One who is expected. (...)

(From Saint Elijah, Patriarch of Carmel, in the journal *Carmel* (15.07.1927) © L'Olivier F84210 Venasque).

### ***The Prophetic Spirit***

The prophet is a man chosen by God to defend the divine rights over Israel against the authoritarianism and impiety of the kings and against the infidelity of the people.

This choice confers on the prophet a permanent mission and an extraordinary power. (...)

Isaias tells how he was called to the mission of prophesying, and how a seraph purified his lips with a burning coal. (...) Scripture shows us Elias the Thesbite, rising up suddenly "like a flame" and beginning his mission as a prophet.<sup>3</sup>

This vocation is a veritable seizure by God, who separates the prophet from his surroundings, from his family, and leads him into the desert. The prophet, having become in the full sense of the word "a man of God", lives thereafter on the margin of society, isolated by his grace and his appurtenance to God. He has no fixed abode; he goes where the Spirit moves him, remains where it sets him, often wandering through Palestine, for the most part living in solitude.

And what does he do? He waits on orders from God, is attentive to His voice; and for that, stays constantly in His holy presence: *Vivit Dominus in conspectu sto!* He is living, the Lord in whose presence I stand! exclaims Elias, the greatest of the prophets of action.

This response that springs from faith and complete surrender to God produces an attitude eminently contemplative. In solitude, marvellous exchanges are established between God and the soul of the prophet. (...) His spiritual gaze, his faith, are purified. (...) On Mount Horeb, (...) God presented him with exterior supernatural manifestations. It is God alone that he longs for, and he shows himself satisfied only when he has found Him in

the whisper of the gentle breeze. (...)

The prophet is a great seer of eternal things, and a familiar friend of God.

But it is not solely to find in him a faithful friend that God has made the prophet; it is to have in hand a docile instrument of His will. An order from God and the prophet sets out at once to execute his perilous mission - to take a message of chastisement to the king, to assemble the people on Mount Carmel, to immolate the priests of Baal, or to lay the prophetic mantle upon Eliseus.

These missions are difficult; the prophet feels the fatigue of them, sees their dangers, experiences his own weakness. But God shows amazing solicitude for the needs of His envoy. The crows bring him food at Carith. The flour and oil of his hostess, the widow of Sarepta, are miraculously replenished while the famine lasts. An angel twice brings him bread to sustain him during his forty days' journey through the desert! (...)

The harmonious union of contemplation and action that the prophet shows forth in his life (...) does not come from merely a wise balance of external occupations and spiritual exercises, from an equilibrium established by prudence, which would both satisfy the aspirations of the soul for divine intimacy and allow for the needs of the apostolate. Balance and synthesis are realized in the life of the prophet by the very God who has seized him and moves him. The prophet is constantly in search of God, and constantly surrendered to the movements of the Holy Spirit within him and without. He gives himself up, and that is his whole occupation. It is for God to dispose of him, to detain him in solitude or to send him thither and yon. His utter *abandon* will successively bring him into the most secret intimacies of God and urge him on to the most daring exterior enterprises; but it will always bring him back, his deeds accomplished, to God who dwells in the desert. *Vivit dominus in cujus conspectu sto!* Thus harmony between contemplation and action is realized by divine Wisdom Himself, thanks to His hold on the prophet, and to the prophet's fidelity.

(Extracts from *I want to see God*, in Part III Chapter VI, pp. 446-449; Christian Classics USA, 1986 "All rights reserved")

- 1 The story of Elijah's mission is found in the books of Kings: 1Kgs. 17-21, 2Kgs, ch. 1 and 2
- 2 Si. 48:1
- 3 1 Kings,17 ; Si 48,1