

Foreword

What is a prophet? A prophet is not a soothsayer; the essential element of the prophet is not the prediction of future events. The prophet is someone who tells the truth on the strength of his contact with God—the truth for today, which also, naturally, sheds light on the future. It is not a question of foretelling the future in detail, but of rendering the truth of God present at this moment in time and of pointing us in the right direction. As far as Israel is concerned, the word of the prophet has a particular function in that faith is essentially understood as hope in Him who will come: a word of faith is always the realization of the faith, especially in its structure of hope, because it leads hope on and keeps it alive. It is equally important to underline that the prophet is not apocalyptic, though he may seem so. Essentially, he does not describe the ultimate realities but helps us to understand and live the faith as hope.

Even if, at a moment in time, the prophet must proclaim the Word of God as if it were a sharp sword, he is not necessarily criticizing organized worship and institutions. His mandate is to counter misunderstanding and abuse of the Word within the institution by rendering God's vital claim ever present. However, it would be wrong to misconstrue the Old Testament as antagonistic dialectics between the prophets and the Law. Given that both come from God, they both have a prophetic function. This is a very important point in my mind because it leads us into the New Testament. At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses is presented as prophet and he too presents

himself as such. He tells Israel: “God will send you a prophet like me.” What does ‘a prophet like me’ mean? Again, according to Deuteronomy—and I think this is the decisive point—Moses’ particularity lay in the fact that he spoke with God as with a friend. I tend to see the root of the prophetic element in that ‘face to face’ with God, in “talking with Him as with a friend.” Only by virtue of this direct encounter with God may the prophet speak in moments of time.

Revelation attained its goal with Christ because, in those beautiful words of Saint John of the Cross—when God has spoken in person there is nothing more to add. Nothing more about the Logos can be said. He is among us in a complete way and God has nothing greater to give us than Himself, or to say to us than His Word. But this very wholeness of God’s giving of himself—that is, that He, the Logos, is present in the flesh—also means that we must continually penetrate this Mystery. And this brings us back to the structure of hope. The coming of Christ is the beginning of an ever-deepening knowledge and of a gradual discovery of what, in the Logos, is being given. Thus, a new way is inaugurated of leading man into the whole truth: as Jesus puts it in the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit will come down. I believe that the pneumatological Christology of Jesus’ leave-taking discourse is very important to our theme, given that Christ explains that his coming in the flesh was just a first step. The real coming will happen when Christ is no longer bound to a place or limited to a body, but when he comes to all of us in the Spirit as the Risen One, so that entering into the truth may also acquire more and more profundity. It seems clear to me that—considering the entire life of the Church, which is the time when Christ comes to us in Spirit and which is determined by this very pneumatological Christology—the prophetic element, as element of hope and appeal, cannot naturally be lacking or allowed to fade away. Through charisms, God reserves for himself the right to intervene directly in the Church to awaken it, warn it, promote it and sanctify it. I believe that this prophetic-charismatic history traverses the whole time of the Church. It is always there especially at the most critical times of transition.

Niels Christian Hvidt has worked for a number of years with the theme of Christian prophecy in the framework of fundamental theology. This doctoral dissertation is the fruit of his research and provides many new insights in this complex but vital theme. The Fathers of the Church knew that Christianity could not be the final stage of salvation, but an intermediary phase between the Incarnation of Christ and his glorious Return. This realization and what it means to the very nature of Christianity needs further elaboration, and Niels Christian Hvidt provides an important contribution hereto.

In the historical part of the work, Hvidt shows that the prophetic call of God through the prophets appears throughout the history of the Church. In his

discussion of fundamental theology, Hvidt therefore investigates the purpose and preconditions of Christian prophecy in light of developments in the past 50 years in Revelation theology, which have given new impetus to the discussion of Christian prophecy. In this way he offers a new approach to the actualization of Revelation and to the development of tradition and dogma regarding Revelation. Prophecy proves to be operative in all areas of the actualization of Revelation, especially in the very life of the Church, which sociological investigations show in an interesting way. Prophecy is constantly challenged by false prophecy, which always represented the greatest threat to the true prophetic gift. The criteria that Hvidt presents for discerning prophecy are therefore vital.

With his discussion, Niels Christian Hvidt has trod new theological land and therewith has made important contributions to a theme that needs further thought. I wish this book many attentive readers.

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