

Towards the Last with Trust: Prophecy and Camillian Commitment

The Prophets of the Bible were chosen by God to give voice to His Word, to be the spokesmen of Jehovah with the powerful and with all peoples. Their call and their message have had an echo that goes beyond the period of their lives. They reach every human reality in every human context. Their message, which reaches us in our present as well, with an always new light illumines vocations to consecration and in a special way the Camillian vocation.

What are the aspects of the prophetic message that can shake the conception of our consecration? Where does the voice of the Prophets of the Bible lead us? In relation to which points do they stimulate us today? And if we want to rediscover the prophetic dimension of our vocation, on which pillars should we base ourselves?

This paper is organised around four points. In the first part I seek, in a phenomenological approach, to revisit Biblical prophetism and some characteristics of the prophets. Then in the second part I examine the relationship between prophets and the society to which they spoke. The third part refers to some aspects of the prophetic message that are especially meaningful for Camillians. The last part is dedicated to the prophetic dimension of the Christian and Camillian vocation.

1. Prophetic Terminology¹

In our mentality, as in the mentality of the people of Israel, the principal intermediary to know about the future is the prophet. We immediately find ourselves faced with a terminological problem. ‘*Profetès*’ is a Greek word and reality. According to the oldest sources, a ‘prophet’ was he who interpreted the confused words of Pythia, the priestess of the Oracle of Delphi. This word was used to refer to various personages that the Jewish Bible described with various names. We have different terms such as ‘man of God’, ‘seer’ and ‘prophet’ which are seen to be synonymous. Other texts seem to express themselves with great precision on each of these leading figures. For example, in 1 Ch 29:29 it is stated that the deeds of David are written ‘in the books of the seer (*ro’eh*) Samuel, in the book of the prophet (*nabi*) Nathan and in the book of the seer (*hozeh*) Gad’. Here we have three personages whom we consider typical representatives of the early prophecy described with three different terms. And we should not neglect the fact that the term ‘visionary’ was added to these three.

1.1. The Seer (*ro’eh*)

This term is used only eleven times. In the traditions prior to the exodus six times; in four of these the reference is to Samuel, in one to the priest Zadok, and in Is 30:10 reference is made to ‘seers’ (*ro’im*). The episode of Samuel provides some interesting information about the ancient image of the seer: he is a man who knows hidden things and can be consulted with the offering of a reward. And because he appears in cities exactly when a sacrifice is about to be offered, some think that he also performed priestly functions. One of the most typical activities of the art of divining was to study the intestines of sacrificed animals. ‘Seers’ paralleled ‘visionaries’. They make up a group who through visions and words reminded the people of their responsibility to God.

1.1. The Visionary (*hozeh*)

¹P. M. DE VIVIES, *Les livres prophétiques* (Mon abc de la Bible, Paris, 2018), pp. 9-13 ; J. L. SICRE, ‘Prophète, Prophétie’ in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (éd. J-Y LACOSTE, Paris, 1998), pp. 937-939.

The term '*hozeh*', a word translated by 'visionary', brings out relationships and differences in relation to the term 'seer'. It is used on sixteen occasions but ten of these are in the Chronicles, a fact that reduces its ancient use to only six cases. In 2 Sam 24:11 reference is made to the 'prophet (*nabi*) Gad', the 'visionary of the King'. This is a rather curious phrase because it seems to suggest that the mission of this prophet was to serve the King through his visions. The chronicler maintains this designation – 'visionary of the King' – and applies it to Heman (1 Ch 25:5) and to Jeduthun (2 Ch 35:15). However, we cannot because of this fact deduce that a 'visionary' is a leading figure of the court. When talking about false prophets who corrupt the people, the chronicler refers at the same time to prophets (*nevim*), visionaries (*hozim*) and diviners (*qosmim*). All of these sell themselves to the best bidder and declare a holy war against those who do not intend to maintain them. Despite this, a positive idea of these leading figures predominates. In Is 29:10 reference is made to 'visionaries' in parallel with 'prophets' (*nevim*) as instruments that the people of Judea have to guide them correctly. They are their eyes that see, their head that thinks. The greatest punishment that God could inflict on the people was to deprive them of these figures. When Samuel was a child visions were not frequent but God granted visions to him. And from that moment onwards, as God says through Hosea, 'I will speak to the Prophets, I will multiply visions'.

1.2. The Man of God (*Is 'elohim*)

This title is much more frequent than the others. It appears on 76 occasions – 55 times in the Books of Kings. In the majority of cases it is applied to a known figure such as Elijah (29 times), Elia (7 times), Moses (4 times) etc. but generally these figures are also thaumaturges who pronounce prodigious words that work miracles.

1.3. The Prophet (*nabi*)

The term most frequently used – indeed the classic term – to refer to prophets is *nabi*'. This comes from the Hebrew word *nb*' which means to call, to speak with enthusiasm, to be inspired, and to be in a state of delirium. The passive form of the verb is translated by 'being called', 'being appointed' or 'being inspired'. A *nabi*', therefore, is he who has been called, he who has received a call, an appeal of God. A. Chouraqui calls him inspired.² This term is used as much as 35 times in the Old Testament. But it is specifically this abundance of citations that creates a series of problems because this title ends up by being attributed to the most diverse people and even individuals who were opposites. A careful analysis leads us to the following conclusions:

- The title of *nabi*' does not imply a positive evaluation – it is even applied to the prophets of Baal and to the false prophets of YHWH. From this point of view, it is rather distant from the title of 'man of God'.

- The meaning and the function of *nabi*' varied during the course of history but the predominant feature is that of communicating the words of another person. The phenomenon of 'nebiism' has many aspects; it is not homogenous in its message or in its expressions.

- A *nabi*' at times acts individually and at times in a group.

- Women can form a part of this movement, even in a quite prestigious way. This fact is very important above all because amongst the people of Israel women did not have access to the priesthood.

² A. CHOURAQUI, *Les hommes de la Bible* (Paris, 1994), pp. 234-235.

- In some prophetic currents, such as that of Isaiah and Micah, the term *nabî'* is not held in high esteem. The word *hazah*, 'to contemplate', is preferred to *nb'*, 'to prophesy'.

1.5. Definition

From this terminological inquiry one can identify certain features that define a prophet.³ One must begin by making clear that in the Bible although some texts present the prophet as a person able to reveal hidden mysteries or predict the future, it is not possible to reduce him to the figure of the diviner. He is a person immersed in the present and involved with his people. For this reason, he denounces social injustices and political conspiracies; he fights against religious corruption and defends the oppressed; and he always remains faithful to the designs of God. The mission of the prophet was always to illuminate the present with the word of God and to direct his contemporaries to follow a righteous path. The prophet is therefore an inspired person who has a personal contact with God that begins at the moment of his call. A man of words, the prophet is a public personage. His place is the street, the public square, where people meet and come together, where his message is urgent. The prophet must remain in contact with the world that surrounds him. He cannot ignore the machinations of politicians, the intentions of the king, the discontent of the poor, the unbridled luxury of the powerful, the negligence of many priests. He is indifferent to no sphere of human life because God is indifferent to nothing. His mission is at risk. The prophet knows that he is a person who is threatened and who has to face up to persecution and death.

2. The Prophet and Society

The prophetic vocation establishes a relationship of 'I-you-them' where the prophet is not chosen to enjoy God but to perform a mission for the people. The prophet encounters opposition within society in different ways. But within society he also finds, at least in some groups, a point of support that makes his mission possible. In order to understand the prophet, one has to put together both the support and the opposition that he meets with in certain parts of society.

2.1. The Contribution of Society to the Prophet

The studies of Wellhausen on the prophets emphasise a personal experience of God which eliminates everything that constitutes the cultural and familial assumptions of the prophet himself. In the years that followed Wellhausen, studies in this field recognised that the experience of God led to a completely new vision of the world but that this experience was located in a set of previous facts derived from the societies in which the prophets lived.

2.1.1. Tradition and Truth

Traditions and religious truths are essential for the prophet. YHWH Himself is not an invention of the prophets: they rediscover His original image after it has been obscured by the pagan divinities that have spread within society. Another great truth that is received is that of the people of Israel as the people of God. Bearing in mind the political situation of their epochs, with a people divided between two independent kingdoms, it is surprising that they always had a clear idea of unity that went beyond the struggles and the divisions.

³ N. CALDUCH- BENAGES, *I profeti, messaggeri di Dio. Presentazione essenziale* (Bologna, 2013), pp. 9-11.

It is impossible to understand the prophets without taking into account the traditions of the people of Israel which are handed down through various channels: worship, popular wisdom and laws. Hosea knows and supports the traditions of the desert and the decalogue; he pays great attention to the past history of his people, even though he is critical of numerous aspects of that past. The political theory of Isaiah begins with received traditions of the inviolability of Jerusalem and the choice of the dynasty of David. The message of Ezekiel is incomprehensible if we do not take into account his formation as a priest.

2.1.2. Social Support

Society also offers prophets its support although many times it confines itself to the posthumous tribute of laying flowers on their tombs. For prophets to exist there must be at least a part of society that accepts them. Isaiah, for example, could rely at a specific moment on two faithful witnesses: the priest Uriah and Zachariah the son of Berechiah. Jeremiah, apart from the Babylonian officers, could rely upon the support and the friendship of Baruch. The clearest evidence of the social support given to the prophet is the existence itself of the prophetic books – the outcome of the patient work of disciples and compilers.

2.2. The Clash with Society

2.2.1. Prophets and Kings

The relationship between the prophets and kings was always difficult. The sovereign needed the recognition of the prophet which was something that was more than mere moral support. There was always a conflict of powers – one religious and the other political. The traditions relating to Samuel confirm this situation. Samuel chose Saul as the first King of Israel but he was also the first to condemn him (1 Sam 15).

2.2.1. Prophets and Priests and Various Social Groups

Something similar to what was said in the previous paragraph happened in this sphere as well. Samuel, when condemning in the name of God the priest Eli (1 Sam 3), prefigures what would be the future clash between Amos and Amaziah and between Micaiah and his contemporaries whose ambition he denounces. Even Isaiah, the friend of the priest Zachariah, did not conceal that he thought the priests were drunkards who closed themselves to the will of God. Amongst the groups who were the objects of attacks by the prophets, we find political and military leaders, the officers of the king and the elders who were attacked because of the injustice they perpetrated.

2.2.2. Prophets and False Prophets

The area of society with which the prophets most severely clashed was that of the false prophets. In the Old Testament two groups are identified: the prophets of foreign divinities (like Baal) and those who claimed that they spoke in the name of YHWH and who based their position on a purported revelation from the true God. The conflict between true and false prophets should be examined from a social and community point of view. It is important to observe here that the prophets offered different methods and approaches for the good of society and the country. The false prophet calmed the conscience of the wicked person so that he did not repent of his injustice; the false prophet promised peace and prosperity to the people when the country was about to be ruined and hoped that the misfortunes would end rapidly.

2.2.3. The Threatened Existence of the Prophets

After what has been just said it is not surprising that the prophet was a man who was threatened. At times what happens to him is only what God said to Ezekiel: ‘My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice... Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice’ (Ez 33:31-32). This is the threat of failure, of being worn out by an approach that does not find favourable responses in those who are listening.

On other occasions the prophets have to face up to more severe situations. Hosea is called a ‘madman’ and a ‘fool’. Jeremiah is accused of betraying his country. In other cases, prophets are persecuted. Elia has to flee from the king on various occasions; Micaiah Ben Imla ends up in prison; Amos is expelled from the Kingdom of the North; Jeremiah spends various months of his life in jail. In extreme cases the prophets encounter death – such was the destiny of the prophets at the time of Ahab and Jezebel. Uriah was murdered and thrown in a common grave (Jer 26:20-23). This persecution was not only carried out by kings and the powerful – priests and false prophets were also involved. Even the people revolted against the prophets, criticised them, despised them and persecuted them.⁴

3. The Message of the Prophets

3.1. The Fight against Idolatry

The fight against idolatry constitutes one of the essential cores of prophetic preaching. It was already common in the accounts of Samuel and found in Elia its greatest exponent. Notable traces of this practice are present in all of the canonical texts. It is a concept that is still present today; anything can rise to the level of God. There is no lack of a tendency to see idolatry as a problem confined to the use of images in the worship of Jehovah and the worship of pagan divinities – two problems that are certainly real in the context in which the prophets operated but which today run the risk of no longer communicating anything. In reality, idolatry is due to two fundamental factors: the rivals of God (pagan worship) or the manipulation of God (and therefore worship). This makes idolatry closer to us because replacing God with something else or seeing Him as merely an idol remains a real risk.

Jesus applies these categories to the reality of his time when he says that one should not accept those who want to serve both God and Mammon, presenting the same alternative between YHWH and Baal that Elia presented on Mount Carmel. In Paul this idea is used again against those who want to divinise what the law prescribes or in the letter of John when the faithful are warned about false gods. This is a subject that concerns us and worries us still today if we manage to detach it from a contextual cultural discourse.

3.2. The Struggle for Justice

One of the most famous and important aspects of the prophetic message is the denunciation of social problems and the attempts to achieve a more just society. The concern with justice is in reality a constant in the legislation of the people of Israel in the previous periods. Concern about the weakest and concern about the upright administration of justice in the various legal codes became a

⁴ L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL and J. L. SICRE DIAZ, *I profeti. Traduzione e commento* (Rome, 1984), pp. 42-60.

fundamental theme of prophetism. Laws to protect strangers, orphans and widows, which were concrete illustrations of the sacredness of human beings, were not respected, and it was here that prophetic denunciations sprang forth.

3.2.1. The Overall View of Society

There were oracles who described the overall view that the prophets had of their time in Samaria and in Jerusalem. The situation in Samaria (starting with King Omri in the ninth century) was very luxurious and the price of this splendour was to be paid in the eighth century BC by the peasants and the poor. Amos denounced this situation of oppression. It was a *mehumot rabbot*, great disorder, in which the oppressed and those who grew rich were distinct groups. The second, the real protagonists of the situation, were for Amos those who did not know how to act with rectitude. They only accumulated and they engaged in violence and theft. The simple possessions for a comfortable and luxurious life were beds of ivory, musical instruments and excellent wines. There was no due justice and the people responsible for this were specifically those who charged themselves with administering justice. There was the basic idea that for God forms of worship and pilgrimages were sufficient – a real parody that the prophet condemned. Instead, he wanted to return the heart of the people to moral conversion.⁵

The picture that we have of Jerusalem is more complete. The diagnosis of Isaiah is similar to that made by many people of contemporary society – it was a city that had forgotten God. But if for us today forgetting God means losing the question of faith, for that epoch forgetting God was to forget about the poor. Those responsible for the abandonment of the poor were the chiefs who had chosen to ally themselves with the rich men of the country in order to obtain advantages and did not listen to the cry of the weak. The rich, therefore, could steal because the institutions did not intervene. Thus change had to take place through the elimination of corrupt institutions and the retrieval of the institutions of the past. Micaiah is even more severe. To the issues to which reference has already been made he added something new: these people had at the centre of their interests the city of Jerusalem: they wanted to expand it, to make it magnificent and to improve it. Micaiah did not belong to this group. He did not love Jerusalem, its buildings or its progress. He did not like to be in the city. Its prosperity and progress were built upon the blood of the poor and their basis was injustice. We do not know what facts he referred to, perhaps to forced labour, but there was an important observation – greed had by then also taken possession of the religious leaders who worshipped God but whose works were designed to earn money. One of the metaphors that Micaiah employs is that of the people being butcher's meat. The Lord felt especially linked to the oppressed whom He recognised as His people and He distanced Himself from the oppressors. The situation described above was one also evoked by Sophonia and Ezekiel. They also identified the civil and judicial authorities as the people principally responsible for the situation, justifying through such faults Judea's destiny.

At the side of these social classes were also placed prophets and priests who were guilty of justifying and tolerating this situation and failed to emphasise the importance of the covenant and basked in their privileges. This is what the false prophet did: he manipulated the truth and placed it at the service of the oppressors. What was most condemned by the prophet was the corruption of a human heart that had abandoned God to serve money.

⁵ P. BOVATI and R. MEYNET, *Il libro del profeta Amos* (Rome, 1995), pp. 172-173.

3.2.2. The Administration of Justice

For the prophets the field of justice was one of the most corrupt. The idea of the powerful was to modify the laws of the covenant as they wished, fostering their enrichment not so much through obscene acts against the poor as through the elimination of the latter's rights. This was an effective stratagem by which it was possible to exclude the weak from the Jewish community, rob the poor, make widows slaves and expropriate the property of orphans.

Business

Another theme that was in vogue was that of economic imperialism which was condemned because of its logic of the accumulation of wealth to the disadvantage of the poor. Amos discovered in merchants the desire to become rich to the detriment of poor people, trafficking their freedom, sending them the most low-quality goods, and refusing to close their premises even for one day. Every prophet was sensitive to this subject and highlighted its aspects in turn.

Slavery

Despite its great importance, the prophets spoke very little about this topic. Amos referred to two causes of slavery (being taken prisoner in war or accumulating debts) and he was intransigent towards both – there was no reason that could justify the possession of a human being.⁶ Jeremiah emphasised that not freeing slaves was not only a sin against a brother but also, and above all else, a transgression against God and His covenant.

Landlordism

Even though the economy was an agricultural one, the problem of landlordism was cited rarely. It was a question touched upon by Isaiah and Micaiah and according to the Book of Nehemiah acquired a fundamental importance in the fifth century.

Wages

The prophet Jeremiah railed against this problem when he accused Jehoiakim of building a palace without paying the workmen. Malaki denounced owners who defrauded their employees of their wages. These are late examples but we should not think that the problem did not exist in the epoch of the first prophets – it is only that not much emphasis was given to it.

Luxury and wealth

This subject was addressed in very different ways. Amos emphasised the good life of the upper class. Isaiah knew about this material luxury but related it to political ambition or pride. Ezekiel denounced wealth that oppressed one's neighbour. The yearning to become rich was a fault not only of the powerful but also of all the whole people. Amos perceived that God is the basis of the moral nature of man which He has always shaped according to His idea of justice. His preaching had its roots in the entire experience of the people of Israel, their life and their traditions.

3.2.3. Criticism of Aspects of Worship

The prophets considered the places of worship as corrupted and thus without God. This is why the sacred spaces lost value, or at least those that had been built by man. The holy temple did not

⁶ P. BOVATI and R. MEYNET, *Il libro del profeta Amos*, pp. 95-102.

receive better treatment. Many prophets seem to have ignored the feasts of the year and criticised the sabbath day and the celebrations of the new moons. As regards sacrifices, on the other hand, we can identify certain constant points in the repugnance felt by the prophets:

- They created a false idea of God, as though He needed something or was hungry.
- They did not correspond to the experience of the desert (when the people of Israel were poor nomads it was not possible to offer up sacrifices and yet God dwelt amongst His people).
- God did not like them and attributed more value to neighbour.

Lastly, the prophets did not spare the ministers of worship. The catalogue of accusations is a long one: drunkenness, ambition, profanation, violation of the sacred and the law, corruption of the people, concealing knowledge of God, murders, fraud, the abuse of power.

The defenders of rectitude and justice, the prophets expressed vehement social criticism of the judicial and economic abuse of the poor and the humble, and continually reminded the people of their obligations relating to the covenant with Jehovah. The prophets were the conscience of the society in which they were immersed and whose heart they knew.⁷

4. The Continuity of Prophetism Contextualised

4.1. The Prophets and the Christian Faith

The first Christians were Jews and their reading of the fundamental event of the death and resurrection of Jesus had its origins in Holy Scripture (Lk 24:17). However, their understanding of the person of Jesus was not easy to expound or to share because the people nurtured an erroneous hope. The people did not expect a suffering Messiah: the wish was for an immediate salvation, liberation from the Roman yoke. The Christians therefore had to innovate in order to make others understand that Jesus was the Messiah. And they found the solution in the words of the prophets. They saw in the life of Jesus the realisation of what the prophets had foreseen. Thus it was that the Christian reading of the prophets seemed to reduce their function to prediction. This vision, even though partial, was not false. It emphasised an important aspect of prophetism. The evangelists made ample resort to the prophetic texts to demonstrate that Jesus was truly he who had been announced by the prophets.

In addition, the prophetic message of the call to conversion was particularly well received. John the Baptist was identified with Elijah, the model for prophetism of the Old Testament (Mk 1:6; 9:13). His preaching had a clear prophetic character. He was thus to be written into the entire line of prophets to the point of imitating their physical appearance. His violent death also belonged to the strongly rooted idea that a prophet would be ill-treated and killed.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is described as a powerful prophet in words and deeds (Lk 4:16-30; 7:16; 7:39; 24:19). This continuity between the preaching of the prophets of old and the preaching of Jesus who is acknowledged to be, and defines himself as, a prophet (Mt 13:57) is emphasised on a number of occasions. It is Jesus himself who refers to the deaths of the prophets (Lk 13:34; Mt 21:33-41; 23,29). Lastly, he explained his death which would arrive as a consequence of his prophetic preaching (Lk 13:34). The miracle of the multiplication of loaves ends in the Gospel of John (6:14)

⁷ V. H. MATTHEWS, 'Prophecy and Society', in M. J. BODA and J.G. MCCONVILLE (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL, 2012), pp. 623-633.

with the exclamation that recognises Jesus as a prophet:⁸ ‘Seeing the sign that he had done, the people said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world”’. For the first Christians the works of Jesus were a completion of the hope of the people of Israel. Jesus was the promised prophet.⁹

4.2. The Prophetic Church

The Christian community has a deep awareness of prophecy. Everything begins with the text of Joel cited by Peter on the day of Pentecost which is the foundation of Christian prophetism. The Christian prophet bears and supports the words of Jesus. The points of continuity and likeness between the prophetism of the Old Testament and the Christian prophets are incontestable. Just as the prophet of the Old Testament has his roots in the theological traditions of his people, so the prophet of the New Testament does this with faith in the eyewitnesses of Jesus. Both speak about the present with reference to their specific historical context. Just as the prophets of the Old Testament became symbols of the hope of the people of Israel, so the Christian prophets had a function of support, consolation and encouragement that kept alive hope in the faithfulness of God and the return of Jesus.

Differently from the prophets of the Old Testament who had a rather notable social impact because of the social and religious homogeneousness of their historical context, the prophets of the New Testament addressed their words to a minority, a small marginal community. The consequence of this was a loss of importance as regards their function and their social impact. It is right to stress that in this context it was the whole community, as such, that had a prophetic function. Thus, today for the Church the message of the prophets of Israel has lost nothing of its contemporary relevance. In the light of the teaching of Jesus, she rediscovers new strength for her mission.

The Church that follows Jesus the prophet is herself also a prophet. In the Christian community, to receive the Holy Spirit meant becoming a prophet (Acts 2:14-36); being a messenger of the word of God performed the essential function of being a prophet. This prophetic role begins within the Church herself, with actions, attitudes, words and choices that have the meaning of illuminating everyone. Some great prophetic figures within the Church such as St. Francis, St. Camillus de Lellis and Mother Teresa of Calcutta have thrown light on her prophetic dimension. Thus this community, a witness to Jesus Christ, is a prophet and acquires a prophetic mission open to all the peoples of the world. Its members can bring to the world a message of ethical exhortation and hope, within the limits of the historical and social context. This special context is of determining importance for the interpretation of the word of God and acts as a guide for prophetic action.¹⁰

4.3. Which Prophecy for Today?

The prophetic word needs to be rooted in the historical community that receives it. Its validity and its effectiveness depend on the fact that the prophet forms a single body with, and takes part in the experience of, the people, like the prophets of olden times of the Bible.¹¹ If he manages to remove the distance between words and action, he unites intentions to facts and thus makes his word visible

⁸ This exclamation echoes Dt 18:18.

⁹ J. ASURMENDI, *Le prophétisme. Des origines à l'époque moderne* (Paris, 1985), pp. 144-150.

¹⁰ M. S. KOPPEL, ‘The Prophets and Pastoral Care’, in C. J. SHARP (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (New York, 2016), p. 843.

¹¹ J. ASURMENDI, *Le prophétisme*, pp. 155-165.

and meaningful. The words that he utters thus become an experienced reality. The message of faithfulness to God, of salvation and of liberation for the last is still today the prophetic message. The oppression of the poor, the of justice, the rule of money and violence, and the rejection of God that were denounced by prophets such as Amos and Isaiah do not represent problems only of the past – humanity is still faced by them.

The courage of the truth envelops the three dimensions of prophecy: the proclaiming of the word of God, protesting against evil through the denunciation of structures of death and proposals for good, and the construction of peace and structures for the liberation of man.¹²

4.4. Towards the Last: Camillian Prophecy

The words of the ancient prophets still sound out today in the hearts of the sons of St. Camillus, especially in their mission towards the last, those whom the Bible called the *anawim*, the poor and the excluded. When Isaiah reacted energetically because Jerusalem had stopped being the faithful spouse and had transformed itself into a prostitute (1:21-26), and the vineyard tended by God had produced only wild fruit (5:1-7), it was faithfulness to the faith that concerned him. This faith is the absolute guarantee for respect for human life. And when Amos, in his turn, denounced numerous injustices, namely the arbitrariness of judges, the corruption of the authorities, the greed of landlords, and the oppression of the governors, or when Hosea stigmatised injustices and the reigning corruption (4:1-2), it was the sacredness of the human person that they proclaimed – the fundamental pre-condition to not falling into a false piety (1:10-20).

Following the words of the prophets, and illuminated by faith in Jesus, the Camillians place the human person at the centre of things, thereby proclaiming the sacredness of human life. This takes place through choices and concrete commitments that mark their lives. The credibility of the modern prophet requires moral rectitude, a harmony between words and life, and consistency between saying and doing.¹³ The principal pre-condition for this prophecy is to place our roots in our own tradition, as the ancient prophets did, and to look with courage at new horizons. Bearing in mind particular contexts, one must open oneself to the visionary dimension which involves the imagination, the dream of a possible future that goes beyond fears and comfort.¹⁴ One thus understands the fundamental option which is translated into principles and action rooted in the tradition of the Camillian charism:

- Overall service for all the categories of the sick, the disabled, the elderly, families and those who are socially excluded, with the devotion of special attention to the poorest.
- The promotion of health, prevention, complete care for the sick person, scientific research, and the relief of pain.
- Humanistic, professional and ethical formation and the Christian animation of professional and voluntary health-care workers in the world of health.
- The humanisation of health-care institutions and services

¹² On this point P. Poucouta cites the declaration of the bishops of Congo-Brazzaville on the humanised management of oil: P. POUCOUTA, 'Jésus, prophète de la vérité et de la vie', *RUCAO* 23 (2005), pp. 66-67.

¹³ N. SOEDE, 'L'unité du dire et du faire dans la vie du prophète', *RUCAO* 23 (2005), pp. 124-125.

¹⁴ M. S. KOPPEL, 'The Prophets and Pastoral Care', p. 859.

- Pastoral care in health provided in the Christian community and in both ecclesiastical and civic socio/health-care and health-care institutions.

Here the prophetic spirit achieves, beyond the activity of validating and protesting, the concrete proposal of living faith which makes respect for the human person and above all the weakest, the *anawim* of YHWH, of central importance. A Camillian spirit exists which contains still today a prophecy for humanity.

Conclusion

The prophets engaged in a moral reading anew of their time in the light of the faith of the people of Israel which did not separate worship from the tradition of social justice. The Camillian is a prophet in his consecrated being and in his works, in his way of interpreting the reality that surrounds him, always starting from the words of mercy received from the prophets.

Choosing to live for the last, becoming their defender, is the best way of bringing to the fore the prophetic message of the Bible. In this sense, the prophetic spirit creates, nurtures, and makes grow and blossom the Camillian spirit. Thus Biblical prophecy inspires and accompanies the Camillian vocation and Camillian work, both of which contain a prophetic spark by which to illuminate human reality in its daily complexity.

In the image of the prophets of the Bible, the Camillian is called and sent to bring a divine message and to engage in actions that pose questions to the human conscience at the personal, ecclesial and political-administrative levels. The question of audacity remains, the courage to see beyond reality. The ability to dream, to imagine a splendour that no longer exists, and to find the strength to make it the future.