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Prophetic Inspiration in the Light of the Prophet's Relationship with God in the Book of Jeremiah

Prorocze natchnienie w świetle relacji proroka z Bogiem w Księdze Jeremiasza

Abstract. The Pontifical Biblical Commission, in *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, proposes a phenomenological approach to biblical inspiration, focusing on the bond between biblical authors and God. According to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the case of prophetic inspiration as the special relationship between a prophet and God is expressed in the function of a prophet as God's messenger, which is identified and founded on stereotypical prophetic formulas and stories of the prophetic vocation. If, however, God communicates himself to the prophet in the word, then the question of relationship between the prophet and God must allow for different experiences of the word of God for the prophet. The testimony of the Book of Jeremiah is particular in his context. While recounting the story of the calling (Jer 1:5–10), it presents the prophet as a son in relation with God who reveals himself to him as a father. In Jeremiah's confessions (especially Jer 15:10–21 and 20:7–13), the prophet struggling with God's word appears as a friend of God. Finally, the prophet's communication through scripture (Jer 36) presupposes the role of the prophet as a writer who witnesses the word of God. These three relationships of the prophet with God – a son, friend, and witness – go beyond the model of inspiration of a prophet as solely a messenger of God.

Streszczenie. Papieska Komisja Biblijna w dokumencie *Natchnienie i prawda Pisma Świętego* proponuje ujęcie fenomenologiczne natchnienia biblijnego, koncentrując się na więzi łączącej autorów biblijnych z Bogiem. W przypadku natchnienia prorockiego ta szczególna relacja łącząca proroka i Boga wyraża się, zdaniem Papieskiej Komisji Biblijnej, w funkcji proroka jako wysłannika Boga, która jest identyfikowana na podstawie stereotypowych formuł prorockich i opowiadań o powołaniu prorockim. Jeśli jednak Bóg udziela się prorokowi w słowie, to pytanie o więź łączącą proroka z Bogiem musi uwzględnić różne doświadczenia słowa Bożego, które są udziałem proroka. Szczególnie jest w tym kontekście świadectwo Księgi Jeremiasza, która w opowiadaniu o powołaniu (Jr 1,5–10) przedstawia proroka jako syna w relacji do Boga objawiającego się mu jako

ojciec. W wyznaniach Jeremiasza (szczególnie Jr 15,10–21 i 20,7–13) prorok zmagający się ze słowem Bożym jawi się przyjacielem Boga. Wreszcie komunikacja proroka za pomocą pisma (Jr 36) zakłada rolę proroka jako pisarza, który jest świadkiem słowa Bożego. Te trzy relacje proroka z Bogiem – syna, przyjaciela i świadka – wykraczają poza model natchnienia proroka jako wysłannika Boga.

Keywords: biblical inspiration, prophetic inspiration, Book of Jeremiah, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, the prophetic book, Jer 1:5–10, Jer 15:10–21, Jer 20:7–13, Jer 36.

Słowa kluczowe: natchnienie biblijne, natchnienie prorockie, Księga Jeremiasza, *Natchnienie i prawda Pisma Świętego*, księga prorocka, Jr 1,5–10, Jr 15,10–21, Jr 20,7–13, Jr 36.

The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture* proposes a phenomenological approach to biblical inspiration. The object of reflection is the testimony of biblical books to the bond of their authors with God, which takes different shapes depending on the form of communication between God and the biblical authors. “One can usefully explore the testimony of the various biblical writings and see how, for example, legal texts, wisdom sayings, prophetic oracles, prayers of all kinds, apostolic admonitions, etc., come from God; God, therefore, by means of the human authors, is their author” (ITSS, No. 10). Analysing of the various models of the Scripture books originating from God leads to the conclusion that “inspiration presents itself as a special relationship with God (or with Jesus), within which he gives the human author to speak – through his Spirit – that what he wishes to communicate to human beings” (ITSS, No 52). In this communication, “fundamental is the gift of a personal relationship with God (unconditional faith in God, fear of God, faith in Jesus Christ Son of God), in which the author embraces the various ways in which God reveals himself (creation, history, presence of Jesus of Nazareth)” (ITSS, No 52). In the case of the prophetic books, two types of texts provide the basis for establishing the model of their inspiration: the stereotypical prophetic formulas through which prophets affirmed the divine origin of their message (ITSS, No 13), and stories of the prophetic call pointing to God as the originator of the communication between him and the prophet (ITSS, No 14). In these texts, the prophet’s relationship with God is expressed in “their role of messengers of God” (ITSS, No 14).

The conclusion drawn by the Pontifical Biblical Commission about prophets as messengers of God is most appropriate, however, the question arises to what extent it fully expresses the dynamics of prophet’s relationship with God.

Firstly, in the model of prophetic communication referred to, the vehicle of God's revelation is the word that the prophet receives from God to bring it – as his messenger – faithfully to the people. The question is whether the verbal communication is the only form of the Lord speaking through the prophet. It suffices to mention the sign acts taken by prophets, in which the God's message is carried not just through words, but gestures, actions or events in the prophet's life.

Secondly, in the Old Testament prophets also communicated with their listeners through the written word, which they wrote down themselves or through a disciple writer. A prophetic book in its final form is the fruit of editorial work spread over time. This raises the question of participation of these persons, who almost entirely anonymous, in prophetic inspiration.

Thirdly, both the prophetic formulas and stories of prophetic calling are stereotypical, established, standard forms of speech in prophetic books.¹ So, to what extent these are merely rhetoric assertion that “the word came from the Lord” (ITSS, No 13), and how much of these is the testimony of the actual prophetic communication?

The phenomenological approach proposed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission regarding biblical inspiration certainly opens up a new theological perspective that respects the self-testimony of biblical texts about inspiration, while at the same time addresses the used language in search for understanding the truth about God as their author. However, in the case of prophetic books, it seems valid not only to deepen the exegetical and theological analysis of texts which present the prophet as God's messenger (especially the stories of prophetic call), but also to consider other testimonies of prophetic communication, in which the vehicle of the message is not only the word spoken, but also the word acted upon and written down by the prophet. These three forms of prophetic communication – through words, actions and writings – are attested in the book of Jeremiah. In each of the three situations the word of God is communicated, albeit through different means, but does express and shapes the prophet's relationship with God. The prophet is aware of being sent by God, but his personal relationship with God is much more dynamic, engaging and intimate. Based on the variety of forms in which the prophetic word presents itself in the book of Jeremiah, three

¹ The prophetic formulas are the structuring element of prophetic oracles, either as introductory or concluding formulas. On the other hand, the narratives of the prophetic call have a specific narrative pattern, consisting of the following elements: divine confrontation; introductory word; commission; objection; reassurance; sign (cf. Habel 1965).

different aspects of this relationship can be identified. The narrative of Jeremiah's calling at its very beginning presents the prophet not as a messenger of God, but as a son in relationship to God revealing himself as the prophet's father (Jer 1:5–10). The texts referred to as Jeremiah's "confessions" or "lamentations" illustrate the prophet's struggle with the word of God, which shapes him as a friend of God (Jer 15:10–21 and 20:7–13). Finally, the story of Baruch writing down the scroll dictated to him by Jeremiah (Jer 36) presupposes the prophet's role as a scribe who remains witness to God. These three particular relationships of the prophet with God – as son, friend, and witness – go beyond the model of prophet's inspiration as God's messenger, thus assuming yet another models of divine origin of prophetic books.

1. The word appointing a prophet: the filial relationship

"Four prophetic books tell the story of how God made their authors to be his messengers: Isaiah (6:1–13), Jeremiah (1:4–10), Ezekiel (1:3–3,11) and Amos (7:15)" (ITSS, No 14). The three verbs that define the prophet as a messenger in these narratives are: "to send, to go, to speak", in the narrative of Jeremiah's message are used "in the form of a categorical command on God's part, which emphasises that his message must be delivered with all accuracy: «And the Lord said unto me, Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you and you shall speak whatever I command you» (Jer 1:7)" (ITSS, No 14). The word that entrusts a mission to a prophet, for that is how this element of stories of prophetic calling is described, in the case of Jeremiah is by no means the first word to define his relationship as a prophet with God. God speaks of his special relationship with Jeremiah in the first sentence addressed to him: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5).

1.1. God as father to the prophet

Making Jeremiah a prophet happens *a priori* to his conception and birth, and thus to the message heard and received by him. Twice mentioned the maternal womb in which God "formed" the prophet's body recalls the moment of conception and birth. However, the story of Jeremiah's life has its absolute beginning in

God, who “knew” him before he was even conceived by his earthly parents. The verb *yāda*^c thus defines the relationship between God and the prophet; however, the polysemantic nature of this verb requires examining the context of Jeremiah's birth so that we can properly understand the sense of God “knowing” the prophet.² In the Old Testament, the verb *yāda*^c is also used to express the legal “acknowledging” of a son by his father (cf. Deut 33:9; Isa 63:16). The relationship thus established between father and son goes beyond legal categories, since the verb *yāda*^c contains a certain emotional charge, especially when the object of God's recognition is a human person. Hence, in Hos 13:5 and Amos 3:2, the “knowing” of Israel on the part of God can be translated as “choosing,” and in Ps 144:3 as “taking care of.”³ God thus acts towards the prophet like a father towards his son, but this relationship is not merely about showing his son the affection one expects of a father towards a child (cf. Hos 11:3–4). God's concern as the father is first and foremost with the son's speech, who recognises his inability to speak, which would make it impossible for a person to be a prophet: “Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (Jer 1:6). God “knows” Jeremiah but Jeremiah does not “know” the words proper for a prophet.

1.2. Prophet as son before God

The reason for Jeremiah's doubt is not some speech defect, as in the case of Moses (cf. Exod 4:10), since he links his inability to speak to his being a “youth” (*na'ar*). Nor is Jeremiah's reluctance due to a lack of skills necessary for oratorical activity, as these can be acquired through proper education. Jeremiah's difficulty arises from realising the nature of the prophetic word. It must be a true word. It is not enough to just make articulate sounds, for a lie that sounds out is no different from the truth. However, this lie remains an empty sound, lacking validity, doomed to oblivion. By contrast, a true prophet opens his mouth to speak words of truth. Prophecy is the truth that has become a word in history, revealing the meaning in its divine origin.⁴

Thus, when Jeremiah states that he “does not know how to speak,” he is admitting a wrong relationship to the “word” itself, which by its very nature is the true word. Jeremiah discovers that he is a “young man” like Samuel, who did not

² Cf. Bovati 2008, 64–67.

³ Cf. Koehler, Baumgartner 1995, 374.

⁴ Bovati 2008, 56.

yet know Yahweh, and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him (1 Sam 3:7). The prophetic word, however, is not just a simple carbon copy of the word the prophet receives from God. The incarnation of the divine word entails weighing God's message down with human literary, cultural and personal conditioning. The shape of the divine word communicated by the prophet depends even more on his ability to enter dialogue with that word, to open up to it, to understand it in order to communicate it to the people in a mature manner. For this reason, to call himself a youth is Jeremiah's admission of his incompetence due to immaturity.⁵ In this he reminds us of Solomon, who at the beginning of his reign confessed to God: "I am a youth, for I do not know how to go out or come in" (1 Kgs 3:7), and that he does not know how to rule Israel properly, in a mature manner. Being a youth, one knows very little. It is only by maturing that one grows in knowledge, experience and wisdom, and acquires competence which is expressed in the ability to act.⁶ Competence in the social dimension is a necessary condition to be an authority. The old man enjoys respect from others because he is "mature" in his wisdom. The rule exercised by the "young man" brings the downfall of society (cf. Isa 3:4–5; Qoh 10:16). Jeremiah is aware of being a "youth" who does not have the words that command authority and have respect from his hearers.

Jeremiah lamenting over being a young man, with all its consequences, is interpreted as him objecting to the prophetic vocation. Meanwhile, it is a complaint of a son about his father, who is responsible for introducing his son to the world, teaching him to speak competent words and endowing him with his authority. God does not deny the objections raised by Jeremiah, nor does he deny his lack of competence. Forbidding him to focus on his weakness in "Do not say, «I am only a youth»" (Jer 1:7), God invites him to open himself to his word, which will endow him with the qualities necessary for prophetic ministry. It is only at that point that Jeremiah hears the unequivocal call to be God's messenger both in territorial dimension ("you shall go to whomever I send you") and communicative one ("you shall speak whatever I command you"). As a son Jeremiah is obliged to obey God, who as a father wants to remedy his communicative incompetence. He does so through a word of promise thus reassuring him of his constant, salvific presence: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to

⁵ Cf. Holladay 1986, 35.

⁶ Cf. Bovati 2008, 61.

deliver you” (Jer 1:8). God accompanies the prophet through the word, which is transformed from a promise into a tangible experience of the word as food to be eaten as received from the father's hand: “Then Yahweh put out his hand and touched my mouth. And Yahweh said to me, «Behold, I have put my words in your mouth»” (Jer 1:9).

1.3. God giving himself to the prophet in the word

Again, this image can be read through the literary genre of narration of the prophetic call, in which God putting the words in the prophet's mouth is what asserts the prophetic message. In the case of Jeremiah, this gesture can be seen as the way God confronting his incompetence, which had paralysed Jeremiah's mouth when he was assigned the prophetic vocation. By putting out his hand to Jeremiah, God reveals his power and authority, which are granted to Jeremiah by God touching his lips and filling them with the authoritative word.

This is asserted by the next word addressed to Jeremiah, by which God appoints (*pāqad* in *Hi*) him “over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer 1:10). The verb *pāqad* indicates the status of the prophet as “overseer, governor” (cf. Gen 39:4–5; 1 Kgs 11:28; 2 Kgs 25:22–23; Jer 40:5.7.11; 41:2.18).⁷ The authority of the prophet thus remains intrinsically bound by the word that God puts in the mouth of his son. The prophet is given immense power to destroy and rebuild in the likeness of a mighty ruler on whose word the fate of all nations depends. This power is described by using two metaphors. The first refers to agrarian land (to pluck out, to plant): the world is seen as a field in which God (or his servant) plants crops and later pulls them out.⁸ The second metaphor is used in the context of construction, of which God is the creator, who can destroy it later. However, it is important to note that the words spoken by the prophet are ultimately aimed at “planting and building.” The point of destination is therefore life, while the act of destruction (“pulling out and tearing down”) is only a transition, an intermediate phase. Despite the threatening tone in Jeremiah's preaching, the ultimate fruit of

⁷ Cf. Fischer 2005, 136. Gianni Barbiero speaks in this context of the “royal” dimension of Jeremiah's vocation (cf. Barbiero 2013, 42).

⁸ Perhaps in the background of this metaphor is the image of a vineyard to which Israel is often compared (cf. Isa 5:1–7; Ps 80:9–12.16 etc.).

his word is creation of life on earth. God as father, grants the prophet, as his son, all authority to use the word to lead to the constitution of the Lord's new people.⁹

2. The word incarnate through prophet: a friendly relationship

The story of appointing Jeremiah a prophet recorded in chapter 1 of the Book of Jeremiah has a paradigmatic value and becomes a guide for his prophetic communication. From the time point of view, the event of the call happens first but at the same time it is lived out by the prophet again and again whenever he must proclaim the word of God. Jeremiah bears witness to this not only by means of stereotypical prophetic formulas, known also from other prophetic books, but also in texts termed "confessions" or "lamentations." These usually include the following texts: 11:18–12:6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–18.¹⁰ The lamentation of Jeremiah in chapter 15 is particularly significant and alludes in many elements to the initial narrative of the prophetic call. It also affirms the prophet's filial relationship with God, who grants him his word. Jeremiah's acceptance of God's word, however, is not automatic, as father's word requires obedience from his son. Thus, a new perspective of encounter with God opens up before the prophet, which takes the shape of friendly relationship.

2.1. Reception of the word of God by the prophet

The prophet's friendly relationship with God is based on the word of the Lord, which for Jeremiah is an ambivalent experience. Referring to the experience of his calling, during which God puts his words in his mouth (cf. Jer 1:9),¹¹ Jeremiah confesses: "Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word

⁹ Cf. Barbiero 2013, 45.

¹⁰ This list is extended by various exegetes to include other passages in the Book of Jeremiah (e.g. Jer 4:19–21; 8:18–23; etc.). For a discussion of the boundaries of the confessions, see, e.g., Ittmann 1981, 22–25.

¹¹ This position is advocated by: Gerstenberger 1963, 401; Vogels 1982, 38; Bracke 2013, 174; Barbiero 2013, 127. Some commentators link the consumption of God's word mentioned by Jeremiah in 15:16 to the finding of the Torah scroll in the Jerusalem temple in 622 B.C.E. (see Holladay 1987, 458; Diamond 1987, 75–76; Lundbom 1999, 743, among others). The main argument is the passive aspect of the verb *māṣāh* (to find) – the same form appears in 2 Kgs 22:13 and 23:2, where it says that the Book of the Covenant that has been found.

was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer 15:16). The image of Jeremiah eating God’s word makes it clear that prophetic communication presupposes the prophet opening his mouth twice. For Jeremiah to preach the word of God, he must first open his mouth to receive the word and absorb it like food. The metaphor of consuming the word of God is much more elaborated in the narrative of Ezekiel’s call to consume the scroll, which means in practice “to saturate his stomach with it and to fill his bowels with it” (Ezek 3:3). Receiving the word in one’s bowels means more than just listening or obeying. It is to penetrate the innermost parts of the body, at the centre of which is the heart – the organ that shapes man’s thoughts, emotions, and volition (cf. Jer 4:19; Ps 22:15). Such internalization leads to the gradual transformation of the prophet’s body into the word of God.¹² By carrying it within himself, by embodying it, the prophet becomes a living word spoken by God. Such an experience of God’s word brings forth the joy, enthusiasm and happiness to Jeremiah, who experiences a sense of being owned by God, “for I am called by your name, Yahweh” (Jer 15:16).¹³

Joy, however, is not the only emotion that the word of God evokes in Jeremiah. Embracing it within and uniting with it leads the prophet to unite with God, with his thoughts and desires. At the same time, however, Jeremiah experiences social isolation and is at the receiving end of aggression from his hearers. In his lamentation, Jeremiah recognises that the source of it all is Yahweh’s wrath with which he has been filled: “I did not sit in the company of merry-makers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation” (15:17). Jeremiah is not only filled with God’s wrath, he also feels it, lives it, is aware of it, as he confesses in 6:11: “I am full of Yahweh’s wrath.”

2.2. The word communicating God’s emotions to prophet

Jeremiah empathizing with God’s wrath encapsulated in the word is not just some transient feeling that he receives from God. The intensity with which God’s word penetrates the prophet, touches his heart and influences his feelings and

Jeremiah would thus count himself among those who enthusiastically, in a spirit of obedience to God’s word, supported the religious reforms undertaken by King Josiah.

¹² Cf. Pikor 2020, 89.

¹³ The legal connotations of this syntagma account for it being used to express someone’s title to property, as noted in 2 Sam 12:28; Isa 4:1; Ezra 2:61 (cf. Barbier 2013, 124–125).

will which Jeremiah expresses with two metaphors of God's wrath. In his polemic against the false prophets, he uses the image of wine: "My heart is broken within me; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man overcome by wine, because of Yahweh and because of his holy words" (23:9). The metaphor expresses the power of God's word, which penetrates and completely possesses the prophet, so that he has no control over his body. This is not a record of an ecstatic state, as Jeremiah confesses that the word of God causes an inner rift in him (a broken heart), the expression of which is an outwardly discernible trembling of the entire body, trembling with strong emotions (shaking bones).¹⁴ The prophet's feelings connoted by this metaphor have a double dimension, as they are born not only out of the bond lived with God, but also out of solidarity with his people. In his boundless pain and incurable wounds inflicted by God's word (15:18), Jeremiah recognizes the suffering and wounds that afflict his people (14:19).¹⁵ However, when faced with the people's rejection of God's word that calls them to repent, the prophet is profoundly shaken and united in suffering with God, who "sheds tears day and night without ceasing" because of the calamity that will befall his people (14:17).

The second metaphor used by Jeremiah to describe the intensity and power of God's word he experienced is fire: "Then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (20:9). The word that ignites Jeremiah's viscera is identical to the wrath of God. In the very same manner, the prophet had spoken of God's wrath, which, despite his efforts, he could not suppress (6:11).¹⁶ The feelings troubling Jeremiah's heart gave rise to an inner conflict within him since the fire of divine wrath experienced by the prophet is not simply the result of empathising with God. The fury is God's reaction to Israel's disobedience and transgressions, which "ignited the fire of his wrath" (17:4). This wrath is directed not only against the people, but also against Jeremiah, who, in solidarity with his listeners, experiences the effects of God's fury, whose "fire has ignited over thee," namely over the prophet

¹⁴ Cf. Jaworski 2016, 92–95.

¹⁵ Jeremiah's lament in 15:18: "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?" echoes the people's complaint in 14:19: "Why have you struck us down so that there is no healing for us?"

¹⁶ The identity of wrath and the word of God in Jer 6:11 and 20:9 is evidenced by the identical description – in both texts the verbs *lā'āh* (to make an effort) and *kûl* (to hold in) of the prophet's futile efforts to neutralise (kill) the word of God within himself.

and the enemies who reject his word (15:14). At the same time, the words that God directs through Jeremiah to the people communicate the fire of God's fury, which God himself emphasises: "I am now making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them" (5:14). The image of fire metaphorizing the power of God's word spells out God's feelings towards his people, which he wishes to share with the prophet.

Jeremiah's confessions bear witness to the inner conflict which tears the prophet apart between his love for God and for his people. In the last of his confessions recorded in chapter 20, Jeremiah speaks of the peculiar battle he fights with the word of God that ignites his gut like a fire. "I made an effort to suppress it, but I could not" (20,9b), which metaphorically expresses his desire to be silent, to silence the word of God and thus to annihilate it ("If I say, I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot"; 20,9a). These attempts prove unsuccessful. But is this merely a record of the prophet's failure to fight the word of God?

2.3. Prophet as friend empathising with God

The key to understanding the meaning of this statement of Jeremiah is the words with which he opens his final confession. In the translation of the Millennium Bible it reads: "you have enticed me (*pittîtanî*), and I have let myself be enticed (*wā²eppāt*); you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed" (Jer 20:7). The translation of Jeremiah's words depends very much on the interpretation of the first verb *pātāh*, which can be translated as "to court someone's favour, to adore" (Hos 2:16), "to seduce, to entice" (Exod 22:15; Judg 14:15; 16:5; Job 31:9), "to trick, to deceive" (Ps 78:36), "to persuade" (Prov 1:10), "to convince" (1 Kgs 22:20.21; Ezek 14:9). The meaning of the verb is reflected in the noun *pefî*— in the wisdom tradition it describes a young man who is inexperienced, lacking in wisdom and thus easily seduced, but also capable of learning (e.g. Prov 14:15.18; 22:3; 27:12).¹⁷ This is how Jeremiah saw himself at the time of his calling, when he admitted to being "a boy who cannot speak" (Jer 1:6). Experiencing God's wrath within himself, Jeremiah feels like a young man seduced and spellbound by the word of God. The picture becomes clearer if we recall the possible use

¹⁷ Koehler, Baumgartner 1995, 70.

of the verb *pāṭāh* to refer to a young girl who may be seduced and induced into a sexual act (Exod 22:15). In this context, some commentators see in the verb *pāṭāh* an accusation of sorts – the prophet accuses God of seducing him and forcibly taking advantage of him.¹⁸ However, one cannot overlook the text of Hos 2:16, in which God also expressed himself using the verb *pāṭāh* towards Israel: “Therefore I will allure her (*māpātte^{yhā}*), and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart.” God’s intention and strategy encapsulated in this utterance can also be applied to his relationship with Jeremiah: God speaks to his heart, appeals to his feelings and seduces him with words of love so that he submits to God’s word and his affection. Jeremiah “allows himself to be seduced” (Jer 20:9), and this is not always a negative experience if one recalls his earlier confession concerning his encounter with the word of God: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart” (Jer 15:16).

The emotions that Jeremiah experiences with the word of God are therefore ambivalent, triggering an inner conflict and tearing him apart between love for God and love for his people. By directing his word to the prophet God invites Jeremiah to experience the divine feeling of love towards Israel, whose conduct stirs God’s sorrow and suffering but also anger. This complex situation of Jeremiah is explained by Abraham Heschel with the concept of the prophet as *homo sympathetikos*.¹⁹ God in his word communicates all his feelings to the prophet so that the prophet “must learn to sense God’s feelings; his eternal love for Israel [...]. The prophet must learn to feel for himself God’s intimate attachment to Israel; he must not only know about it, but experience it from within.”²⁰ Understanding the divine *pathos* of love and wrath is done by way of empathising and sympathy for God. “To be a prophet means to identify one’s concern with that of God.”²¹ Sympathy takes the form of Jeremiah’s dialogue with the word of God, which, accepted and assimilated by him, shapes his thinking, sensing, perception of reality, and volition. The prophet is God’s messenger insofar as he empathises in sync with God. The function of being a messenger is therefore conditioned by friendship between God and prophet, if one accepts the understanding of

¹⁸ Cf. Carroll 1986, 398; Holladay 1987, 552; Popielewski 2003, 285–286; Barbiero 2013, 250.

¹⁹ Heschel 1962, 395–397.

²⁰ Heschel 1962, 149.

²¹ Heschel 1962, 395.

friendship as *idem velle atque idem nolle* (to want the same thing and to reject the same thing).²² By remaining in friendship with God and empathizing with him, the prophet is sensitive to the divine understanding of events, which he translates into the prophetic word communicated to the people.

3. The written word: prophet as witness

The role of a prophet as God's messenger is based on the bond of filiality and friendship between the prophet and God. Ultimately, the word of God communicated by the prophet takes the shape of a written word – a prophetic book. The prophetic communication through scripture translates into yet another model of inspiration, in which the prophet acts as witness to the word of God. Scripture as a testament presupposes inspiration of not just the prophet, but all those who contributed to the canonical prophetic book. Testimony to such form of prophetic communication, which completes the whole phenomenon of prophetic inspiration, is provided in chapter 36 of the book of Jeremiah. It recounts a particular moment in Jeremiah's life when, unable to act directly as a messenger, he communicates the word of God through writing. This communication is composed of three moments: the writing down of Jeremiah's words by Baruch (36:1–8); the reading of the script (36:5–26);²³ the re-writing of Jeremiah's words by Baruch after the scroll had been burned by King Jehoiakim (36:27–32). In these three moments, different witnesses to the word come to the fore: a prophet – scribe – reader, allowing this model of inspiration to be termed 'attested testimony'.²⁴

²² Salustius 2006, 20.

²³ It takes place three times on the same day under changing circumstances and in front of different audiences: first Baruch reads the scroll in the hall of Gemariah in front of the entire people (36:10–14), then he reads it a second time in the chamber of Chancellor Elisham in front of the leaders gathered there (36:15–20), and finally the third time the scroll is read by Jehudi in front of King Jehoiakim in his winter residence (36:21–26)

²⁴ The notion of "attested testimony," referring to the concept of testimony proposed by Paul Ricoeur, was adapted to the process of the creation of the prophetic books by Gianantonio Borgonovo (cf. Borgonovo 1988, 312–316; 2001, 55–59).

3.1. Prophet's testimony

The events described in Jer 36 take place – according to the Masoretic text – over the course of at least one year. God entrusts Jeremiah with the task of writing down the scroll in the year 605 (36:1), while the prophet instructs Baruch to read the scroll in the Jerusalem temple, which takes place at the end of 604 (36:9). The re-writing of the scroll happens immediately after the king burnt it; however, the closing verse of the narrative mentions the scroll being further completed at a later time (36:32).

The question of the material the scroll was made of remains a speculation. The phrase *məḡillaṭ-sēper* is a pleonasm, since in the narrative, apart from verse 4, the scroll is referred to either as *məḡillā^h* or as *sēper*. In adverbial connection, the term *sēper* indicates a writing purpose of the scroll (*məḡillā^h*), which speaks in favour of the translation “writing scroll.”²⁵ Baruch inscribes the text in ink in columns (36:18) on either a papyrus scroll or one made of leather. Papyrus seems a more likely material considering the ease with which King Jehoiakim cuts the scroll with a scribe's knife every three or four columns, tossing the cut sections in the fire (cf. 36:23).

We are unable to determine the precise content of the scroll, although the command that God directs to Jeremiah is specific: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day” (36:2). The prophet must write down all the words that God addressed to him from his appointment in the year 627 until now, the year 605. Commentators usually connect this first scroll with chapters 1–20 of the canonical Book of Jeremiah, although more precise identification of the first written oracles in the present form of the book is impossible.²⁶ The scroll could not have been too extensive, since a year later it is read three times in one day.

Jeremiah must therefore write down all the words God had spoken to him over the last thirteen years (36:2). The time span alone rules out the likelihood of the scroll being a stenographic record of all these words of God. It is also difficult to imagine that Jeremiah was able to reproduce from memory the exact content

²⁵ Cf. Leuchter 2018, 12.

²⁶ Cf. the discussion of the content of the *Urrrole* in: Lundbom 1999, 588–589. The question of the content of the first scroll remains secondary to the statement in 36:32 that the rewritten scroll, expanded to include an oracle against Jehoiakim (36:28–31), underwent further additions until it took the form now known.

of the oracles he delivered, with all the words of God he absorbed. Essentially, the written word was meant to express the purpose of Jeremiah's preaching, which was to call the people to repentance (36:3).²⁷ Although Jeremiah is directly instructed to write down these words, he nevertheless delegates this task to the scribe Baruch, who records them "from [his] mouth": "Baruch wrote down under dictation from the mouth (*mippî*) of Jeremiah all the words of Yahweh which he had spoken to him" (36:4). The idiom "write from someone's mouth" is usually translated as "to take dictation."²⁸ This emphasises that the word that was penned by the scribe is the same word that Yahweh put into the mouth of the prophet (cf. Jer 1:9).²⁹

3.2. Disciple's testimony

In the record of Jeremiah's testimony, a key role is played by Baruch, who in 36:26.32 is referred to as the scribe (*sōpēr*). In ancient times, scribes belonged to the intellectual elite of a nation.³⁰ Among them were officials, who performed various administrative, political, military and educational duties at the royal court. The double name by which the person of Baruch ("Baruch son of Neriah") is invoked attests to his descent from an established family of writers. Seraiah, Baruch's brother, is the scribe acting as chief quartermaster at Zedekiah's court. It is through him that Jeremiah's oracles addressed against Babylonia will reach the exiles in Babylonia in 594 (cf. 51:59–64). Baruch appears to be one of the king's scribes, as one can infer from the friendly manner the high-ranking royal officials treat him when he reads Jeremiah's scroll to them³¹, and they also protect his life when Baruch faces potential threat from the king (cf. 36:19).

²⁷ Confirmation of the purpose of Jeremiah's prophetic communication thus defined can be found in his words delivered earlier in the temple (cf. 7:3–7; 26:3)

²⁸ In the light of Jer 36:18, this idiom expresses the idea that Jeremiah personally – "with his mouth" – conveyed to Baruch the words he was writing down on the scroll.

²⁹ From the command to write down the scroll that God directs to Jeremiah in 36:2, it is clear that the writing coming from the scribe is a faithful and complete record of the prophetic word, both from the perspective of content ("all the words that I have spoken to you"), addressees ("against Israel and Judah and all the nations") and the time of its delivery ("from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today"); cf. Bovati 2008, 154.

³⁰ Cf. Perdue 2007, 260–271; Leuchter 2018, 3–6.

³¹ This is indicated by the polite phrases they use to address him, in 36:15–17

In the book of Jeremiah, Baruch first appears in 32:9–15 in connection with Jeremiah's purchase of a field in Anathoth. Baruch's role goes beyond that of a mere notary confirming in writing the effected transaction. For Jeremiah entrusts Baruch with the document of sale, making him, as it were, the executor of his will. The relationship between Jeremiah and Baruch is therefore not purely formal. Baruch, by writing down Jeremiah's words, takes action that allows him to be described as a disciple of the prophet. It is not just a matter of Baruch writing down Jeremiah's words. Jeremiah is forbidden to enter the Jerusalem temple (36:5),³² so he commissions Baruch to go there and "read to the people listening in the temple the words of Yahweh from the scroll which he had written down under his dictation" (36:6). The act of reading the prophetic writing takes on the character of a disciple's testimony, which, on the one hand, confirms the reliability of the scroll as a record of Jeremiah's words (cf. 36:17–18) and, on the other, attests the words written on the scroll as consistent with the words God had addressed to Jeremiah earlier. Therefore, Baruch, when recounting the event, refers to the words read from Jeremiah's scroll as both "the words of Yahweh" (36:8.11) and "the words of Jeremiah" (36:10).

The disciple bearing witness by the act of reading is not merely a faithful reproduction of the written prophetic text. The voice of the prophet resounds in the voice of the disciple.³³ The very act of reading the text is already an interpretation of the text. The word of God attested by Jeremiah now resounds in the testimony of Baruch, who proclaims it publicly to the people and then to the leaders. The disciple's proclamation of God's word read from the scroll has the same purpose as the prophet's earlier proclamation of God's word – namely, to convert its hearers from their perverse behaviour (cf. 36:3.7). Essentially, the disciple's testimony is to make the hearers decide about the prophetic word, and thus to embrace it and spread on the prophet's testimony. Those holding various offices in the King Jehoiakim's court, scribes and such, on hearing the testimony read to them from the scroll, do precisely that. The first to bear witness is Micaiah from the Shaphan's family, who is recounting "all the words of Yahweh heard from the book" read by Baruch in the temple (36:11) to the leaders gathered in the chamber of chancellor Elisham (36:13). When Baruch then reads out

³² The ban probably follows a lawsuit brought against Jeremiah after his earlier speech in the temple (Jer 26).

³³ Bovati 2008, 162.

Jeremiah's scroll directly to them, they take on his testimony further, passing it on to the king (36:20).³⁴

The reaction of the king and his advisors to their testimony, however, will be negative. The scroll is read to the king not by Baruch but by another scribe, Yehudi, but this testimony is rejected by King Jehoiakim. Unlike the leaders, the king and his courtiers were "not frightened" by the words they heard (cf. 36:14 and 36:24). Their reaction to Jeremiah's scroll contrasts with King Josiah's attitude towards the Torah scroll found in the temple of 622. When the words of the Torah were read to Josiah, he "tore his robes" (2 Kgs 22:11–13). Meanwhile, Jehoiakim, hearing God's words read from Jeremiah's scroll, tears not his robes but the scroll to burn it in the fire (Jer 36:24).³⁵ Thus, on the one hand, we have hearers who accept the "attested testimony" of God's word and, on the other, those who try to break the continuity of that testimony.

3.3. Reader's testimony

The story of Jeremiah's first scroll as presented in Jer 36 describes the growing opposition to prophecy, which first tries to force the prophet into silence (36:5), then persecutes the witnesses communicating the word of God through the writing (36:19.26), and finally destroys it definitively by burning the scroll (36:23). However, the story does not end here, but is taken up again from the beginning. For the Lord God instructs Jeremiah to write "another scroll," and the prophet once again engages Baruch (36:28.32).

This second scroll contains "all the words that were in the first scroll burned by Jehoiakim" (36:28). There is thus a re-creation, a reproduction of the word that the king wanted to destroy. Jeremiah re-creates in his memory the words received from God, while Baruch re-writes them "from the mouth" of the prophet (36:32). What occurs is a kind of resurrection of the prophetic writing that had previously wanted to be put to death. However, this second writing is not identical to the first, as it accounts for the fact that the king had burned the first

³⁴ The king's notification of Jeremiah's scroll is interpreted as a result of their dismay at the king's predictable negative reaction to the prophet's words. However, the fact that they protect Jeremiah and Baruch (36:19), as well as depositing the scroll in the chancellor's chamber (36:20), demonstrates that they recognised the reliability of God's words recorded in Jeremiah's scroll; cf. Holladay 1987, 262.

³⁵ Cf. Isbell 1978; Ferry 2012, 294–296.

scroll. The purpose of this new writing is to foreshadow the calamity that God would bring upon the king and the people as punishment for their demonstrated disobedience to the word given in the first scroll (36:31).

The story closes with a sentence that opens up new perspectives on scripturally mediated prophetic communication: “Many similar words were added to them” (36:32). In the first instance, this sentence alludes to the long and complex redaction process that resulted in the Book of Jeremiah as it stands today.³⁶ The process of rescripting the first scroll initiated by Baruch was therefore continued by others. Like him, they take up the testimony of the word of God communicated by Jeremiah and attest to its credibility by adding words “similar to those” which do not change the prophetic message but supplement it. The changes they make are an expression of the writer’s “creative fidelity to the Word” which, handed down by the prophet and attested by the disciple, can give meaning to new events read in its light.³⁷

The course of the process of editing and transmission of the text that we have in the book of Jeremiah remains debatable. Whatever its shape, the process was a continuation of the prophetic communication initiated by the first scroll of Jeremiah. In this model of prophetic inspiration, the scripture replaces the prophet. The prophet’s witness to the word received from God, attested by the writings noted down by the disciple (scribe), transcends the time and place of the prophet’s life.³⁸ Thus the string of witnesses to the word of God communicated by the prophet continues. Each act of reading the prophetic writing recreates the original experience of the word that God addressed to Jeremiah and through him to individual listeners. They have been replaced by new readers who are invited to take up this attested testimony and, as new witnesses, attest the prophetic word to their reliability.³⁹

4. Relational dynamics of prophetic inspiration

In *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture* the Pontifical Biblical Commission proposed a phenomenological approach to the question of inspiration, perceived

³⁶ Cf. Leuchter 2013, 276.

³⁷ Bovati 2008, 157.

³⁸ Cf. Toorn 2007, 182; Hartenstein 2017, 77–78. 89.

³⁹ Cf. Borgonovo 1998, 313–315.

in relational terms. An analysis of biblical testimonies about the bond between biblical authors and God leads to the conclusion that inspiration is “a special relationship with God (or with Jesus), within which he gives the human author to speak – through his Spirit– what he himself wishes to communicate to men” (ITSS, No. 52). In the case of prophetic inspiration, this special bond between the prophet and God assumes, according to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the prophet being a messenger of God. This view of biblical inspiration is as appropriate, except that it does not go beyond the conventional language of prophetic formulas and stories of prophetic calling. If God gives himself to the prophet in the word, then the question of the bond between the prophet and God needs considering the testimony in prophetic books about the relationship of the prophet to *Dei Verbum* that is the object of his communication. Particular in this context is the testimony of the book of Jeremiah about Jeremiah's inner experience of the word of God and the transition in his communication from the spoken word to the word written. Reading of these texts allows for a deeper understanding of the relational nature of prophetic and, consequently, biblical inspiration.

Firstly, Jeremiah's role as God's messenger is rooted in his filial relationship to God, who reveals himself to him as father in the word of his calling. The “appointing” of the prophet is secondary to God “knowing” of him as a son whom he “feeds” with his word. This metaphor relates not only to the content of the prophetic word, but also to its quality, especially in terms of competence, normativity and authority that come from God.

Secondly, the metaphor of the prophet consuming the word of God reveals the principle of prophetic communication, which is based on the prophet's opening his mouth twice: first to receive it, to assimilate it, internalise it, embody it – and not only in his words but also in his body – and then to pass it on to those to whom he is sent. This dynamic of prophetic word requires interpretation, as the prophet receiving God's word incorporates it into his own cognitive, cultural and linguistic structures. Interpreting the prophetic word therefore requires reaching to the divine that is in it.

Furthermore, embodying of God's word in a shroud of the human word is not the result of a purely intellectual (understanding the word) or volitional action (obedience to the word). God's word received by Jeremiah leads him to empathise with God's pathos of love, but also of anger. By opening himself to God's feelings, by sharing his concern for the people, the prophet enters a friendly relationship with God. Without empathising with God, the word of the prophet

will remain a dead letter, devoid of God's Spirit, unable to speak to the hearts of his hearers.

What is more, the prophet shares his filial and friendly experience of God's word through testimony. As God's messenger, Jeremiah bears witness to how God speaks through him to specific audiences, thus inviting them into the same dialogue of love in which he participates as the son and friend of God. The prophet's testimony transcends the time and place of his life thanks to his disciples, who, by writing down the divine message, were thus included in the process of prophetic communication initiated with Jeremiah. The fruit of their attested testimony is the prophetic book bearing the name of Jeremiah.

Finally, the book of Jeremiah, like any other prophetic book, is the fruit of the prophetic communication not only of Jeremiah, but of all those persons unknown to us – except for Baruch – who engaged in his testimony. Attesting of this testimony up until its final form of the Book of Jeremiah was only possible through inspiration understood as “the gift of personal relationship with God”, which the prophet experienced as a son, friend and witness of God.

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