

## QUESTION 174

### The Division of Prophecy

Next we have to consider the division of prophecy. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) How is prophecy divided into its species? (2) Is a prophecy higher if it is not accompanied by a vision in the imagination? (3) What are the different degrees of prophecy? (4) Was Moses the greatest of the prophets? (5) Can someone who has the beatific vision of God be a prophet (*utrum aliquis comprehensor possit esse propheta*)? (6) Has prophecy increased over the course of time?

#### Article 1

##### Is prophecy appropriately divided by a certain Gloss on Matthew 1:23?

It seems that prophecy is not appropriately divided by the Gloss in question on Matthew 1:23 (“Behold, the virgin shall be with child ...”), where it says, “One sort of prophecy proceeds from *God’s predestination* and is such that it is necessary for it turn out true in all respects, in the sense that it is fulfilled without our choice—as, for instance, the prophecy that we are now talking about. A second sort of prophecy proceeds from *God’s foreknowledge*, and our choice is mixed in with it. And a third sort of prophecy is called a *threat (comminatio)*, which is a sign of God’s reproach (*signum divinae animadversionis*).”

**Objection 1:** What follows upon *every* prophecy should not be posited as one of the component parts that divide prophecy. But every prophecy is in accord with God’s foreknowledge, since, as a Gloss on Isaiah 38:1 says, “The prophets read the book of foreknowledge.” Therefore, it seems that *what accords with foreknowledge* should not be posited as one of the species of prophecy.

**Objection 2:** Just as something is prophesied as a *threat*, so, too, something is prophesied as a *promise*, and the two alternate with one another (*et utraque variaturi*). For instance, Jeremiah 18:7-8 says, “I will suddenly speak against a nation and against a kingdom, to root it out and to pull it down, and to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken repents of its evil, I also will repent”—and this involves a prophecy of *threat*. And then (Jeremiah 18:9-18) he adds a prophecy of *promise*: “I will suddenly speak of a nation and of a kingdom, to build it up and to plant it. If it does evil in my sight ... I will repent of the good that I have said I will to do for it.” Therefore, a prophecy of *promise* should be posited in the same what that a prophecy of *threat* is promised.

**Objection 3:** In *Etymologia* Isidore says, “There are seven kinds (*genera*) of prophecy. The first is an *ecstasy*, which is the transport of the mind, in the way that Peter saw a vessel descending from heaven with various animals. The second kind is a *vision*, as we read in Isaiah 6:1, where he says, ‘I saw the Lord sitting,’ etc. The third kind is a *dream*, in the way that Jacob saw the ladder in a dream. The fourth kind is through a *cloud*, in the way that God spoke to Moses. The fifth kind is a *voice from heaven*, like the voice that called to Abraham saying: ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy’ (Genesis 22:11). The sixth kind is *receiving a parable*, as in the case of Balaam (Numbers 23:7 and 24:15). The seventh kind is *being filled with the Holy Spirit*, as in the case of almost all the prophets. He also posits three types of visions, one in accord with bodily eyes; a second in accord with the image of a spirit; and a third through a mental intuition. But none of these expressed in the division laid out above. There, that division is insufficient.

**But contrary to this** is the authority of Jerome, whose Gloss this is said to be.

**I respond:** In moral matters the species and acts are distinguished by their objects. Now the object of a prophecy is that which exists in God’s cognition and which surpasses the human faculty of cognition (*id quod est in cognitione divina supra humanam facultatem existens*). And so according to the first division noted above, prophecy is divided into different species according to the differences among the things that exist in God’s cognition.

Now it was explained above (q. 171, a. 6) that there are two ways in which the future exists in God’s cognition:

(a) In one way, *insofar as it exists in its causes*, and on this score one posits the *prophecy of threat*, which is not always fulfilled. Instead, through this sort of prophecy what is antecedently pronounced is the ordering of causes to effects, which is sometimes impeded when other causes supervene.

(b) In the other way, God foreknows future things *in themselves*—either (i) *as they are going to be brought about by Himself*, and with respect to these things there is the *prophecy of predestination*, since, according to Damascene, “God predestines those things that are not in our power,” or (ii) *as they are going to be brought about through man’s free choice*, and this is the *prophecy of foreknowledge*. The latter can have to do with both good things and bad things—something that does not happen with the prophecy of predestination, which has to do with good things only.

And since predestination falls under foreknowledge, in a Gloss at the beginning of the Psaltery there are only two species of prophecy posited, viz., *prophecy with respect to foreknowledge* and *prophecy with respect to threat*.

**Reply to objection 1:** Properly speaking, ‘foreknowledge’ means precognition of future events insofar as they exist *in themselves*, and this is the sense in which it is posited as a species of prophecy.

However, when ‘foreknowledge’ is said with respect to future events regardless of whether they are future insofar as they exist in themselves or future insofar as they exist in their causes, then foreknowledge applies in general to *every* species of prophecy.

**Reply to objection 2:** *Prophecy of promise* is included under *prophecy of threat*, since the same sort of truth is found in both of them. Yet the species is better named by *threat* because God is more prone to mitigate a punishment than to withdraw promised benefits.

**Reply to objection 3:** Isidore is here dividing prophecy according to the *modes of prophesying*, which can be distinguished either (a) *according to a man’s cognitive powers*, viz., the senses, the imagination, and the intellect, and in this way there are three kinds of *vision*—which he posits along with Augustine in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12—or (b) *according to differences in the prophetic influence*, which, with respect to the illumination of the *intellect*, is signified as *being filled with the Holy Spirit*, which he posits in the *seventh* place.

Now as regards the imprinting of forms in the *imagination*, he posits three kinds, viz., *dreams*, which he posits in the *third* place; *visions*, which are brought about in a waking state with respect to some sort of common thing, which he posits in the *second* place; and *ecstasy*, which occurs through the elevation of the mind to certain higher things, which he posits in the *first* place.

Now as regards *sensible signs*, he posits three kinds. For a sensible sign is either (a) an exterior corporeal thing that is apparent to vision, like a *cloud*, which he posits in the *fourth* place, or (b) a well-formed exterior sound that is sent down for a man’s hearing, which he posits in the *fifth* place, or (c) a sound formed by a man that has a likeness to a thing, and this involves a *parable*, which he posits in the *sixth* place.

## Article 2

### Is a prophecy that involves both an intellectual vision and a vision in the imagination more excellent than a prophecy that involves just an intellectual vision?

It seems that a prophecy that involves both an intellectual vision and a vision in the imagination is more excellent than a prophecy that involves just an intellectual vision:

**Objection 1:** In *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12 Augustine says—and this is found in a Gloss on 1 Corinthians 14:2 (“His spirit utters mysteries”)—“The one who sees *images* of the things signified by his spirit alone is less of a prophet; the one who is endowed only with an *understanding* of those things is more of a prophet; but the one who excels in both is a prophet most of all.” But this belongs to a prophet who has an intellectual vision together with a vision in the imagination. Therefore, a prophecy of this sort

is higher.

**Objection 2:** The power of a thing (*virtus alicuius rei*) is greater to the extent that it extends to greater distances. But as was explained above (q. 173, a. 2), the prophetic light mainly pertains to the mind. Therefore, a prophecy that flows all the way to the imagination seems to be more perfect than a prophecy that exists in the intellect alone.

**Objection 3:** In his prologue to the books of Kings, Jerome distinguishes the *prophets* from the *sacred writers* (*distinguit prophetas contra hagiographos*). All of those whom he calls prophets, viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others of this sort, had vision in the imagination together with intellectual vision, but not those who are called sacred writers in the sense that they were writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, e.g., Job, David, Solomon, and others of this sort. Therefore, it seems that those individuals who have vision in the imagination together with intellectual vision are more properly called prophets than those individuals who have only intellectual vision.

**Objection 4:** In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 1 Dionysius says, “It is impossible for the divine ray to shine on us unless we are screened all around by a multitude of sacred veils.” But prophetic revelation is effected by an emission of divine rays. Therefore, it seems that it cannot exist without veils made of images.

**But contrary to this:** A Gloss at the beginning of the Psalter says, “This is the mode of prophecy that is more worthy than the rest, viz., when an individual prophesies solely by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, without the exterior assistance of any deed, word, vision, or dream.”

**I respond:** The excellence (*dignitas*) of the means to an end is mainly taken from the end. Now the end of prophecy is to manifest some truth that lies beyond man. Hence, a prophecy is more excellent to the extent that a manifestation of this sort is more powerful. But it is clear that a manifestation of divine truth that is effected by the bare contemplation of the truth itself is more powerful than a manifestation of divine truth that is effected under the likeness of corporeal things, since the former comes closer to the vision which belongs to heaven and by which truth is seen in the essence of God. And so it is that a prophecy through which a supernatural truth is seen purely as an intellectual truth is more excellent than a prophecy in which a supernatural truth is made manifest through a likeness of corporeal things by means of a vision in the imagination.

And from this the prophet’s mind is likewise shown to be more sublime—just as, in the case of human teaching, a student is shown to have a better intellect if he is able to grasp an intelligible truth that is propounded barebones (*nude*) by the teacher than if he needs to be led by the hand toward understanding by means of sensible examples. Hence, in commending the prophet in 2 Kings 23:3, David says, “The strong one of Israel has spoken to me.” And later he adds, “Like the light of the dawn when the sun is rising, he shines without clouds in the morning.”

**Reply to objection 1:** When a supernatural truth is going to be revealed through corporeal likenesses, then a prophet who has both, viz., an intellectual light and a vision in the imagination, is greater than a prophet who has only one or the other, since his prophecy is more complete. And this is what Augustine is talking about.

By contrast, a prophecy in which bare intelligible truth is revealed is the greatest of them all.

**Reply to objection 2:** It is one thing to pass judgment on things that are sought for their own sake, and it is another to pass judgment on things that are sought for the sake of something else.

For in the case of things that are sought for their own sake, an agent’s power is greater to the extent that it extends to more things and to more distant things—in the way that a physician who can heal more individuals, and who can heal individuals who are more distant from health, is considered a better physician.

On the other hand, in the case of things that are sought only for the sake of something else, an agent seems to be more powerful to the extent that it can arrive at its intended end by means of fewer things and by means of things that are closer by—in the way that a physician is praised if he can heal the sick through fewer means and through means that are easier for the sick to bear.

Now in the case of a prophetic cognition, a vision in the imagination is required not for its own sake, but for the sake of the manifestation of an intelligible truth. And so a prophecy is greater to the extent that it has less need of visions in the imagination.

**Reply to objection 3:** Nothing prevents it from being the case that a thing is better absolutely speaking and yet receives the predication of something less properly—in the way that the cognition that belongs to the blessed in heaven is more noble than the cognition that belongs to those ‘on the way’ (*sicut cognitio patriae est nobilior quam cognatione viae*), and yet the latter is more properly called ‘faith’, because the name ‘faith’ implies an incompleteness of cognition. Similarly, ‘prophecy’ implies a sort of obscurity and a distance from intelligible truth. And so even assuming that the same truth is being revealed in both cases, individuals who see it through a vision in the imagination are more properly called prophets, even though the prophecy that comes through an intellectual vision of it is more noble.

However, if an intellectual light is divinely infused into someone not in order for him to have cognition of anything supernatural, but in order for him to *judge* with divine certitude what can be known by human reason, then an intellectual prophecy of this sort falls short of a prophecy that involves a vision in the imagination leading to supernatural truth; all who are numbered in the order of prophets have had prophecies of this latter sort, and they are specifically called prophets because they were engaged in the role of a prophet and so spoke in the person of the Lord, saying to the people, “Thus says the Lord.” Those who composed the sacred writings did not do this. Most of them were speaking more frequently of what could be known by human reason, and they were speaking in their own person and not in the person of God—yet with the assistance of the divine light.

**Reply to objection 4:** In the present life, illumination by divine rays is not effected without the veil of all kinds of images, since it is natural to a man in the state of the present life not to have understanding in the absence of images. However, sometimes the images that are abstracted *in the common manner* are sufficient, and no *divinely procured* vision in the imagination is needed. And in such a case a prophetic revelation is said to be effected without a vision in the imagination.

### Article 3

#### Can the degrees of prophecy be distinguished by reference to vision in the imagination?

It seems that the degrees of prophecy cannot be distinguished by reference to vision in the imagination:

**Objection 1:** The degree of a thing takes into account what exists for its own sake and not what exists for the sake of something else. But as was explained above (a. 2), in the case of prophecy, what is sought for its own sake is *intellectual* vision, whereas what is sought for the sake of something else is vision in the *imagination*. Therefore, it seems that the degrees of prophecy should be distinguished solely by reference to intellectual vision and not by reference to vision in the imagination.

**Objection 2:** It seems that there is a single degree of prophecy for each prophet. But revelation to a single prophet is effected by diverse visions in the imagination. Therefore, the diversity of visions in the imagination does not diversify the degrees of prophecy.

**Objection 3:** According to a Gloss at the beginning of the Psalter, prophecy consists “in words and deeds, in dreams and visions.” Therefore, the degrees of prophecy should not be distinguished more by reference to vision in the imagination—to which “dreams and visions” pertain—than by reference to “words and deeds.”

**But contrary to this:** The middle term diversifies the degrees of cognition; for instance, scientific knowledge *propter quid* (*scientia propter quid*), because it involves a more noble middle term, is higher than scientific knowledge *quia* (*scientia quia*) or, again, higher than opinion (*opinio*). But in the case of prophetic cognition, a vision in the imagination is a sort of middle term. Therefore, the degrees of

prophecy should be determined by reference to vision in the imagination.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 2), a prophecy in which some supernatural truth is revealed by an intelligible light through the mediation of a vision in the imagination occupies a middle degree between (a) a prophecy in which a supernatural truth is revealed without a vision in the imagination and (b) a prophecy in which a man is directed by an intelligible light through the mediation of a vision in the imagination to have cognition of something, or to do something, that pertains to the communal life of human beings (*ad humanam conversationem*).

Now cognition is more proper to prophecy than action is. And so the lowest degree of prophecy occurs when an individual is moved by an interior instinct to do certain things exteriorly, in the way that it is said of Samson in Judges 15:14 that “the spirit of the Lord came strongly upon him, and as flax is wont to be consumed at the approach of fire, so the bands with which he was bound were broken and loosed.”

Again, the second degree of prophecy occurs when an individual is illuminated by an interior light to have cognition of things that do not yet exceed the limits of human cognition, in the way that it is said of Solomon in 3 Kings 4:32-33 that “he uttered parables ... and spoke of trees—from the cedar that grows in Lebanon all the way down to the hyssop that springs out of walls—and he taught about beasts and birds and reptiles and fish.” And all of this came from divine inspiration, for it had been said before this (3 Kings 4:29) that “God gave wisdom to Solomon and prudence beyond measure.”

Still, these two degrees fall short of prophecy properly speaking, since they do not attain to supernatural truth.

Now prophecy in which a supernatural truth is made manifest through a vision in the imagination is divided, first, by the difference between a *dream*, which occurs in sleep, and a *vision*, which occurs in the waking state. The latter belongs to a higher degree of prophecy, since a prophetic light that draws a soul occupied with sensible things in the waking state toward supernatural things seems to have more power than a prophetic light that finds a soul in the sleeping state already withdrawn from sensible things.

The degrees of prophecy are divided, second, with respect to the expression of the image-signs by which intelligible truth is expressed. And since the expressed signs of intelligible truth are especially words, there seems to be a higher degree of prophecy when a prophet, either in his sleep or in a waking state, *hears words* that express intelligible truth than when he *sees things* that signify truth, in the way that the seven full ears of corn signified seven years of plenty (Genesis 41:22-26). Again, in the case of these latter signs, a prophecy seems higher to the extent that the signs are more explicit, in the way that Jeremiah sees the burning of the city under the likeness of a boiling cauldron (Jeremiah 1:13).

Third, there is a higher degree of prophecy when the prophet not only sees signs of words or deeds, but also sees, either in sleep or in the waking state, someone speaking to him or pointing to something, since the prophet’s mind is thereby shown to be closer to the revealing cause.

Fourth, the height of a degree of prophecy can also be taken from the status of the one who is seen. For the degree of prophecy is higher if the one who is speaking or pointing is seen, either in sleep or in a waking state, in the likeness of an angel than if he is seen in the likeness of a man—and higher still if he is seen, either in sleep or in the waking state, in the likeness of God—this in accord with Isaiah 6:1 (“I saw the Lord sitting ...”).

However, higher than all these grades is the *third genus* of prophecy, in which intelligible and supernatural truth is shown without any vision in the imagination. But as has been explained (a. 2), this exceeds the nature of prophecy properly speaking. And so it follows that the degrees of prophecy are properly speaking distinguished by reference to visions in the imagination.

**Reply to objection 1:** The distinction among intelligible lights can be known by us only insofar as they are judged through sensible signs or signs in the imagination. And so the differences among intelligible lights depends on the diversity of things that are imagined.

**Reply to objection 2:** As was explained above (q. 171, a. 2), prophecy exists not in the manner of an immanent habit, but rather in the manner of a transitory passion. Hence, there is nothing absurd about

prophetic revelation being effected at different times according to diverse degrees in one and the same prophet.

**Reply to objection 3:** The “words and deeds” that are mentioned in this passage are relevant not to prophetic *revelation* but to prophetic *pronouncement*, which is effected in accord with the disposition of those to whom what has been revealed to the prophet is announced. And this happens sometimes through words and sometimes through deeds. But as was explained above (a. 1), pronouncement and the working of miracles are related to prophecy as things that follow upon it (*consequenter se habent ad prophetiam*).

#### Article 4

##### Was Moses the most excellent of all the prophets?

It seems that Moses was not the most excellent of all the prophets (*non fuerit excellentior omnibus prophetis*):

**Objection 1:** A Gloss at the beginning of the Psalter says, “David is called the prophet because of his excellence.” Therefore, Moses was not the most excellent of all.

**Objection 2:** Greater miracles were worked by Joshua, who, as Joshua 10:12-13 reports, made the sun and moon stand still, and by Isaiah, who, as Isaiah 38:8 reports, made the sun go backwards, than by Moses, who divided the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21). Again, also by Elijah, of whom it is said in Ecclesiasticus 48:4-5, “Who has the right to boast like you, who raised a dead man from the depths?” Therefore, it is not the case that Moses was the most excellent of the prophets.

**Objection 3:** Matthew 11:11 says, “Among those born of women none has arisen greater than John the Baptist.” Therefore, Moses was not more excellent than all the prophets.

**But contrary to this:** Deuteronomy 34:10 says, “Since that time there has not arisen a prophet in Israel like unto Moses.”

**I respond:** Even though other prophets might have been greater than Moses in some respect or other, Moses was greater than all of them absolutely speaking. For as is clear from what has been said (a. 3 and q. 171, a. 1), in the case of prophecy the things to consider are (a) *cognition*, with respect to both intellectual vision and also vision in the imagination, (b) *pronouncement*, and (c) *confirmation by way of miracles*.

Thus Moses was more excellent than the others, first, *with respect to intellectual vision*, because, as Augustine explains in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12, he saw God’s essence itself in the same way that Paul did in his rapture. Hence, Numbers 12:8 says that “plainly, and not by riddles, does he see God.”

Second, *with respect to vision in the imagination*, which he had, as it were, at will—not only hearing words, but also seeing the speaker under the appearance of God, and this not only in the sleeping state but also in the waking state. Hence, Exodus 33:11 says, “The Lord spoke to him face to face, as a man is wont to speak with his friend.”

Third, *with respect to pronouncement*, since Moses spoke to the whole nation of believers in the person of God, proposing the Law at the beginning, whereas other prophets spoke to the nation in the person of God in order to induce them to obey the Law of Moses—this according to Malachi 4:4 (“Remember the Law of Moses, my servant”).

Fourth, *with respect to the working of miracles*, which he performed on a whole nation of non-believers. This is why Deuteronomy 34:10-11 says, “And since that time there has not arisen a prophet in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which He sent him to do in the land of Egypt—to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to his whole land.”

**Reply to objection 1:** The prophecy of David comes close to the vision of Moses *with respect to intellectual vision*, since both received the revelation of intelligible and supernatural truth without a vision in the imagination. But Moses’s vision was more excellent *with respect to cognition of the*

*divinity*—even though David knew and expressed more fully the mystery of the incarnation of Christ.

**Reply to objection 2:** The signs of the prophets in question were greater as regards *the substance of the deed*, but the miracles of Moses were greater as regards *the manner in which they were done*, since they were performed on a whole nation.

**Reply to objection 3:** John [the Baptist] belongs to the New Testament, the ministers of which, as is shown in 2 Corinthians 3:7ff., take precedence over even Moses himself in the sense that “they see in a more unveiled way.”

## Article 5

### Is there also a degree of prophecy among the blessed in heaven?

It seems that there is also a degree of prophecy among the blessed in heaven (*etiam aliquis gradus prophetiae est in beatis*):

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 4), Moses saw God’s essence. Yet he is called a prophet. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, the blessed in heaven can be called prophets.

**Objection 2:** A prophecy is a divine revelation. But divine revelations are also made by the beatified angels. Therefore, beatified angels can also be called prophets.

**Objection 3:** From the instant of His conception Christ had the vision of God (*fuit comprehensor*). And yet He calls Himself a prophet in Matthew 13:57 when He says, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country.” Therefore, the blessed in heaven and those who have the vision of God can be called prophets.

**Objection 4:** In Ecclesiasticus 46:23 it is said of Samuel that “he raised his voice from under the ground in prophecy to blot out the wickedness of the nation.” Therefore, for the same reason, other holy individuals can be called prophets after their death.

**But contrary to this:** In 2 Peter 1:19 the prophetic word is compared to “a light that shines in a dark place.” But there is no darkness in the blessed in heaven. Therefore, they cannot be called prophets.

**I respond:** Prophecy implies a vision of some supernatural truth insofar as that truth is remote. There are two ways in which this remoteness can exist:

In one way, *on the part of the cognition itself*, since a supernatural truth is known not in itself, but in certain of its effects. And the cognition will be still more remote if it is effected by means of images of corporeal things rather than by means of intelligible effects. And this is the way it is especially with a prophetic cognition that is effected by means of likenesses of corporeal things.

In a second way, a vision is remote *on the part of the one who is having the vision*, viz., if he has not been totally led to ultimate perfection—this according to 2 Corinthians 5:5:6 (“As long as we are in the body, we are wandering from the Lord”).

But the blessed in heaven are not remote in either of these ways. Hence, they cannot be called prophets.

**Reply to objection 1:** The vision of Moses was fleeting, in the manner of a passion, and not permanent, in the manner of beatitude. Hence, he was still seeing from a distance. Because of this, such a vision does not entirely lose the nature of a prophecy.

**Reply to objection 2:** Divine revelation is made to angels not as to those who are far off, but as to those who are already totally joined to God. Hence, the sort of vision in question does not have the nature of prophecy.

**Reply to objection 3:** Christ was simultaneously a wayfarer and someone who had the vision of God (*simul erat comprehensor et viator*). Therefore, the nature of prophecy befitted Him not insofar as he had the vision of God, but only insofar as He was a wayfarer.

**Reply to objection 4:** Samuel likewise had not yet reached the state of beatitude. Hence, again, if

it was by God's will that the very soul of Samuel predicted to Saul the outcome of the war that God had revealed to him (1 Kings 28:1-28), then this did indeed involve the nature of prophecy. However, the same line of reasoning does not apply to the saints who are already in heaven.

Nor does it matter if someone claims that this was done by the art of demons. For even if demons are unable to call forth the soul of any saint or to force that soul to do anything, it can nonetheless be brought about by God's power that when a demon is consulted, God Himself announces the truth through His own messenger—in the way that, as reported in 4 Kings 1:2-8, God gave a truthful reply through Elijah to the messengers of the king who had been sent to consult the god Accaron.

On the other hand, someone could claim that it was not the soul of Samuel at all, but instead a demon who was impersonating Samuel and whom the wise woman [of Endor] called by the name 'Samuel' and whose prediction she treated as a prophecy, in agreement with the opinion of Saul and of the bystanders, who were of the same opinion.

## Article 6

### Do the degrees of prophecy vary over the course of time?

It seems that the degrees of prophecy vary over the course of time:

**Objection 1:** As is clear from has been said (a. 2), prophecy is ordered toward the cognition of divine things. But as Gregory puts it, "Knowledge about God kept increasing throughout the course of time." Therefore, the degrees of prophecy ought likewise to be distinguished over the course of time.

**Objection 2:** Prophetic revelation is effected in the manner of God's speaking to man, whereas the things that have been revealed to the prophets are announced in both speech and writing. Now 1 Kings 3:1 says that before the time of Samuel "the Lord's word was priceless," i.e. rare (*pretiosus, idest rarus*), whereas afterwards it was spoken to many. Similarly, the books of the prophets do not appear to have been written before the time of Isaiah, to whom it was said (Isaiah 8:1), "Take unto yourself a big book and write in it with a man's pen"—after which time most of the prophets wrote down their prophecies. Therefore, it seems that the degree of prophecy increased over the course of time.

**Objection 3:** In Matthew 11:13 our Lord says, "The Law and the Prophets prophesied up until John [the Baptist]." But afterwards the gift of prophecy existed in the disciples of Christ in a much more excellent way than it had existed in the ancient prophets—this according to Ephesians 3:5 ("In other generations this"—viz., the mystery of Christ—"was not known to the children of men in the way that it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit"). Therefore, it seems that the degree of prophecy increased over the course of time.

**But contrary to this:** As has been explained (a. 5), Moses was the most excellent of the prophets, even though he preceded the other prophets. Therefore, the degree of prophecy did not advance over the course of time.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 2), prophecy is ordered toward the cognition of divine truth, by the contemplation of which we are not only instructed in the Faith but also guided in our works—this according to Psalm 42:3 ("Send forth Your light and Your truth, they have led me"). But our Faith consists mainly in two things: first, *in the true cognition of God*—this according to Hebrews 11:6 ("One who approaches God must believe that He exists"); and, second, *in the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ*—this according to John 14:1 ("You believe in God, believe in me as well").

Therefore, if we are talking about prophecy insofar as it is ordered toward *faith in God*, then it grew in accord with three distinct temporal periods, viz., (a) *before the Law*, (b) *under the Law*, and (c) *under grace*:

For *before the Law*, Abraham and the other patriarchs were prophetically instructed about the things that involve faith in God. Hence, they are even called prophets—this according to Psalm 104:15,



“Do no evil to my prophets,” which is said specifically of Abraham and Isaac.

On the other hand, *under the Law* prophetic revelation was about the things which involve a faith in God that was more excellent than before the Law, since it was now necessary for the whole people to be instructed about this and not only specific individuals or certain families. Hence, in Exodus 6:2-3 the Lord says to Moses, “I am the Lord who appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, under the name of God almighty, and my name ‘Adonai’ [‘The Lord’] I did not make known to them.” For the previous patriarchs had been instructed in general about the omnipotence of the one God, whereas Moses was later more fully instructed about the simplicity of God’s essence, when in Exodus 3:14 it was said to him, “I am who am.” And the Jews signified this name by the name ‘Adonai’ because of their veneration for the ineffable name.

However, afterwards, *in the time of grace*, the mystery of the Trinity was revealed by the Son of God Himself—this according to Matthew 28:19 (“Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”).

However, *within* each stage the first revelation was the most excellent.

*Before the Law* the first revelation was made to Abraham, since by the time of Abraham men had begun to deviate from the faith in the one God by falling into idolatry, whereas such a revelation was not needed before that, as long as everyone was persisting in the worship of the one God. On the other hand, the revelation made to Isaac was lesser revelation in the sense that it was built upon the revelation that had been made to Abraham. Hence, in Genesis 26:24 it is said to Isaac, “I am the God of your father Abraham.” And, similarly, in Genesis 28:13 it is said to Jacob, “I am the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.”

Similarly, *within the stage of the Law* the first revelation made to Moses was the most excellent, and upon it is founded every other revelation that belonged to the prophets.

So, too, *in the time of grace*, the whole Faith of the Church is founded upon the revelation made to the Apostles about faith in the oneness and threeness [of God]—this according to Matthew 16:18 (“... and upon this rock”—viz., the rock of your confession—“I will build my Church”).

However, as regards *faith in Christ’s incarnation*, it is clear that the closer they were to Christ, either before Him or after Him, they were, for the most part, more fully instructed about it—though more fully after than before, as the Apostle explains in Ephesians 3:5.

By contrast, as regards *directing human acts*, prophetic revelation is diversified not by the course of time, but by the current state of affairs (*secundum conditionem negotiorum*), since as Proverbs 29:18 says, “When prophecy fails, the people will be dispersed.” And so men have been divinely instructed at every time about what to do in accord with what was expedient for the salvation of the elect.

**Reply to objection 1:** This passage from Gregory should be understood (a) to apply to the time before Christ’s incarnation and (b) as having to do with the cognition of this mystery.

**Reply to objection 2:** As Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 18, “Just as it was in the early days of the Assyrian kingdom that Abraham and to him were made the clearest promises, so, too, it was at the emergence of the Babylon of the West”—i.e., the city of Rome—“under whose the rule was to come the Christ, in whom those promises”—i.e., the promises that had been made to Abraham— “were to be fulfilled, that the oracles of the prophets, who not only spoke but also wrote in testimony to such a great future event, were unleashed. For even though prophets were almost never lacking to the people of Israel from the time when they began to have kings there, this was only for their benefit and not for the benefit of the nations. But at the time when the prophetic writings that would one day benefit the nations were being set down in a more public way, the city that was to rule the nations”—viz., the city of Rome— “was being founded.”

Now the reason why the prophets had especially to abound among that people during the time of the kings was that the people were not then being oppressed by foreign nations, but instead had their own king, and so now, having their freedom, as it were, they had to be instructed by the prophets about what they should do.

**Reply to objection 3:** The prophets who foretold Christ's coming were able to last only "up until the time of John," who indicated Christ in the present by pointing (John 1:36). And yet, as Jerome says in commenting on that passage (Matthew 11:23), "This does not mean that He excluded prophets after John, since we read in the Acts of the Apostles that Agabus prophesied, along with the four virgin daughters of Philip (Acts 11:28 and 21:7-11)." John, too, wrote a prophetic book about the end of the Church.

And in every time there has been no shortage of individuals who have the spirit of prophecy—not, to be sure, in order to draw forth a new doctrine of the Faith, but in order to direct human action. For instance, in *De Civitate Dei* 5 Augustine reports that the emperor Theodosius "sent to John, who was living in the Egyptian desert and whom he had come to know of because of his growing fame as one endowed with a prophetic spirit, and from him he received an absolutely certain message of victory."