Prophecy and Inspiration in Christianity: Any Relationship?

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Abstract
Prophecy which is the fore-telling and forth-telling of what is to come has been playing vital role in the society. People do consult prophets to know what the future holds for them. The prophets are also known as seers. They claimed that messages are communicated to them by God. This acclaimed message is known as prophecy. But who is a prophet? How does he receive the message? Often the Prophet claims being inspired to prophesize. This implies that inspiration plays certain roles in prophecy. Therefore, the probing questions are: What is a prophecy? How does a prophet receive the message? What relationship exists between prophecy and inspiration? Can it be separated? These are basically the thrust of this paper. The writers discovered that there is a strong cord relationship between prophecy and inspiration. The methodology adopted in this work was historical. The work recommends that the Prophet who is the medium through which the message (prophecy) is been delivered to the recipients should wait on the Lord and be truly inspired before communicating the message.
Keywords: *Prophet, Mark of a true Prophet, Prophecy, Mode of Prophecy, Inspiration.*

1. Introduction

Prophecy has been playing an important role in the lives of Israelites and Christians as well as community life. Throughout the Church dispensation or history, prophecy has been one of cords and

ministries that aided Church growth. The Old Testament is seen to be divine expressions of God through some selected people known as prophets or seers. Similarly the New Testament is also seen to be divine words of God. Both Old Testament and New Testament are written records of the chosen men of God who declared what God gave to them to pass on. There are Prophets today in our society who also prophesize. But who is the person called prophet? How can we know a prophet? What is prophecy? How does the Prophet receive the message? What is inspiration? Is there any relationship between prophecy and inspiration? These served as the thrust of this work.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relationship between prophecy and inspiration but this cannot be wholly done without firstly examining the personality of the Prophet who transmits the message. The methodology adopted was historical. The paper gives attention to: Prophet, the marks of a true prophet, prophecy, mode of prophecy, inspiration, and the relationship between prophecy and inspiration, conclusion and recommendation.

2. Definition of Terms

2.1 The Prophet

There can never be a prophecy without a prophet who receives and communicates the message to the recipients. The prophet is of great importance when it comes to the issue of prophecy and inspiration. Therefore, it becomes important to look at the person of the Prophet.

> Prophecy has to do with fore-telling and forth-telling that which comes from the supernatural source. In the biblical and Christian experience, it designates the situation in which God gives a message to a special recipient for transmission to others. That special recipient is called Prophet, a term which many people are quite familiar with (Lasebikan 41).

In fact, the nature of prophetic calling can be best understood by starting its studies from the name itself. The prophet is known by some titles or names. In the Old Testament, the word *Ro'eh* which means"Seer," is used eleven times to describe the spiritual forerunner of the prophets. The word portrays special powers of insight. Its verb means "to see". In this line we see Samuel as a "Seer who had attained a reputation in the community as one who was singularly successful in

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receiving mysterious answers from the unknown" (Yates 2). *Chozer* is another word used in the Old Testament for the prophets (Terien 664). The word appeared twenty-two times in Old Testament to denote the same idea of gazing or seeing. Example of prophets here includes Balaam. Gad and some of the writing prophets. They are called "Seers" or "Gazers". The functions of the early prophets merged into that of receiving the truth rather than any quality of delivery or behavior. However, there is another Hebrew word for the prophet which connotes much meaning. The word is *Nabhi* or *Nabi*. It is found three hundred times in the Old Testament.

Though the root is difficult to assess, it is thought to derive from Cognate Akkhadian and Arabic word meaning "to call" or "to announce," or from "naba" which means to bubble as if to say that prophets were people who bubble up with inspiration (Lasebikan 41). This means that prophecy is done under the influence of divine spirit. But in Arabic the word "seem to mean utterance of a special message on behalf of one who has commissioned him to say it"(Yates 2). Here we see Aaron as Moses' mouth piece (Exodus 7:1). As a result of this the Greek word Prophets is translated into English to mean "one who speaks in behalf of another."

There are some other several names or terms used to designate the prophet. Among such other names are Man of God (Deut.33:1; 1 Sam.9:6). Watchman (Ezek. 3:17), Messenger of Yahweh, Servant of Yahweh (2 Kgs. 17:3-13), Manager of the Spirit and interpreter. The terms are used according to situation that called for it. Indeed, one of the most appropriate one used is "Interpreter" (Gen. 40:8) which portrays the primary task of the prophet. For "the prophets were primarily speakers or preachers to their own age, witnesses as well as predictors"(Yates 2).

2.2The Marks of a prophet

In the Old Testament, three major tests are used in discerning between the true and false prophet. They are found in Deuteronomy chapter thirteen and eighteen, and Jeremiah chapter twenty-three.

The first one is the theological test. The Lord who brought the Israelites out of Egypt had made His revelation known through Moses to the people. Though the prophet may perform some signs to give validation to what he was saying but if his message goes contrary to Mosaic theology-

"the known about the Lord who brought his people out"(Young 826). Such a prophet was not from God. He is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1ff). This implies that the test is theological one which is "the revelation of God at the Exodus"(Baker 980). A prophet might claim that he spoke in Yahweh's name but if he failed to acknowledge Moses' authority and subscribe to the doctrine of the Exodus the prophet was false one.

The second is the practical test. This is emphatically seen in Deuteronomy 18:20ff. It emphasized that the prediction that failed to be fulfilled has not come from the Lord. Young notes that this kind of test is a negative one. Because "it does not say that fulfillment is proof that the Lord has spoken, for that might in fact be the evidence offered by false prophet to vindicate his words"(Yates 826). So what is not fulfilled comes not from the Lord.

The third is the moral test. This is found in Jeremiah 23:9ff. It is attest first to be applied both to the prophet's life himself and to the tendency of the message he preaches (23:13-14). Are the messages strengthening the hands of evil doers to do more evils? Do the messages assure the evil doers that no judgment is coming thus making them to have no fear (23:17)? Where this occurs it is simply a sure sign that the prophet did not stand before the Lord to hear from him (23:18-19). Baker in referring to the alleges of Jeremiah in chapter 23 notes that "the false prophet is a man of immoral life (vv. 10-14) and he places no barrier to immorality in others (v.17); whereas the true prophet seeks to stem the tide of sin and to call people to holiness (22)" (Baker 980). He makes people trust in lies and leave them without resource when days of trial come. His message is his mark and it has to do with one of peace and swallow optimism (Ezekiel 13: 10-16), and devoid of moral content. The righteous are grieved by his message but it encourages the wicked (Ezekiel 13:22). But the true prophet is the Mosaic prophet. He calls and reminds Israel of their moral requirements of the covenant. His message turns people from their evil way because he receives from the Lord afresh (Jeremiah 23:22).

According to Lasebikan, the prophet is a political activitist. As an authorized spoke man of God, he had an important role assigned to him in warfare (1 Kings 20:13ff) when he had to give counsel in order to save his people. Such is the sense of commitment of prophet to the

political independence of nation both from the whims and caprices of wicked and faithless kings and from the claws of oppressions of foreign nations. all at the risk of their own lives(53,54).

Yates in his book *Preaching from the Prophets* (Yates 5)listed nine good signs or marks through which we get to know the Prophets. The marks range from physical to moral and spiritual.

1. He is always an uncompromising individualist: He cannot be bound by reconvention or by public opinions or be restrained by the caution of diplomats.
2. He is conscious of a divine call that holds him to the task set forth by God. Always he must realize that he is God's mouthpiece. The divine compulsion must be obeyed.
3. He is conscious of the privilege of access to the inner counsel of Yahweh. He is in immediate contact with God. He is the bearer of precious secrets from the throne of God to the needy men.
4. He is usually a man of action with a certain ruggedness of body and character that commands attention in any gathering. Being intense and keyed to a high pitch he will be apt to stir up antagonism and opposition.
5. He is conscious of God's authority and backing in all emergencies. It is usually true that he stands alone against practically all of his contemporaries. Even the religious leaders (priest and conventional prophets), who usually find time for social intercourse, are constantly challenging the strange stands of God's prophets.
6. He is definitely a man of prayer and communion. His lonely, solitary life gives him plenty of time to keep in touch with God.
7. He is clean and consecrated in life and character. In all the long line of genuine prophets we do not find a single breath of criticism of the moral life of any one of them. Each lived a separated life.
8. He is an outspoken critic of specific evils in social order. King, priest, nobles and judges are denounced fearlessly. He does not deal in abstraction. Guided by the will of God he realizes his voice in violent protest against any person or institution meriting denunciation.

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9. He is God's agent to reveal the future to the people. It is quite true that his main work is that of preaching to his own age. We must not, however, lose sight of the particular insight into the will of God for the generation yet unborn.

2.3 Prophecy

What is prophecy? *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* in defining prophecy says it is the power of telling what will happen (Horby et al. 771).Prophecy is a declaration, a description, a representation, or a prediction of that which is beyond the power of human wisdom to discover. According to Jewett, prophecy is

> the word used in the OT to describe the message of men who spoke to the people of Israel under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. This message often introduced with a "thus saith the Lord," came sometimes in the form of a commandment; sometimes as a promise of deliverance
> either in the immediate or more remote future; sometimes as a word ofjudgment and condemnation, sometimes as a word of admonition, a lamentation, hymn of praise or the like (Jewett 430).

Prophecy as a declaration involves a formal statement. Declaration is defined in online *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* as an official or formal statement, especially about the plans of a government or organization; the act of making such a statement. It is also a written or spoken statement, especially about what people feel or believe. It is an official written statement giving information (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries.com).This implies that prophecy as a declaration is a formal state about the plans of God for His people or nations. It could also be an official written statement giving such information. Thus we see some written prophecies in the Scripture (Bible) and some prophets being classified as writing prophets such as Minor Prophets like Hosea, Micah, Joel, etc., and Major Prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, etc.

Prophecy, in its broad sense, could also be a prediction that has to with future events. A prediction "is a statement that says what you think will happen; the act of such a statement"(Oxford Learner's Dictionay.com). Thus prophecy as a declaration has some measure of prediction. Some prophetic declarations have its fulfillment in the future.

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Example of such declarative prediction can be seen in Book of Daniel (see chapters 9-21) and Revelation (see chapters 16-21) regarding the end time events. Prophecy is a message claimed by a Prophet to be communicated to him by God. It is "a divinely inspired revelation or interpretation"(Britannica.com). The word has its etymology from the Greek word *pro* "before" plus the root of *phanai* "speak". So *prophanai*means "speaking before" or "foretelling", i.e. proclaimation (wwwcrystalinks.com).

Prophecy always involves some kind of communication with the future or with different realms of existence, which are usually not discernible byor in harmony with empirical science. Therefore, skeptics consider prophecy to be false. Believers, however, claim that prophecy is possible through supernatural means which bypass the natural laws (wwwcrystalinks.com).

Prophecy, therefore, has to do with fore-telling and forth-telling. It goes beyond prediction of future- "it is a promise about the future"(www.aboutbibleprophecy) and "history written in advance"(STP-15 Prophecy). There are some principles which must be followed in prophecy. H. Orton Willey in his book *Introduction to Christian Theology* presented four laws of prophetic prediction as considered fit by Pope. These include:

(1) Christ is its witness.
(2) The law of progression according to which each age is under the sway of some governing prophecy, the accomplishment of which introduces a new order of prophetic expectation.
(3) The law of reserve by which God has so ordered that in every prediction and every cycle of predictions, sufficient is given to encourage hope and anticipation, and enough concealed to shut up the prediction of faith.
(4) Prophecy has been constituted as sign to each succeeding generation.

The book of the prophets furnish an inexhaustible elements, and this makes it clear that prophecy was intended to be an abiding credential throughout the whole course of time (Wiley and Culbertson 26).

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But it must be noted that there can never be prophecy, if there is no prophet. But how does the prophet receives his prophecy? Or what is the mode of prophecy?

3. Source and Mode of Prophecy

The source of true prophecy is God who reveals His words to His prophets. So a true prophecy always originates from God not man. According to Hale "the true prophets of the Bible received words from God and the spoke them to the people"(Hale 17). There are false prophecies which do not come from God and men who utter them are called false prophets (Matthew 7: 15; 1 John 4:1). The nature of prophecy is twofold: either by vision or revelatory auditions (i.e. inspired) or by learning the techniques (i.e. acquired). In many cases both are present. A vision is a supernatural revelation of God to a person. It may be in the form of a dream or trance-like state. God declared to the Israelites that "Hear now my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD, shall make myself known to him in a vision I shall speak with him in a dream."(Numbers12:6). Vision in Greek is *horma* meaning "to supernaturally gaze at an object externally or have an inspired appearance internally"(www.quora.com).Vision is basically the same as dream with the exception that dream occurs whilst a person is in a state of sleep and vision will happen whilst the person fully awake. Someone can have a closed vision when his eyes are closed. He could also have an open vision when the eyes are opened. In either case the person sees something but it is out of his control and inducement. In biblical days, the signs that showed that someone was a prophet was gifts of dreams and visions (Number 12:6). Thus we see that one third of the Bible consists of prophetic revelation. "God likes speaking in this way to His also people"(www.thinkaboutsuchthings).

The goal of learning certain prophetic techniques is to help the prophet reach an ecstatic state thus receives revelations. At the ecstatic state which is also called ecstatic prophecy, the prophet is being taken over completely by the Holy Spirit- body, soul and spirit- and prophesies as an oracle. This often occurs when the prophet is in a worship mood amidst congregation as well as music; songs and dance going on simultaneously in an increasing tempo and violent bodily movement. Then the Spirit of God descends upon the prophet inspiring him to

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prophesize- i.e. declaring God's message or will to the people. He may also tell them things to come. Elisha asked for a minstrel so as to help get to the right mood for prophecy (2 Kings 3:15). Ecstatic oracles are usually and generally delivered in the first-person singular pronoun by the prophet and are spoken in a short, rhythmic style (www.olivetree.com). The prophet made known impending judgment because of people's sin; when the judgment will be accomplished (Adekoya 55).They also "interpreted the course of past history and explained God's purpose in history"(Awoniyi 7). The prophet receives the prophecy after being inspired. It therefore implies that there can never be prophecy (true) if there is no divine inspiration. Then the question is this, what is inspiration?

4. Inspiration

The *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* gave four different meanings as regard inspiration:

(1) Influence(s) arousing creative activity in literature, music, art, etc.
(2) Person or thing that inspired.
(3) (Colloq) good thought or ideas that come to the mind
(4) Divine guidance held to have been given to those who wrote the Bible (Horby 511).

Although the direct definition of the term or inspiration cannot be found in the Bible but Bible itself speaks of inspiration. The word inspiration is used twice in the Bible especially in KJV, this is first found in Job 32:8. Its Hebrew derivative is *neshamah* meaning "to breathe", and the second appearance of its usage is found in 2 Timothy 3:16. Its Greek derivative is *theopneustos* and it literally signifies "the breathing of God", "God breathed" or "the breathing into". According to Straham "It is through an experience of the spiritual power of the Bible that the word first comes to have a real meaning"(347). Inspiration in general signifies the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the writers of the books of the Bible in such a manner that their production became the expression of God's will. In the word of Wiley and Culbertson,

> Inspiration is that influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of theScripture writers which made their writings the record of a progressiveDivine and interpreted by the same spirit who

inspired them to lead every honest inquirer to Christ and Salvation (48).

It is a "divine guidance; (theology) a special influence of a divinity on the minds of human beings"(Divine:InspirationGoggleSearch). The underlying fact is that inspiration comes through the acting energy of the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Spirit men chosen of God have officially declared His will to us as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Thus we see that through the inspiration by the Holy Spirit, qualified men receive religious truth and communicate it others without error. Indeed, revelation made the writer but inspiration enable them to declare the revelation without mistake.

5. The Relationship between Prophecy and inspiration

There can never be prophecy if there is no prophet. In the same vein, neither can there be a prophet (true prophet) if there is no inspiration. Remove the prophet from prophecy what will be left will amount to nothing. And if you remove the inspiration from prophecy both the prophet and his prophecy amount to zero. The relationship that exists between the two or three characters is so knitted that the removal of one destroys the other. It is like a food web. J. Strahan in quoting Plato says:

> God has given the art of divination not to the wisdom,but to the foolishness of man. No man, when in wits attains prophetic truth and inspiration; but when he receives inspired word, either his intelligence is enthralled in sleep,or he is demented by some distemper or possession (347).

A prophet says nothing at all of his own nor does act as if the word he is declaring belongs to him. He acts only as an interpreter at the prompting of another in all his saying. When the Divine spirit enters into him the inspiring power (Spirit) strike the mechanism of his voice thus sounding through it to declare declaration of that which the prophet prophecies. This type of view is held by Philo (Strahan 345) and many other people. Some people are of that view that Divine influence was communicated to the Bible by dictation to its writers. Such people regarded the Bible writers as mere mouthpiece or penmen of Deity. But this is not wholly correct or true of the Bible writers. In fact, as Strahan

rightly put it; "Inspiration does not suspend the power and faculties of the souls, but raises them to their highest activity, the supernatural intensifying the natural"(347).

Indeed, the Creator of men may act upon the minds of his creature and extends his action to any level or degree according to his will in order to attain the fulfillment of his desires. According to Orton, it is unreasonable to suppose that God who is the "Father of Spirits" in His omnipotence cannot communicate truth to the minds of men or "to instruct them in those things which concerns their eternal well-being"(Wiley and Culbertson 49). The correlation of revelation is inspiration. Whenever God desires to reveal himself, he does so first by inspiring men. Such inspired men of God receive or communicate the revelation. The tendency in the early days was soothsaying, augury, clairvoyance and divination. Some of the prophets that exhibited these characteristics include Samuel who solves riddle, find lost article, pries into the unknown and answer difficult questions. The root of prophecy may be traced to such primitive beginnings but there had been a change of such characteristics during the golden age of Old Testament prophecy. After the days of Elijah the nature of Hebrew prophecy has drastically changed to ethical and religious (Yales 2- 4).

In fact, the opening address of the prophet tells us something about their own awareness. The statement "The word of the lord came..." shows a statement of a direct, personal awareness. This is the prophet basic experience (Exodus. 7:1-2; 4:15-16)." God is the author of people. It is the same experience which Jeremiah had when the Lord's hand touched his mouth (Jer. 1:9) (Motyer 978). Other are dreams and visions (Jeremiah 23:38; 31:26).But inspiration itself is a miracle and we do not know precisely the way through which God makes the mind of a man to become aware of his word. It is the Spirit of God who acts in prophetic inspiration. There are eighteen passages which associate prophetic inspiration with the activity of the Holy Spirit. The passages include the following:

In Num.24:2 the reference is to Balaam; Num.11:29; Isa.10:6, 10; 19, 19:20,23 deal with the prophetic ecstasy; the plainassumption that prophecy arises from the Spirit of God is found in
1 Kgs.22:24; Joel 2;28-29 Hosea 9;7 Neh.9: 30 Zc 7:12; a direct claim to the inspiration of the spirit is made Mic.3:8; the Spirit's inspiration of the

prophetic word is claimed by 1 Chro12;18;2Chro15:1; 20;14;24;20 and Ezk 11;5. But his evidence is not evenly spread through the Old Testament, and in a particular that of the pre-exilic prophets are sparsely Represented (Motyer 978).

The prophet appeared before their contemporaries as men who have something to offer. Indeed they are men with a word to say because they are inspired men. The spoken oracle is the form in which the word of God is expressed. Although the word is God's word spoken through His mouth piece, they (The words) are also words of a certain man, spoken at a certain time under certain circumstances. What is so common of the prophets is that they sometime couched their oracle in the form of parable or allegory (e.g. Isaiah 5:1-17, 2Samuel 12:1-7; Ezekiel 16 and 23). The dramatic way of presenting their message was by means of the 'acted oracle'. According to Motyer "the acted oracle was a movement from God to man; the word of God , the activity on which God has already decided, was thus declared and promoted on earth. In this, as in every other aspect of biblical religion, the initiative rests solely with God"(979).General inspiration is followed by special inspiration. In fact, behind the inspired prophet and Psalmist of the Old Testament was the inspired Hebrew nation and behind the inspired apostle there as the inspired Christian community. True medium of revelation is not just a book but the man. This is because inspiration is a condition of soul in relation to God (Strahan 347) from who prophecy originates.

Secondly, they were to work for the loftiest ideal of human civilization. If one is to judge their gusto what is to be seen is that their credibility is the highest. All they were pursuing to achieve was the establishment of ethical monotheism as the religion of Israel. In fact, the affirmation of these prophets "regarding the righteous and love, the faithfulness and holiness of God, are today kernel of the world's faith"(Strahan 347). Therefore, prophecy and inspiration are so knitted that without inspiration no prophecy. Inspiration ignites prophecy and proves the genuineness of a true prophet as well as the fulfillment of the prophecy as coming from God.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Prophecy is a miracle in the field of knowledge. It is forth-telling and fore telling of something that lies ahead. The fore- teller and fore-

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teller is called a prophet. Different terms are being used for prophet such as *Nabi* ,*Chozeh, Ro'eh,*etc. Other words including man of God, watch man, messenger of Yahweh, man of the Spirit, an interpreter and servant of Yahweh. The prophet is an uncompromising person who is always conscious of the divine call that holds him to the task set forth by God. He lives clean and consecrated life, dedicated to prayer and communion with God.

His consciousness of God's authority and backing in all emergencies gives him the courage to deliver the message without fear and firm.He is God's agent to reveal the future to the people. He is critic of specific evils in social order. In fact, he is political activist. He receives his message through inspiration and thus prophesies. Inspiration is the correlate of revelation. It is that influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of prophets or the writers of the scriptures. In Greek, it is *theopneustos* meaning "the breathing of God"; "the out breath of God" etc. inspiration is the condition of the soul in relation to God. Whenever God reveals Himself He does so by inspiring men to receive so as to communicate the revelation. This He does through visions, dreams, trances, etc. The influence of the inspiration could also be seen a times through ecstatic movement of the prophet under inspiration as he declares the message or prophesizes.

In fact, the strong relationship which exists between prophecy and inspiration is like food web. The removal of one distorts others. Also between prophecy and inspiration is the prophet receives the message from God, the removal of one distorts the others. It is the inspired word of God spoken by the prophet that is known as prophecy. Therefore, since inspiration plays a key role in prophecy, it is recommended that the prophet should wait on the Lord to be inspired before declaring messages to people. He should also ensure that the message is actually coming from God. He should reaffirm his mode of receiving the message before declaring messages in the name of the Lord. It is not everyone that could prophecy therefore those with prophetic gifts should not boast. The prophetic gift is a gift to serve so it should be used to edify, exhort and comfort the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:3).

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