

Prophecy

Written by W.J.Pais

By reason of the object there are three kinds of prophecy according to [St. Thomas](#) ([Summa II-II:174:1](#)

): prophecy of denunciation, of foreknowledge, and of [predestination](#)

- In the first kind [God](#) reveals future events according to the order of secondary causes, which may be hindered from taking effect by other causes which would require a [miraculous](#) power to prevent, and these may or may not happen, though the [prophets](#) do not express it but seem to speak absolutely. Isaias spoke thus when he said to Ezechias: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die, and not live" ([Isaiah 38:1](#)

). To this kind belongs the prophecy of promise, as that mentioned in 1 Kings, ii,30: "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father should minister in my sight, forever", which was not fulfilled. It was a conditional promise made to Heli which was dependent upon other causes which prevented its fulfilment.

- The second, that of foreknowledge, takes place when [God](#) reveals future events which depend upon created [free will](#)

and which he sees present from [eternity](#)

. They have reference to life and death, to [wars](#)

and dynasties, to the affairs of [Church and State](#)

, as well as to the affairs of individual life.

- The third kind, the prophecy of [predestination](#), takes place when [God](#) reveals what He alone will do, and what he sees present in [eternity](#)

and in His absolute [decree](#)

. This includes not only the secret of [predestination](#)

to grace and to glory, but also those things which [God](#)

has absolutely decreed to do by His own supreme power, and which will infallibly come to pass.

The objects of prophecy may also be viewed in respect to [human knowledge](#) :

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- when an event may be beyond the possible natural [knowledge](#) of the [prophet](#), but may be within the range of

[human knowledge](#)

and known to others who witness the occurrence, as, for instance, the result of the battle of [Lepanto](#)

revealed to

[St. Pius V](#)

;

- when the object surpasses the [knowledge](#) of all men, not that it is unknowable but that the [human mind](#) cannot naturally receive the [knowledge](#), such as

the mystery of the

[Holy Trinity](#)

, or the mystery of

[predestination](#)

;

- when the things that are beyond the power of the [human mind](#) to [know](#) are not in themselves knowable because their

[truth](#)

is not yet determined, such as future contingent things which depend upon

[free will](#)

. This is regarded as the most perfect object of prophecy, because it is the most general and embraces all events that are in themselves unknowable.

[God](#) can enlighten the [human mind](#) in any way he pleases. He often makes use of [angelic](#)

ministry in prophetic communications, or He Himself may speak to the

[prophet](#)

and illuminate his mind. Again the

[supernatural](#)

light of prophecy may be conveyed to the

[intellect](#)

or through the senses or the

[imagination](#)

. Prophecy may take place even when the senses are suspended in

[ecstasy](#)

, but this in mystical terminology is called rapture.

[St. Thomas](#)

teaches that there is no suspension of the sense activities when anything is presented to the mind of the

[prophet](#)

through impressions of the senses, nor is it

[necessary](#)

Prophecy

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when the mind is immediately enlightened that activity of the senses should be suspended; but it is

[necessary](#)

that this should be the case when the manifestation is made by

[imaginative](#)

forms, at least at the moment of the vision or of the hearing of the revelation, because the mind is then abstracted from external things in order to fix itself entirely on the object manifested to the

[imagination](#)

. In such a case a perfect judgment cannot be formed of the prophetic vision during the transport of the

[soul](#)

, because then the senses which are

[necessary](#)

for a right understanding of things cannot act, and it is only when a man comes to himself and awakens from the

[ecstasy](#)

that he can properly

[know](#)

and discern the nature of his vision.

[More](#)