Section V.

Rethinking Parrhesia. Theological-Political Considerations on the Present Crisis of Religious Representation

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In the Old Testament, the figure of prophecy represents the protest against the political and sacerdotal power through a person who is external or excluded from the system. In Israel, sacredness and sovereignty separated themselves, not only allowing resistance against abuses of power but also giving the chance of another word of justice and truth. The first part of this contribution aims to show the role this eccentric word played in the first development of democratic ideals, as well as to emphasize firstly the institutionalization process and secondly the progressive exclusion of the prophetic function in the course of the history of Christianity. The second part of this article focuses on the meaning of utopian thought in Modern times, which does not correspond only to the secularization of prophecy (from prophecy to utopia) but also to its radicalization and its transfusion into a new political discourse, also beyond the Jewish-Christian tradition. The third part of the contribution deals with the political-economical monopoly of the present that radically transforms and pulverizes the meaning of both prophecy and utopia. With regard to this, however, the present condition does not seem to correspond exclusively to the mere exhaustion of them but also to their transformation into something new. The political-theological project of Pope Francis seeks to disclose a new prophetic horizon within the present crisis of representation, both of the Church and of politics. His pastoral vision aims to generate a new archipelago, both in Christian experience and in the global network, becoming a paradoxical symbol of democratic life in late-capitalist times.

Prophecy; Parrhesia; Utopia; Pope Francis; Futurity

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Introduction

The present crisis of representation can be fruitfully analyzed through a look at the Biblical awareness of the power of the word, as well as at the modern utopia and its tension towards future. Both of them are an expression of a particular form of representation, which has been progressively experiencing a deep crisis in the past decades, undermining the possibility to shape a sustainable socio-political development and to imagine a possible alternative horizon for democratic societies. In this regard, the crisis of representation seems to primarily deal with the increasing difficulty to critically discern and develop the inner potentialities of the present condition and to disclose new possibilities for living and acting meaningful human experiences. With regard to this, the main thesis of this contribution is that Pope Francis’ attitude in face of this demise of futurity and of the urgent challenges of our time of crisis seems, in a certain way, to renew and transform the ancient prophetic and utopian tradition, in order to prefigure new democratic alternatives and a new kind of representation.

Firstly, I briefly illustrate the historical and theoretical meaning of Israel’s prophetic tradition, in order to highlight the original and, in a certain sense, precursory democratic character of this Biblical experience. Secondly, I try to analyze the transformation process of Israel’s prophecy by comparing it to the category of utopia, which has mostly influenced the vision and construction of future in modern times. Finally, I aim to show how the pastoral vision of Pope Francis is trying to renew some characters of both categories, deeply transforming the figure of representation in the present time.

1. Prophecy

In the Old or First Testament, the figure of the prophecy represents the protest against the political and sacerdotal power through a person that is external to, or excluded from, the system. In the different phases of the construction of the nation, Israel’s prophecy constituted a very new element compared to the theological-political vision of ancient Egypt and of the Middle Eastern reigns, where divinity was identified with (political) power. “For the first time, in Israel, the justice, or the ‘law’, was subtracted from the power and placed in the sphere of transcendence: together with the idea of the covenant, of the alliance, Yahweh...
becomes directly the guarantor of the social and political justice”.

This means that in Israel, because of the Lord’s covenant (berith) with His people, sacredness and sovereignty were separated: This separation between religious and political power (in all its expressions) corresponds to a crucial stage in the construction of our civilization, namely to the desacralization of the political power. Whilst the pharaoh incorporated sovereignty and sacredness into his own person, in Israel sacredness and sovereignty separated, allowing not only for resistance against the abuse and perversion of power, but also opening up the opportunity for a different word on justice and truth to arise. In light of this, the power of the prophetic word is not the result of an institutional-bureaucratic authorization that is the expression of the socio-political system, but the charismatic emergence of another representative and authoritative force.

This terrain for a different word corresponds to the scene and to the discourse of the prophet. The prophet is able to read the signs of the times from a new perspective beyond consolidated interests and represents the voice of God expressing the condemnation of injustice and the proclamation of a path of peace and redemption. Against this background, the difference between crime (against the institutional power) and sin (against God and His word of justice) begins to emerge. Consequently, there is another place or a different symbolic order, which judges human actions and confers them their true consistence. The figure of Antigone could be considered here as a significant paradigm of this separation as well. The institutional political and priestly power does not correspond to the only and ultimate representative word for the people anymore, because the word of the prophet expresses a new path of freedom and truth among the people.

“The word pronounced by a God, who has no name (the God of the Old Testament), does not identify itself with the dominant collective identity and with the positive law of the rulers, but it expresses itself potentially through all the members of the group, even if they do not reside in the palaces and temples.”

A crucial text in the Old Testament Book of Numbers expresses this “different discourse” with special evidence and is of unusual significance. God provided Moses with a group of seventy elders with a special spiritual authority necessary to aid him in leading the people. But these elders of Israel, who have received charismatic power from above, lose the capacity of prophesying progressively, since the institution prevails. Eldad and Medad (Num 11: 25–29), who are outside of the palace and of the temple – of the power – begun to prophesy among common people. The institutional power tries to suppress their voice, but Moses refuses it:

2 Prodi 2016, 17.
“And there ran an young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them! And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of Israel” (Num 11:28–30).

Eldad and Medad are not part of the institution, they live outside the realms of power: but Moses does not interrupt their word, because of its prophetical force. The “discourse of the prophet” – paraphrasing a Lacanian expression – is therefore a protest against any rigid closure and exclusion, since the Spirit of God exceeds any institutional role or conferred assignment. The narration suggests the promise and the hope that everybody may be true witness and bearer of the Word of God.

At the same time, the prophetic word aims to contrast any violence, injustice and betrayal of the pact between God and His people, and remains a bastion against the anti-word:

“Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood” (Hos 4:1).

Here I want to emphasize the element of parrhesia this discourse possesses, as the right/duty to tell the truth, at all costs. The word “parrhesia”, which is ordinarily translated into English as “free speech”, appears for the first time in Greek literature in Euripides, and occurs throughout the ancient Greek world in its classical texts. Etymologically, the Greek verb “parrhesiazesthai” means “to say everything” and suggests the attitude of frankness and free speech. As Foucault maintains, in ancient Greece there was no democracy without parrhesia: all citizens had the same right to take part in the public assemblies (isonomia) and to speak their mind (isegoria) with reference to reason and telling the truth (parrhesia). Euripides, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle considered the relationship between parrhesia and politeia to be an essential element in the Athenian constitution as well as the characteristic ethical attitude of a good citizen. As a consequence, parrhesia corresponds to a “politics of truth”, in which the structures and rules of governance (politeia) and of moral activity (ethos) are deeply interconnected with the forms of truth-telling (aletheia). Furthermore, in his “ge-

3 Cf. Foucault 2011.
4 Foucault writes: “‘parrhesiazesthai’ means ‘to tell the truth’. But does the parrhesiastes say what he thinks is true, or does he say what is really true? To my mind, the parrhesiastes says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true because it is really true. The parrhesiastes is not only sincere and says what is his opinion,
nealogy of the critical attitude.” Michel Foucault maintains that *parrhesia* is a form of discourse by “one who speaks the truth to power”, risking his own life. “Parrhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the ‘game’ of life or death”.\(^5\) *Parrhesia* preserves, therefore, a special relationship to criticism, freedom and truth, which can be observed in the prophetical discourse as well. As a consequence, the contrast between Athens and Jerusalem, as Leo Strauss outlines it, seems more dialectic and differentiated, since it has had to take into account the figure of the prophet. The prophet is a Parrhesiastes in his/her telling the truth as a duty and a vocation, criticizing the dominant power and tradition as well as the perverse betrayal of the covenant with God.

In this respect, it is possible to argue that the prophetical word as a word of protest and criticism against the dominant dispositive of power *arose before democracy* and was akin to its first seed. Freedom of expression (*parrhesia*, that is the possibility to speak frankly and clearly) took place not only in the Greek *polis* in front of the *demos* but also in the word of God pronounced by a prophet, a word that did not identify with the dominant collectivity or the realms of power. As Paolo Prodi sustains, “this is the root of democracy in its actual positive expression, even if the way to technical solutions until the invention of the parliamentary elective representation has still been lengthy and hard in the last two millennia”.\(^6\) The development of prophecy is therefore closely intertwined with the possibility of contesting the system of power – as can be seen in Isaiah as well as in the figure of David, a simple shepherd outside the establishment, who contrasts the consolidated authority and becomes king of Israel and Juda. David represents here a particular figure, because he is an outsider with respect to the dominant institutions, who will then become the representative of royal power (showing at the same time the destiny of prophecy, as will be seen below).

Moreover, it could be possible to summarize the dialogue between God and His people through the voice of the prophets. A specific prophetic word dominates the dialogue between God and His people, namely “Why??”: “You, Israel, Why?”, or: “You, Lord, Why?”. God’s covenant with Israel represents “a surprising institution”, as Paul Beauchamp maintains: “It was made for the stability, it rests on movement. It reveals that the event and the institution are not op-

\(^5\) Foucault 1999.

\(^6\) Prodi 2016, 17.

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posable as two faces of the same sheet”.

In this sense, there is no covenant without a historical event and its corresponding narration, there is no law without a history. The covenant can endure because God has given His word and the people answered with its faith (amen), but this alliance was often broken by unfaith and injustice. The tragedy of the prophet is that of a word that does not resound and does not open any new possibility for the future anymore. It is the tragedy of the profanation and evacuation of the Name (of God), which vanishes because of the voracity (“Bring, and let us drink”, Am 4:1), the avid search for money (“Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail”, Am 8:4) and the silence of the people. But the force of prophecy vanishes when it enters the realms of power, corrupting and losing itself as the alternative word of truth. “Take with you words, and turn to the LORD” (Hos 14:2), says the prophet Hosea. These new words were able to recall the history of salvation and God’s gifts and thus to reactivate the covenant with Him. This history persists thanks to the reproach, the outcry and the protest of the prophets, so that, once they cease, the covenant will cease to exist.

The development of prophecy is strongly intertwined with the history of the Christian Church. The institutionalization of prophecy corresponds actually to the birth of the Church, where the word of the prophet becomes a collective discourse proclaiming the gospel of the Reign of God. In Christianity “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This incarnation of the word expresses not only the relationship between God and mankind, but also the effectiveness of the word and its generative and critical power. Jesus dreamed about a Church that had to be “institutionalized prophecy”, which had to generate a permanent dialectics between the religious sphere and the dominant system of power. Also referring to the synoptic recurrence “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mc 12:17; Mt 22:21; Lk 20:25), prophecy becomes a cultural and social structure keeping its distance from the political power and maintaining the dualism the ancient prophets introduced in Israel. This produces a progressive desacralization of political power and the beginning of a history of dialectics and conflicts between State and Church throughout the centuries. However, this word is not the word of a single person or authority, but the word of the whole community of believers, as the Apostle Paul maintains:

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would

7 Beauchamp 1985, 96.
that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying (1Cor14:1–5).”

Accordingly, prophecy becomes an assignment and a vocation for the whole ekklesia, which does not confuse itself with the secular power of the law but has to remain a critical instance for its drifts and abuses.

The institutionalization of prophecy – following in a certain way Ivan Illich’s approach – together with the progressive growth of the power of the Church has, however, profoundly transformed its traditional function, which produced a historical rivalry between prophetic word and hierarchic law (Mendicant Orders, Joachim of Flore, Girolamo Savonarola, etc.). Prophecy was gradually marginalized and tended to seek refuge in eremitical monasticism or to transform itself into a heretical opposition, beyond the institutionalized Church. At the same time, the prophetic function was degraded to the practice of interpretation or production of predictions because of its fundamental refusal to obey the institution. Moreover, we can interpret the present digitalization and virtualization processes as further signs of the evaporation of the flesh into an imaginary territory without bodies, along a series of avoided incarnations with neither prophecy nor future.

As a consequence, the prophecy-parrhesia was expelled from the ecclesiastic discipline and was radically transformed within the religious experience as well. The prophet was progressively considered as a fanatic and was marginalized, imprisoned or excluded from religious and public life. Together with the multiplication of seminaries and religious orders, a new insuperable barrier appeared between those who could speak in assemblies and those who could not. The reality and the force of “a word that was made flesh” has progressively turned (and perverted) into the reality of a flesh that was made word – that is a flesh that dissolves into thin air and progressively vanishes. The virtualization process of the present represents the fulfillment of this evaporation of the flesh and of the expansion of a word that is deprived of its substance and effectiveness.

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9 We can think about the birth of moral theology as an autonomous discipline, the growing development of religious orders and communities and their practice of obedience, the elaboration of models of perfect life, or the expansion of the spiritual jurisdiction of consciousness in the XVII century.

2. Utopia

Within this horizon, the utopia of the new political religions – until the ideologies of the 20th Century – assimilates the sacral element of the prophetic tradition in order to shape a new social and political program for the future of the masses. Under the gradual dissolution of Medieval Christianity, the prophetic tradition was progressively replaced by a new utopian thought which has a clear political intention. Utopia arose in Modern times as the possibility of projecting an alternative society to the dominant one. This transformation process was closely connected to the possibility of instigating a revolution, a revolt, or a coup in order to institute a new symbolic order and to found a new society. Here utopia does not only correspond to the secularization of prophecy (from prophecy to utopia), but also to its radicalization and its transfiguration into a new political discourse, even beyond the Jewish-Christian tradition. In this sense, the Utopia of Thomas More (1517) divides two epochs not only with regards to the contents, but also with regards to its abandonment of any millenialism or messianic intention in the name of an ideal new mankind. More’s utopia develops within a cultural and political innovative constellation, while with Columbus, Machiavelli, Luther and Ariosto, i.e., the birth of modern consciousness and of the public sphere were opening up a new symbolic era.

Even if More’s Utopia follows the humanistic tradition of Christian universalism (à la Erasmus of Rotterdam), it differs radically from the ancient prophecy-parrhesia, since it crosses the confines of religious confessions to join the ascent of the public opinion and the press. The utopian function is a specific result of Modernity and differs both philosophically and theologically from the prophetic one, even if it is not possible to exclude a certain confusion between prophecy and utopia at specific times and under particular conditions.

Thomas More or Francis Bacon did not actually aim at founding Utopia or New Atlantis, but at elaborating regulative principles and ideas as well as at establishing new paradigms and possible horizons for concrete historical processes. Because of its effectiveness, utopia is an open-eyed daydream on the present situation of the epoch. Modern utopia deals with a rational as well as ironic construction, which critically investigates the contradictions of historical circumstances and does not presume a divine intervention in history interrupting the course of events. Utopia corresponds to the idea of a progressive historical development towards a certain future, analyzing forces and potentialities at work in the present in order to overcome the folly of wars and conflicts (Erasmus!) and to reach immanent purposes for the future. Prophets are not progressive pedagogical figures of an alternative sovereignty, but voices immediate a Deo, God’s words for the present. In this sense, utopia could be interpreted – following Carl Schmitt’s perspective – as the secularization of a theological category for (democratic)
thought and action in modern Europe. “Utopia is secularized eschatology”, as Massimo Cacciari maintains, and it revolves around the relationship between politics and intellectual/scientific powers. It eludes the “economic” dimension of the instruments, of the dispositive, but does not contradict them, showing their ultimate potentialities and horizons for action.

On the one hand, according to Thomas More and Francis Bacon, Utopia seems to be a very concrete utopia, as a part of the world; in this sense, it seeks to identify and to realize hidden potentialities of the present, to fulfill them, prefiguring a new futurity. Ernst Bloch postulates a utopian impulse that governs and shapes everything that is oriented towards the future in life and culture: here utopia represents the imaginary place of human desires, dreams of a better life and imaginary impulse in unsuspected occasions. Against this background, a utopian aura seems to surround everyday life with its encounters, objects and gestures, which preserve traces and memories of happiness in a decayed present – as Proust and Freud show and practice in their method of free associations. In this regard, utopian aura corresponds to a “standing reserve” of personal and political energy between the individual and the community, unconscious desire and the conscious project of social transformation.

On the other hand, utopia contains elements of conflict and criticism of the current dispositive of power, under the perspective of a radical novelty. Considering this, the spirit of utopia has not a pastoral or idyllic character, but a negative one of demystification that aims at removing or weakening sources of exploitation and suffering in the present condition. In this sense, as Fredric Jameson sustains, “the fundamental dynamic of every utopian politics (or of every political utopianism) will therefore lie in the dialectic of Identity and Difference, to the degree to which such a politics aims at imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radically different from this one”.

Is it still possible to speak about utopia here? Or would it be better to call it a prophetical intention? What does utopia mean? Does it represent another world, an alter mundus? In this sense, every project could be a utopian one, since it seeks to generate something new and does not simply aim to repeat or re-form the given situation.

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11 Cacciari 2016, 71.
13 Marcuse 1962, 18.
3. **Today**

The political-economical monopolization of the present is radically transforming and pulverizing the meaning of both prophecy and utopia. The scientific utopia, according to which science is supposed to lead to progressive harmony between men and nature, has failed: technology and industry have taken its place thus emptying its central meaning. Moreover, utopia as prefiguration or image of a possible synthesis between knowledge and politics seems to be destined to end. The “industrial system” has no need to imagine a future, but rather to plan and organize definable progress. With the emergence of Thatcherism, the crisis of socialism and the expansion of global late capitalism, the traditional utopian production seems to be exhausted.

Furthermore, the dialectics or the institutional dualism between sacred and political order, which has constituted the prophetic experience in the Jewish-Christian tradition, cannot be represented by the relationship between State and Church anymore. The deep crisis of legitimation and sovereignty, which has affected both the State and the Church over the last decades, has also exhausted any effective countervailing “parrhesiastic” power that should contrast or criticize them. The exemplary gesture of Benedict XVI, who in 2013 resigned from office, could be interpreted not only as a problem concerning internal ecclesiastical politics, but as a question of legitimacy and self-legitimation, which expresses the profound crisis of representation affecting not only the contemporary Catholic Church but all modern institutions. As Giorgio Agamben maintains, the pope’s meditated abdication is extremely relevant not only with respect to the present and the future of the Church but also to the “political situation of the democracies in which we live”. Agamben suggests that the resignation aimed to emphasize the importance of the crucial distinction between spiritual power (legitimacy) and temporal power (legality). The dialectics between natural law and positive law, legitimacy and legality and spiritual and temporal power – which has characterized many representations of power across the century – is being increasingly eroded. The present absolutization of legality in democratic societies, which reduces the principle of legitimation to legal, positive and procedural rules cannot adequately resolve (but, on the contrary, contributes to) our socio-political crisis that is above all a crisis of legitimation of our institutions.

However, within the Catholic world, the new Pontificate of Pope Francis, prepared by the extraordinary resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in February 2013, seems to have opened a new dimension of prophecy in non-prophetical times. He is not only a Pope from the periphery but also from the bowels, from the inner reality of the Church.

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16 Agamben 2017, 1.
The main thesis of this contribution is that the prophetic character of his function primarily consists of his renewed interpretation of the relationship between prophecy and institution, which has taken shape in these last years and is defining a new dimension of the Church. For example, we can consider his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (2013) that represents the disclosure of a new sociopolitical horizon within Christianity: This horizon is outlined, on the one hand, by the proposal of a religious ideal able “to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today’s world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel” (EG 88). On the other hand, the new symbolic order of this Pontificate results in a form of dissidence against the marks of dominion and colonization, produced by the Western political rationalization, by the financial dogma of the market, by the ideology of consumption, as well as by the nihilistic exploitation of being in all its expressions. Those are typical issues of the utopian discourse.

Pope Francis seems to embody a new prophetical voice within the system. In this sense, a new figure and a new discourse seem to be emerging. If utopia represents the secularization of prophecy, I propose to consider this new discourse to be a sacralization of utopia as a new form of prophecy.

What does this mean?

This Pontificate represents a new form of utopia in direct contact with the masses and their desires. In the Pope’s words and gestures, the social bond and the construction of a new humankind (of a new people, also beyond the Christian community, according to the Latin America theological tradition) acquire a religious character and assume a real utopian dimension. This utopian element does not correspond, however, to the essential intentions of the modern experience of utopia, since it does not emerge from the scientific/philosophical project of perfect harmony between human beings and nature, but from the form of popular devotion and popular religion. In any event, this new discourse recalls and reactivates the force of the prophetic parrhesiastic tradition with its perpetual invocation of absolute mercy, perfect forgiveness, radical care for creation, profound sensitivity for the fragility of life and fraternity without compromise. These prophetical elements of his pastoral vision, however, are not translated into the eschatological discourse of the city of God, but in the everyday experience of popular religiosity.

In this way, Pope Francis aims to rehabilitate the legitimacy of the “discourse of the Church”, namely the evangelium, in a new perspective. He is transforming and converting the theological eschatological tradition as well as the utopian function, since he inserts them in the constellation of the common experience, in order to imagine and realize a new poetics and aesthetics of human relations for the
present and for the future. Through this prophetic gesture, he released and regained the *vis utopica* in a rediscovered popular religiosity. He discusses the same crucial questions of utopian tradition (ecology, technology, economy, mankind) but he declines them in a radically new way, following and intensifying the proclamation of the prophet Joel in the First Testament:

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).

In the awareness of the failure of the great ideologies and utopias of the past, this discourse opens up the vision of a “utopian fermentation” of religion: this does not correspond to a strictly prophetic tension, but to a *popular* one. Everyone could be a prophet – sons and daughters shall prophesy, old men shall dream dreams, and young men shall see visions – in their own thought and practice of a new form of neighborhood, in the tender perception of the fragility of lives and in the everyday democratic construction of the common. The utopian discourse – within at least the European political-philosophical tradition – is mostly a discourse of the elites and of the avant-gardist intellectual leadership, who have, however, indulged in utopian dreams, sometimes justifying atrocities in human history. Pope Francis transfers the utopian potential to the *demos* and, at the same time, he embodies the spirit of prophecy. This prophetic spirit appears not to be the duty or the function of an outsider anymore but becomes *the work and the impulse of an insider*, of the leader.

Moreover, in a post-traditional and secular context, also a prophetic word requires further investigation as well as a critical and hermeneutical approach. The word of the insider has to be deciphered and interpreted, not only immediately assumed and practiced. Within our present socio-political constellation, the dialectics between institution and *demos* assumes a special meaning, since it risks being sucked into the enthusiasm of the masses at any moment. The spirit of prophecy shall not amount to an impulsive drive of the spirit that follows the prophetic words of the leader. This means that the realization of prophetic discourse needs to be accompanied by a continuous hermeneutic practice by the demos, as much as the spirit of the demos needs a Third, an instance, a word from outside, in order to shape its own tension. The *force* of the demos and the *form* of the prophetic word have to meet in order to open up new horizons of history. Pope Francis invites the whole Church and all cardinals and bishops to listen to and to enhance the *humanistic potential* of popular religion. In this sense, the (religious) authority abandons the logic of the sacral function outside the *demos* – or, paternalistically, *for* the demos (or even against the *demos*). At the same time,
however, it does not merely release or gratify the immediate tensions and drives of the *demos* that are always risking idolatry, fanaticism and mystification.

In this view, it is necessary to imagine a future on the threshold between the vision of the prophet Joel – your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions – and the risk of fanaticism and populism. The spirit of utopia and the dynamic of the alliance shall not separate like in the ancient prophetic tradition. This process has something in common with the democratic rule: without the *force* of the *demos* (with its contradictions, despairs, aspirations and desires), the *form* of democracy loses itself in the abstractness of procedures, arrangements and projects aloof from reality (opening the way to populist drifts). The democratic form without the force of the *demos* is empty (as well as irritating and exhausting); the force of the *demos* without the democratic form is blind (as well as irrational and even violent).

Within the present crisis of representation, in which either the mere form of procedural and positive rules disconnected from real civil life, or the demagogical and immediate ideal of a new (unpolitical) community unsuccessfully try to govern the societal uncertainty and global disorder, this Pontificate seems at least to perceive and to understand the forces and to give them a form, which means a future. He aims to recover the legitimacy of the Gospel (“*Evangelii gaudium*”) through a prophetic word that comes from the periphery, through a word of shepherds living with “the smell of the sheep”.18

“The Word of Christ is intended to reach out to everyone, in particular those who live in the peripheries of existence, so that they might find in Him the center of their life and the source of hope. And we, who have had the race of receiving this Word of Life, are called upon to go, to leave our confines and with zeal bring forth all the mercy, the tenderness, the friendship of God. Go and welcome: in this way the heart of the mother Church and all of her children is able to beat. When hearts open up to the Gospel, the world starts to change and humanity is resurrected.”19

In a post-traditional and post-patriarchal society, the institutional figure of the Pope as prophetic voice of the time could represent a possible answer to the lack of futurity and hope of the present only if it is able to intercept and support the unexpressed desires and expressed aspirations of the present time. As a consequence, in the time of the evaporation of authority, representation and legitimacy, the prophetic or the utopian function has to be thought and critically assumed together with initiatives and experiences of the *demos*, where citizenship, rights and alternative horizons could be imagined thanks to a new form of *parrhesia*. In times of particular fragility of the public space, of transformation of the

18 Pope Francis’ address to the world’s priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday March 28, 2013.
nation state and of post-truth (or post-factual) politics, it seems necessary to rethink and support any alternative experience of participation and of protest, which expresses a special parrhesiastic intention.

The present Pontificate aims to give a voice to these new forms of parrhesia, which deal above all with a new encounter with the world and with the others, which seeks to involve all believers and even non-believers (EG 113) in the construction of the people of God. Following Evangelii Gaudium, it is possible to argue that the construction of the demos implies a fundamental change of perspective that is able to privilege the periods of process instead of the spaces of power.

“One of the faults which we occasionally observe in sociopolitical activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. [...] What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity” (EG 223).

The main problem does not consist of the vital spirit of the demos, which often assumes the shape of a parrhesiastic mediation, since it does not always want to be overwhelmed by the sum of its own passions. The problem lies rather in the possibility to convert the representatives of the governmental apparatus (such as cardinals and bishops, as well as parties and leaders), which tend to “crystallize processes” and “spaces of power” and to preserve a formal ecclesiastic identity without history and recognition of the concrete human experience. Such a rigid and defensive religious ideal corresponds to a “monocultural and monotonous” (EG 117) Christianity and to “a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures” (EG 49). The act of mediation does not seem to be accepted and executed by the system itself. The well-intentioned leaders, who aim to understand the dialectics between form and force, do not seem to have the consent of the skeptical (and cynical) ruling class, whose main problem, in this case, is not corruption, but rather a hidden but intrinsic suspicion toward the spirit of prophecy, which underestimates the vital (but also wild) potentialities of the demos. This is precisely one of the main factors of the deep crisis of representation the Catholic Church is faced with today.

In this respect, it is clear that the ruling class has not incorporated any interest for the future. When there is a lack of imagination with regards to the future, there is no space for the construction and the elaboration of the historical horizon and for the common good. Democracy becomes an intellectualistic design and the
vital spirit of the *demos* turns into an unleashing of archaic drives (that is the endemic risk of the new populist movements). In this sense, the main responsibility of the elites is to avoid extinguishing prophecy as well as confusing democracy with demagogy.

**Conclusion**

Considering this, the prophetic function corresponds to the preservation of a “time open to the future”, to the *unrest of futurity* – Habermas would speak about “die Zukunft als eine *Quelle* der Beunruhigung”\(^{20}\) (the future as a source of disquiet) for the present. This unsettling dimension aims to interrupt the foreseen and colonized future, that is only an extension of our capitalistic present and to overcome suspicion and cynicism. This represents a revolutionary process, which reopens a collective dimension that has been stuck in a repetition or checked by state oppression. The political field can therefore be understood as the liberation of possibilities of life that was blocked and made impossible by a determined situation. “Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people” (EG 270).

Even if our present society has convinced us that the true dis-alienation can happen only within private and individual’s territories, there is increasing evidence that individualization\(^{21}\) without any sort of representation has no possibility to transform personal and collective lives and to give a non-alienating form to the expansion of force. This conviction deals with a form of parrhesia that has to shape a new theological and anthropological vision for the future, both of the Church and of every human community:

> “Sometimes I wonder if there are people in today’s world who are really concerned about generating processes of people-building, as opposed to obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness. History will perhaps judge the latter with the criterion set forth by Romano Guardini: ‘The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age’ (EG 224).\(^{22}\)”

Only in the dynamic tenacity of this perspective, which aims to generate processes and not to occupy places, as well as to increase one’s own power, could it be possible to imagine new horizons in history where young people are not prevented from dreaming, and the old people may still have visions.

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20 Habermas 1986, 22.
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