

## QUESTION 171

### Prophecy

After having talked about the individual virtues and vices that pertain to the situation and status of *all* men (questions 1-170), we now have to consider what pertains in a special way to *some* men (questions 171-189).

Now as regards the things that involve the habits and acts of the rational soul, there are three ways in which a difference is found among men:

In one way, there is a difference *with respect to diverse gratuitously given graces* (*secundum diversas gratias gratis datas*), since, as 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 explains, “There are a variety of gifts ... to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge, etc.” (questions 171-178).

In a second way, there is a difference *with respect to diverse ways of life*, viz., the *active life* and the *contemplative life*, which are taken from the diverse application of operations (questions 179-182). Hence, in the same passage it is explained that there are differences “among ways of operating” (1 Corinthians 12:6). For as we read in Luke 10:38-42, the application of operation in the case of Martha, who was solicitous about, and worked at, recurring service, is one thing—and this pertains to the active life—whereas the application of operation in the case of Mary, who, sitting at the feet of our Lord, listened to His words, is another thing—and this pertains to the contemplative life.

In a third way, there is a difference *with respect to diverse offices and states of life* (questions 182-189). For as Ephesians 4:11 explains, “He gifted some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers.” This involves diverse ministries (*pertinet ad diversa ministeria*), of which 1 Corinthians 12:5 says, “There are different types of service (*divisiones ministracionum sunt*).”

Now as regards the gratuitously given graces, which is our first consideration here, one should note that some of these graces involve *having cognition*, some involve *speaking*, and some involve *acting*. Now everything that involves cognition can be included under *prophecy*. For as will become clear below (q. 171, a. 3), prophetic revelation extends not only to future human events, but also to divine things—both (a) with respect to what is proposed for belief, which pertains to *faith*, and also (b) with respect to higher mysteries having to do with perfect things, which pertains to *wisdom*, along with (c) prophetic revelation involving spiritual substances, by whom we are led either toward good or toward evil, and this pertains to *discernment of spirits*; and, again, prophetic revelation also extends to (d) directing human acts, and this pertains to *knowledge*.

And so the first thing that has to be considered is *prophecy*—along with *rapture*, which is a certain degree of prophecy (question 175). Now as regards prophecy, there are four things to be considered: first, its essence (question 171); second, its cause (question 172); third, the mode of prophetic cognition (question 173); and fourth, the types of prophecy (question 174).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Does prophecy have to do with cognition? (2) Is prophecy a habit? (3) Is prophecy only about future contingents? (4) Does a prophet know everything that can be prophesied? (5) Does a prophet distinguish what he perceives in a divine way from what he sees with his own spirit? (6) Can a prophecy be false?

### Article 1

#### Does prophecy have to do with cognition?

It seems that prophecy does not have to do with cognition:

**Objection 1:** Ecclesiasticus 48:13 says, “The body of Elisha prophesied,” and later, at 49:18, it says of Joseph that “his bones were visited, and after his death he prophesied.” But no cognition remains in a body or in bones after death. Therefore, prophecy does not have to do with cognition.

**Objection 2:** 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, “One who prophesies speaks to men for the purpose of edification.” But speech is an effect of cognition and not cognition itself. Therefore, it seems that prophecy does not have to do with cognition.

**Objection 3:** Cognitive perfection excludes stupidity and insanity (*excludit stultitiam et insaniam*). But these can exist together with prophecy; for Hosea 9:7 says, “Know, O Israel, that the prophet was stupid and insane.” Therefore, prophecy is not cognitive perfection.

**Objection 4:** Just as revelation belongs to the intellect, so inspiration seems to belong to the affections, because it implies a certain movement. But according to Cassiodorus, prophecy is said to be “revelation or inspiration.” Therefore, it seems that prophecy does not have to do more with the intellect than with the affections.

**But contrary to this:** 1 Kings 9:9 says, “For one who is now called a prophet (*propheta*) was called a seer (*videns*) in times past.” But vision pertains to cognition. Therefore, prophecy has to do with cognition.

**I respond:** Prophecy *primarily* and *principally* consists in *cognition*, since the prophets have cognition of certain things that are far removed from men’s cognition. Hence, prophets can be said to take their name from *phanos*, i.e., apparition (*apparitio*), since certain things that are far off are apparent to them. And this is why Isidore says in *Etymologia*, “In the Old Testament they were called seers, because they saw what the rest did not see and they foresaw what had been hidden in mystery. Hence, the gentile nations called them ‘diviners’ (*vates*), from ‘mental power’ (*vis mentis*).”

However, since, as 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each is given a manifestation of the spirit for the sake of usefulness,” and later at 14:12, “Seek to abound unto the edification of the church,” it follows that prophecy *secondarily* consists in *speaking*, insofar as the prophets announce for the edification of others what they know from having been taught by God—this according to Isaiah 21:10 (“I have announced to you what I have heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel”). Accordingly, as Isidore explains in *Etymologia*, prophets can be called, “as it were, ‘foretellers’ (*praefatores*), because they tell from afar”—that is, they speak from a distance—“and predict truths about things to come.”

Now the things that are revealed by God beyond human cognition can be confirmed not by human reason, which they surpass, but by the operation of divine power—this according to Mark 16:20 (“They preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed their words by the signs that followed.”) Hence, in the *third* place, prophecy involves *the working of miracles* as a sort of confirmation of the prophetic pronouncement. Hence, Deuteronomy 34:10-11 says, “And ever since that time there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders.”

**Reply to objection 1:** These passages are talking about prophecy with respect to the third point just made, where something is being taken as a proof of prophecy.

**Reply to objection 2:** In this passage the Apostle is talking about prophetic pronouncement.

**Reply to objection 3:** Those who are called insane and stupid prophets are not genuine prophets but are instead false prophets, of whom Jeremiah 23:16 says, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you and deceive you; they are telling of the vision of their own hearts and not speaking from the mouth of the Lord.” And Ezekiel 13:3 says, “Woe to the stupid prophets who follow their own spirit and see nothing.”

**Reply to objection 4:** In a case of prophecy it is required that the mind’s focus (*intentio mentis*) be elevated to perceive divine things; hence, Ezekiel 2:1 says, “Son of man, stand on your feet and I will speak with you.” Now this elevation of focus is accomplished by the Holy Spirit’s movement, and this is why it is added (2:2), “And the Spirit entered me and stood me up on my feet.” And after the mind’s focus has been elevated to higher things, it perceives divine things, and this is why it is added, “... and I heard Him speaking to me.”

So, then, what is required for prophecy is (a) an *inspiration* as regards the elevation of the mind—this according to Job 32:8 (“The inspiration of the Almighty gives understanding”)—and (b) a *revelation* as regards the perception itself of divine things, in which prophecy is brought to completion

and through which the veil of obscurity and ignorance is removed—this according to Job 12:22 (“He reveals deep things from out of darkness”).

## Article 2

### Is prophecy a habit?

It seems that prophecy is a habit:

**Objection 1:** As *Ethics 2* says, “There are three things in the soul: *power, passion, and habit.*” But prophecy is not a power, since if it were, it would exist in all men, to whom the powers of the soul are common. Similarly, it is likewise not a passion, since, as was established above (*ST 1-2, q. 22, a. 2*), the passions belong to the appetitive power, whereas prophecy, as has been explained (*a. 1*), has to do principally with cognition. Therefore, prophecy is a habit.

**Objection 2:** Every perfection of the soul that is not always acting is a habit. But prophecy is a certain perfection of the soul, and yet it is not always acting—otherwise, no individual who is sleeping would be called a prophet. Therefore, it seems that prophecy is a habit.

**Objection 3:** Prophecy is counted among the gratuitously given graces. But as was established above (*ST 1-2, q. 109, aa. 6 and 9, and q. 110, a. 2*), grace is something habitual in the soul. Therefore, prophecy is a habit.

**But contrary to this:** As the Commentator says in *De Anima 3*, a habit is “that by which an individual acts when he wills to.” But it is not the case that an individual is able to make use of prophecy when he wills to. This is evident in 4 Kings 3:15 from the case of Elisha; as Gregory observes in *Super Ezechiel*, “When Josaphat asked Elisha about the future and the spirit of prophecy failed him, he had a minstrel brought to him, in order that the Spirit of prophecy might come down upon him through the praise of the singing and fill his mind with things to come.” Therefore, prophecy is not a habit.

**I respond:** As the Apostle says in Ephesians 5:13, “Everything that is made manifest is light,” since just as the manifestation of corporeal vision is brought about through corporal light, so, too, the manifestation of intellectual vision is brought about through intellectual light. Therefore, the manifestation has to be proportioned to the light through which it comes about, in the way that an effect is proportioned to its cause. Therefore, since, as has been explained (*a. 1*), prophecy involves cognition which goes beyond natural reason, it follows that what prophecy requires is a sort of intelligible light that exceeds the light of natural reason, and this is why Micah 7:8 says, “When I sit in the darkness, the Lord is my light.”

Now there are two ways in which light exist in a thing: (a) in the manner of *a permanent form*, in the way that corporeal light exists in the sun and in fire; and (b) in the manner of *a transient impression or instance of being acted upon (per modum cuiusdam passionis sive impressionis transeuntis)*, in the way that light exists in the air. Now prophetic light does not exist in the prophet’s intellect in the manner of a permanent form; otherwise, the ability to prophesy (*facultas prophetandi*) would always have to be present in the prophet’s intellect—which is clearly false. For in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “Sometimes the spirit of prophecy is absent from the prophets, nor is it always present to their minds—to the extent that when they do not have it, they recognize that when they do have it, they have it as a gift.” Hence, in 4 Kings 4:27 Elisha says of the Sunamite woman, “Her soul is in anguish, and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.”

The reason for this is that an intellectual light that exists in an individual in the manner of a permanent and complete form perfects the intellect for having cognition of those first principles which are made manifest by that light, in the way that through the light of the active intellect the intellect has cognition mainly of the first principles of all those things that are known naturally. Now the principle of those things which pertain to supernatural cognition and which are made manifest by prophecy is God

Himself, who is not seen through His essence by the prophets. By contrast, He *is* seen by the blessed in heaven, in whom a light of this sort exists in the manner of a permanent and complete form—this according to Psalm 35:10 (“In Your light we see light”).

Therefore, it follows that the prophetic light exists in the soul of a prophet in the manner of a transient impression or instance of being acted upon (*per modum cuiusdam passionis vel impressionis transeuntis*). And this is signified by Exodus 33:22, “When my glory passes by, I will set you in the opening of a rock,” etc. And in 3 Kings 19:11 it is said to Elijah, “Go forth and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, and, behold, when the Lord passes by,” etc. And so it is that just as the air always stands in need of a new illumination, so, too, the prophet’s mind always stands in need of a new revelation—just as a student who is not yet adept at the principles of an art stands in need of being instructed about each particular thing. Hence, Isaiah 50:4 says, “In the morning He arouses my ear, so that I may hear Him as a teacher.” And, again, the very mode of enunciating a prophesy indicates this, when it is said that the Lord has spoken to such-and-such a prophet, or that the word of the Lord, or the hand of the Lord, has come upon him.

By contrast, a habit is a permanent form. Hence, it is clear that a prophecy, properly speaking, is not a habit.

**Reply to objection 1:** This division by the Philosopher does not include, absolutely speaking, everything that exists in the soul, but instead includes those things that can be the principles of moral acts, which sometimes are done out of *passion*, sometimes from *habit*, and sometimes by a bare *power*, as is clear in the case of those acts that an individual does by the judgment of reason before he has the habit.

Nonetheless, prophecy can be traced back to a passion as long as the name ‘passion’ is taken for *any* sort of receptivity, in the sense in which the Philosopher says in *De Anima* 3 that “understanding is a certain sort of being acted upon.” For just as in natural cognition the passive intellect (*intellectus possibilis*) is acted upon by the light of the active intellect (*ex lumine intellectus agentis*), so, too, in prophetic cognition the human intellect is acted upon by being lit up by the divine light (*ex illustratione divini luminis*).

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as in the case of corporeal things, when an instance of being acted upon ends, there remains a sort of aptitude for being acted upon again—in the way that a piece of wood, once it has been on fire, is more easily set on fire again—so, too, when an actual instance of enlightenment in a prophet’s intellect ceases, there remains a certain aptitude for being more easily enlightened again—in just the same way that once a mind is stirred up to devotion, it is afterwards more easily recalled to its former devotion. Because of this, in *De Orando Deum* Augustine says that prayers in quick succession are necessary in order for devotion, once conceived, not to be completely extinguished.

**Reply to objection 3:** Every gift of grace elevates a man to something that lies beyond human nature. There are two ways in which this can happen:

(a) In one way, with respect to the *substance of an act*, e.g., working a miracle or having cognition of the uncertain and hidden elements of God’s wisdom. And for these acts a man is *not* given an *habitual* gift of grace.

(b) In the second way, there is something that lies beyond human nature with respect to the *mode* of an act but not with respect to its *substance*, e.g., loving God or having a cognition of Him in the mirror of creatures. And for this a man is given an habitual gift of grace.

### Article 3

#### Is prophecy about future contingents alone?

It seems that prophecy is about future contingents alone:

**Objection 1:** Cassiodorus says, “Prophecy is a divine inspiration or revelation that pronounces

with unchangeable truth the unfolding of things (*rerum eventus*).” But ‘unfolding’ pertains to future contingents. Therefore, prophetic revelation is about future contingents alone.

**Objection 2:** As is clear from 1 Corinthians 12, *prophecy* is divided off on the same level from *wisdom* and *faith*, which have to do with divine things, and from *discernment of spirits*, which has to do with created spirits, and from *knowledge (scientia)*, which has to do with human things. But as is clear from what was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 18, a. 5 and q. 54, a. 2), habits and acts are distinguished by their objects. Therefore, it seems that prophecy does not have anything to do with any of the objects just enumerated (*de nullo pertinente ad aliquod horum sit prophetia*). Therefore, what remains is that prophecy is about future contingents alone.

**Objection 3:** As is clear from what was explained above (*ibidem*), diversity of object causes a diversity of species. Therefore, if some prophecies are about future contingents while others are about other things, it seems to follow that these are not the same species of prophecy.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says that some prophecies are about *the future*, e.g., Isaiah 7:14 (“The virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son”), some are about *the past*, e.g., Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”), and some are about *the present*, e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 (“If everyone is prophesying and a non-believer comes in ... the secrets of his heart are made manifest”). Therefore, prophecy is not about future contingents alone.

**I respond:** A manifestation brought about by a light is able to extend to everything that is subject to that light—just as corporeal vision extends to all colors, and just as the soul’s natural cognition extends to everything that can be subject to the light of the active intellect. Now prophetic cognition occurs through the divine light, by which all things can be known—both divine and human, both spiritual and corporeal. And so prophetic revelation extends to all things of this sort. For instance, prophetic revelation has been made by the ministry of spirits about things pertaining to the excellence of God and angels, as in Isaiah 6:1, where he says, “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and exalted.” His prophecy also contains things that pertain to natural corporeal bodies, as in Isaiah 40:12 (“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, etc.?”). Again, it contains things that pertain to the behavior of men, as in Isaiah 58:7 (“Break your bread for the hungry”). It likewise contains things that pertain to future events, as in Isaiah 47:9 (“These two things will come upon you suddenly in one day: sterility and widowhood”).

Notice, however, that since prophecy has to do with what was at one time far from our cognition, the farther away things are from human cognition, the more properly they pertain to prophecy. Now such things come in three degrees:

(a) The *first degree* belongs to things that are far removed from the cognition of *this* man, whether with respect to his senses or with respect to his intellect, but not far removed from the cognition of *all* men—in the way that an individual man knows what things are present to him with respect to place, and yet another man does not know them by human sensation because he is absent from that place. And so, as we read in 4 Kings 5:26, Elisha knew prophetically what his disciple Gehazi had done in his absence. Similarly, as 1 Corinthians 14:24 says, the thoughts of the heart of one individual are manifested prophetically to someone else. And, again, in this same way, what one individual knows through a demonstration can be revealed prophetically to someone else.

(b) The *second degree* belongs to things that altogether exceed the cognition of *all men*, not because they are unknowable in their own right, but because of the weakness of human cognition—for instance, the mystery of the Trinity, which, as we read in Isaiah 6:3, was revealed by the Seraphim proclaiming, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” etc.

(c) The *third and last degree* belongs to those things that are far removed from all human cognition because they are not knowable in themselves, such as future contingents, whose truth is not determinate. And since what exists universally and in its own right (*universaliter et secundum se*) is more important than what exists in particular cases and through another (*particulariter et per aliud*), it follows that in the most proper sense prophecy involves the revelation of future events, and this is how the name ‘prophecy’

seems to be understood. Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “Since prophecy is so called because it predicts future events, what follows is that when the past or the present is spoken of, it loses the meaning of its name.”

**Reply to objection 1:** Prophecy is being defined in this place in accord with what is properly signified by the name ‘prophecy’. And it is likewise in this way that prophecy is divided off from the other gratuitously given graces.

**Reply to objection 2:** From this, the reply to the second objection is clear—although one could reply that all the things that fall under prophecy agree in the having character of not being knowable by a man except through divine revelation. By contrast, those things that pertain to *wisdom* and *knowledge* and *the interpretation of speech* can be known by a man through natural reason, though they are made manifest in a higher way by the illumination of the divine light. On the other hand, *faith*, even though it is of things that are not visible to a man, does not involve the cognition of the things that are taken on faith, but instead involves a man’s assenting with certitude to things that he knows from others.

**Reply to objection 3:** What is *formal* in prophetic cognition is the divine light, from the unity of which prophecy has a unity of species, even though there are diverse things which are made manifest prophetically by the divine light.

#### Article 4

##### Does a prophet know through divine inspiration everything that can be known prophetically?

It seems that a prophet knows through divine inspiration everything that can be known prophetically (*cognoscat omnia quae possunt prophetice cognosci*):

**Objection 1:** Amos 3:7 says, “The Lord will not give the word without revealing His secret to His servants, the prophets.” But all the things revealed prophetically are words given by God. Therefore, there is nothing of them that is not revealed to the prophet.

**Objection 2:** As Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “The works of God are perfect.” But as has been explained (aa. 1 and 3), prophecy is a divine revelation. Therefore, it is perfect. But it would not be perfect unless everything that can be prophesied were revealed to the prophet, since, as *Physics* 3 explains, what is perfect “is lacking in nothing.” Therefore, everything that can be prophesied is revealed to the prophet.

**Objection 3:** The divine light, which causes prophesy, is more powerful than the light of natural reason, by which human scientific knowledge is caused. But a man who is in possession of a given science knows everything that belongs to that science; for instance, a grammarian knows all matters pertaining to grammar (*cognoscit omnia grammaticalia*). Therefore, it seems that a prophet knows everything that can be known prophetically (*cognoscat omnia prophetabilia*).

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “Sometimes the spirit of prophecy touches the mind of the one prophesying from the present and touches it not at all from the future, whereas sometimes it does not touch it from the present and touches it from the future.” Therefore, it is not the case that the prophet knows everything that can be prophesied.

**I respond:** Diverse things have to exist together only because of some one other thing in which they are connected and on which they depend, in the way that, as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 65, aa. 1 and 2), all the virtues have to exist together because of prudence or charity. Now all the things that are known through some principle are connected in that principle and depend on it. And so if someone knows the principle perfectly in the totality of its power, he simultaneously knows everything that can be known through that principle.

However, if the general principle is unknown or apprehended in a general way, then there is no

necessity for knowing everything at once, but instead each of the things has to be made manifest in its own right. And as a result, it is possible for some of them to be known and others not to be known. Now the principle of those things that are made manifest prophetically by the divine light is the First Truth itself, which the prophets do not see in itself. And so they do not have to know *all the things* that can be prophesied, but instead each prophet knows *some of them* in accord with the special revelation of *this* thing or of *that* thing.

**Reply to objection 1:** The Lord reveals to the prophets all the things that are necessary for the instruction of the faithful people; and yet He does not reveal everything to all of them, but instead reveals some things to one and some to another.

**Reply to objection 2:** Prophecy is something incomplete (*imperfectum*) in the genus of divine revelation; hence, 1 Corinthians 13:8-9 says, “Prophecy will be made void,” and “We prophesy in part,” i.e., incompletely. Now the perfection of divine revelation will exist in heaven, and thus it is added, “When what is perfect and complete comes, then what is imperfect and incomplete will be made void.” Hence, a prophetic revelation does not have to be lacking in nothing; instead, what is “lacking in nothing” are those things toward which the prophecy is ordered.

**Reply to objection 3:** An individual who possesses a science knows the principles of that science, and everything that belongs to the science depends on those principles. And so whoever has the habit of a science in a complete and perfect way (*qui perfecte habet habitum alicuius scientiae*) knows all the things that pertain to that science.

However, through prophecy one does not know in Himself the principle of prophetic cognitions, viz., God. And so the arguments are not parallel.

## Article 5

### Does a prophet always distinguish between what he says through his own spirit and what he says through the spirit of prophecy?

It seems that a prophet always distinguishes between what he says through his own spirit and what he says through the spirit of prophecy:

**Objection 1:** In *Confessiones* 6 Augustine says that his mother “claimed that she distinguished—by I know not what sort of sense which she could not express in words—the difference between what God was revealing and what her own soul was dreaming up.” But as has been explained (a. 1 and a. 3), prophecy is a divine revelation. Therefore, a prophet always distinguishes what he says through the spirit of prophecy from what he says by his own spirit.

**Objection 2:** As Jerome points out, “God does not command anything impossible.” But in Jeremiah 23:28 He commands the prophets, “The prophet who has a dream tells of the dream, and the prophet who has my word speaks my word truly.” Therefore, a prophet can distinguish what he has through the spirit of prophecy from what he sees in another way.

**Objection 3:** The certitude that comes through the divine light is greater than the certitude that comes through the light of reason. But an individual who possesses scientific knowledge through the light of natural reason knows for certain that he possesses it. Therefore, an individual who possesses prophecy through the divine light is all the more certain that he possesses it.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “Notice that sometimes when they are consulted, the holy prophets, because they are used to prophesying, utter certain things from their own spirit and suspect that they are saying these things from the spirit of prophecy.”

**I respond:** There are two ways in which the mind of a prophet is instructed by God: (a) *through explicit revelation*; and (b), as Augustine puts it in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 2, “*through a sort of instinct*, by which human minds are sometimes acted upon without even knowing it.”

Therefore, the prophet has the greatest possible certitude with respect to the things that he knows *explicitly through the spirit of prophecy*, and he knows for certain *that they have been divinely revealed* to him. Hence, Jeremiah 26:15 says, “The Lord in truth sent me to you, in order that I might speak all these words into your ears.” Otherwise, if he himself did not have certitude about this, then the faith that is based on the sayings of the prophets would not be certain. And we can take as a sign of this prophetic certitude the fact that Abraham, urged on in a prophetic vision, prepared himself to immolate his only-begotten son—something that he would in no way have done if he had not been absolutely certain of God’s revelation.

On the other hand, as regards those things that a prophet has cognition of *through an instinct*, sometimes he is such that he cannot fully discern whether he has this thought by some sort of divine instinct or through his own spirit. Now not everything that we have cognition of by a divine instinct is made manifest to us with prophetic certitude, since this sort of instinct is something imperfect and incomplete in the genus of prophecy. And it is in this way that one should understand the passage from Gregory. However, as Gregory adds in the same place in order to forestall the possibility of an error on this score, “having been quickly corrected by the Holy Spirit, they hear from Him what is true and blame themselves for having said what is false.”

**Reply to the objections:** The arguments at the beginning all go through with respect to things that are revealed through the spirit of prophecy. Hence, the reply to all the objects is clear.

## Article 6

### Can a prophetic cognition or pronouncement be false?

It seems that a prophetic cognition or pronouncement can be false (*ea quae propheticæ cognoscuntur vel annuntiantur possint esse falsa*):

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 3), prophecy has to do with future contingents. But future contingents are able not to happen; otherwise, they would happen by necessity. Therefore, it is possible for a prophecy to be false.

**Objection 2:** As we read in 4 Kings 20:6 and Isaiah 38:5, Isaiah made a prophetic pronouncement to Hezekiah, saying, “Set your house in order, for you will die and not live”—and yet fifteen years were later added to his life. Similarly, in Jeremiah 18: 7-8 the Lord says, “I will suddenly speak against the nation and against the kingdom, to root it out and to pull it down and to destroy it. If the nation against which I have spoken does penance for its evil, I will likewise do penance over the evil that I had thought about doing to it.” And this is apparent in the example of Nineveh—this according to Jonah 3:10 (“The Lord had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said He would do to them, and He did it not do it”). Therefore, it is possible for a prophecy to be false.

**Objection 3:** As is proved in *Posterior Analytics* 1, every conditional whose antecedent is absolutely necessary is such that its consequent is absolutely necessary, since the consequent in a conditional is related to the antecedent in way that the conclusion is related to the premises in a syllogism, and from necessary premises in a syllogism only what is necessary can ever follow. But if a prophecy cannot be false, then the conditional *If something has been prophesied, then it will be the case* must be true. But the antecedent of this conditional is absolutely necessary, because it is about the past. Therefore, the consequent will likewise be absolutely necessary. But this is absurd, since in that case a prophecy would not be about anything contingent. Therefore, it is false that a prophecy cannot be false.

**But contrary to this:** Cassiodorus says, “Prophecy is a divine inspiration or revelation that enunciates with unchangeable truth how things will turn out.” But the truth of a prophecy would not be unchangeable if it were able to be false. Therefore, it cannot be false.

**I respond:** As is clear from what has been said (a. 2), prophecy is a sort of cognition impressed on



the prophet's intellect by divine revelation in the manner of a teaching. But the truth of a cognition is the same in the disciple and in the teacher, since the learner's cognition is a likeness of the teacher's cognition—just as, among natural entities, the form of what is generated is a likeness of the form of the thing generates it. And it is along the same lines that Jerome says that prophecy is “a sign of God's foreknowledge.”

Therefore, it must be the case that the truth of a prophetic cognition or pronouncement is the same as the truth of God's cognition—which, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 16, a. 8), is such that it is impossible for it to be false.

**Reply to objection 1:** As was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 14, a. 13), the certitude of God's foreknowledge does not exclude the contingency of future contingents, since His foreknowledge extends to them insofar as they are present and already determined to a single outcome. And so prophecy, which is an impressed likeness, or sign, of God's foreknowledge, does not by its unchangeable truth exclude the contingency of future outcomes.

**Reply to objection 2:** There are two respects in which God's foreknowledge is related to the future things: (a) insofar as they *exist in themselves*, i.e., insofar as they are intuited as present; and (b) insofar as they *exist in their causes*, i.e., insofar as He sees the ordering of causes to their effects. Even though future contingents, as existing in themselves, are determined to a single outcome, nonetheless, as existing in their causes, they are indeterminate in the sense that they could turn out otherwise. And even though these two types of cognition are always conjoined in God's intellect, nonetheless, they are not always conjoined in prophetic revelation, since the impression of an agent is not always equal to its power.

Hence, sometimes the prophetic revelation is an impressed likeness of God's foreknowledge insofar as He sees these future contingents *in themselves*. And such prophetic revelations turn out as they are prophesied, as in the case of Isaiah 7:14 (“Behold, a virgin will conceive”).

By contrast, sometimes the prophetic revelation is an impressed likeness of God's foreknowledge insofar as He knows *the ordering of causes to their effects*. And in such cases things sometimes turn out otherwise than they are prophesied. And yet the prophecy is not false, because the sense of the prophecy is that the lower causes, whether natural causes or human acts, are [at present] disposed in such a way that this effect is going to happen. Accordingly, this is how to understand (a) the words that Isaiah pronounced, “You will die and you will not live”—that is, your body's disposition is ordered toward death—and (b) what Jonah 3:4 says, “Forty days from now and Nineveh will be destroyed”—that is, its [present] merits demand that it be destroyed.

Moreover, God is said to “do penance” metaphorically insofar as He behaves in the manner of a penitent, viz., by changing his way of thinking (*sententia*)—even though He does not change His purpose (*consilium*).

**Reply to objection 3:** As has been explained, the truth of the prophecy is the same as the truth of God's foreknowledge—in the sense that the conditional *If this has been prophesied, then it will occur* is true in the same way that *If this has been foreknown, then it will occur* is true. For in both cases it is impossible for the antecedent not to be true. Hence, the consequent is likewise necessary, not insofar as it is future to us, but insofar as it is considered in its own present, in the way it is subject to God's foreknowledge. This was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 14, a. 13).