

End-Time Fever?

“The Prophets are Coming”



Dr. Prof. Norbert Baumert, s.j.
German Catholic Charismatic Renewal
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(With some additions for better clarification)

3. Documentation of the content of the Dialogue

(with John Wimber and the “Prophets”)

“The prophets are coming” – was on the title page of “Charisma”, (Germany), Issue 76, April - June 1991. Not all of those who had been expected (s. 2.1) came to Bern on August 91 however, Paul Cain and Mike Bickle were the main speakers the following year at the conference “Prophetischer Dienst und Gebet” (Prophetic Ministry and Prayer) in Nuremberg on September 3-6, 1992 (s. 2.5). In anticipation, two interviews with them were published in “Charisma”, Issue 81, July – Sept 92, as well as from myself “A Request to the New Prophets”. We were asked repeatedly why we, as Catholics, were not among the sponsors of those conferences. There was a multiple exchange of letters and several discussions that took place in the autumn of 92 until the time had come to give a public account about it for the Catholics, as well as, for the sisters and brothers involved in charismatic ecumenism in Germany and Europe (s. 2.5). This was done by four articles in “Rundbrief für charismatische Erneuerung in der katholischen Kirche” (Newsletter in the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church) (4/92; 1-3/93) which will be printed here with slight modifications.

3.1. The process of the discussions

The National Service Committee (NSC) of the “Council of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church in Germany” (CCR) had had regular meetings with the service committee of the Geistliche Gemeindeerneuerung in der Evangelischen Kirche (Spiritual Parish Renewal in the Protestant Church): during these discussions we decided for the Wimber conferences in Frankfurt (1987 and 1988); that will also attracted many Catholics; not to be joint sponsors; yet there was to be the possibility for the Catholic participants to meet and where a celebration of the Eucharist would be possible.

A) Structures of Ecumenical Gatherings

Why this restraint? A good ecumenism requires clarity in responsibility. Thus we can discern different types of events in the charismatic area:

- 1) Gatherings of members of one confession with guests, occasionally with guest speakers from other confessions: our German Catholic Charismatic Renewal conferences; Catholic prayer groups, that are ecumenically open.
- 2) Gatherings of groups originating from two (or more) confessions, where a leadership team is formed from all the groups involved in sponsoring the event (i.e. some of the ecumenical leaders' meetings in Craheim (an ecumenical center in Germany in the 80's). Some ecumenical prayer groups, communities and consultations have a similar structure.
- 3) A fully-ecumenical gathering, in which (principally) all existing groups from the charismatic area agree to give full support and share together the responsibility of organization, program and participants. (Pan-European Congresses: Strasbourg 82, Bern 90 and Brighton 91 - International -; some worship services and others).
- 4) Gatherings initiated and planned by one or several groups, which then openly invite other groups or afterwards ask other leadership teams to cooperate groups including an invitation for their service teams to join in cooperatively (i.e. Wimber Congresses; Nuremberg , September 3-6, 92; some inter - confessional gatherings).

In every case a confessional group has to take responsibility and decide if it can and will participate in an "ecumenical" gathering. The criteria should not be an urge to participate at any cost or the desire to improve one's own profile but the discernment of the will of God. In that regard it is decisive, if the event allows for member of the respective confession or group to grow in the faith and will not perturb them unnecessarily, for example through problematic teachings and practices. The capacity of the various members for ecumenism also needs to be considered. Those in responsibility need to discern this. Their decisions will not always be understood by the members and sometimes even will be regarded as an assault on their own maturity. Certainly a mature Christian will eventually decide himself, whether to participate or not; still the decision of the leaders should be also considered. The fairness in regard to your own ecclesiastical group will demand considering oneself, if necessary only as an individual guest and to act accordingly.

In gatherings of types 2 and 3, they should be organised in joined responsibility, with teachings and practices done in a way, that possibly everyone present can appraise them or receive help to understand differences in a good way. Those in leadership can also evaluate in what frequency such gatherings are helpful and useful. This is more difficult with the fourth type of gatherings. Over the previous years there has been a rising amount of initiatives by individual groups to organize large conferences and then to invite a wider audience, far beyond its own members.

A special difficulty results from an often missionary impetus of such events. But it makes a difference if people are invited, who are far from the faith and on the search for God or if the advertisement is made in other churches, fishing in others' fishing-places, as it might be called. In the latter case, this is in disregard of the laws of spiritual growth, which says that everyone needs to be sufficiently integrated in his church. Else, some might become estranged to their own church and become homeless migrants. Instead, we as churches

need to choose the way of ecumenism; and that requires a lot of time and respect of the situations of life God places us in. All this depends on our ecclesiology, our teaching of the Church. Thus, we Catholics ask other charismatic groups to understand that we do not accept every invitation, even when it is offered with fair purposes.

The impetus of the Wimber congresses had been planned beforehand; they did not make provision for us to introduce the Catholic element and its expressions. Also, we had from the start misgivings about the content, i.e. that “signs and wonders” were over emphasized or that spontaneous reactions were too quickly interpreted as work of the Holy Spirit. For we know from our own experience that a desire for sensational events and superficial effects can obscure the view of Jesus and his message (Mk. 1:45ff, Mt. 9:30; John 6:15, 26). Our service team expressed this in an attitude of brotherly openness in writing and in conversations with the organizers with whom, we were in close contact.

b) The partners of the dialogue

With the participation of the so-called prophets being considered for Bern 91 (Aug.28-31) and then for Hamburg 92 (May 6-9), we formed a working group in January 1991 to assess what was going on (s. 2.5). The members of that group were: Norbert Baumert, s.j. (CCR Theological Committee), Hans Gasper (a delegate of the Pastoral Conference of the Conference of the German Bishops and a member of the CCR theological committee) as well as the members of the CCR National Service Committee: Mrs. Kim Kollins (Community of the Beatitudes), Herbert Lüdtke (Community Immanuel, Ravensburg), Dr. Karl Renner (Community Lumen Christi, Maihingen) and Fr. Bill Thomas (diocese of Würzburg).

The sometimes turbulent discussion in the English language area within charismatic ecumenism, to which we connected, had been characterized by sincere worries and sense of responsibility. With the prophetic ministry being practiced in public, it was the right and the duty of those concerned to also discern it in public. Were those true or false prophets? Was there a divine mission and the mistakes only a result of how it was carried out? How to see this “movement” that comprised also other prophets like Rick Joyner, as a whole? Did it require a more thorough distinction between individuals and carriers?

As all activities of the prophets mentioned above took place in the ministries of Vineyard and John Wimber expressly had taken on the ultimate responsibility (s. 2.4), we started with a request to him, among others with an extensive letter and the addition of a “theological contribution to the discussion” by myself (in German and in English, s. 2.5). After the conference in Hamburg our committee had a conversation with John Wimber on May 11th, 1992 in St. Georgen/Frankfurt on the Main which took place in an open, brotherly atmosphere. We made clear once again our reservations and felt he was disposed to hear them.

c) Content of the conversation

John Wimber explained some theological and pastoral positions and their backgrounds, also named some one-sided positions and mistakes, like some members of Vineyard over-estimating the significance of the prophets or the missionary role of their own movement – which he, John Wimber himself, had supposedly corrected recently. He also said, he

considered the announcement of some kind of school for prophets (the so-called Shiloh project) premature and had given up on this plan; that he saw the danger to exert a manipulative control over others through prophecies and himself emphasizes that only the addressee should trust a prophecy, if the Lord confirmed it to him. That he distanced himself from a “prophecy” of Bob Jones that had first appeared to be full of humour.

We were struck by the openness in which corrections for individuals and churches were shared. More of the content was already mentioned in 2.5 and will also be set forth in three topics (3.2 - 3.4).

Meanwhile, there were the preparations for the conference in Nuremberg, Sept. 92. I had already participated, as a guest in a preparatory meeting for Hamburg, in which almost all non-Catholic expressions within the charismatic ecumenism in Germany took part and had handed a copy of my “theological contribution to the discussion” to all leaders present, including those responsible for the Nuremberg conference at the end of the meeting. From this and other contacts, for example in the European Charismatic Consultation (ECC) or March for Jesus, while - the “Circle of Charismatic Leaders” was formed in Germany, with some Catholics a part of it.

In July 92, we received two responses to my theological contribution to the discussion, one from Paul Cain and Dr. Jack Deere, and the other from Avner Bosky, a theological collaborator of John Wimber. I answered them with a “2nd theological contribution to the discussion”.

Meanwhile the Nuremberg conference had taken place. Many Catholics participated or watched the videos to get their own impression. Many were impressed. Still, there needs to be more to an assessment than spontaneous individual impressions: theological reflection, sharing with others and a joined spiritual discernment. In that regard, there was a meeting with Paul Cain and Mike Bickle on Tuesday, September 9th in Frankfurt/Main in which three members of our committee participated.

The final presentation of Mike Bickle in Nuremberg, in which he had talked of an imminent great revival in Germany and England and a special role of these two countries for world evangelisation, had been based on various prophecies by Paul Cain and others, but the presentation of those prophecies were tied so closely with his own thoughts, that it had been hard for those listening to distinguish between them. Thus we had questions as to this combination of prophecies and rhetoric and their spiritual quality that led to a discussion of individual backgrounds and the modes of examination and discernment.

Another critical issue was the teaching that we are now in the “last days” of history and that there would be a “triumphant church” in these last days, which was to start right now among those listening. While both in the discussion stuck to their position that a triumphant church of the end-time could be deducted from the Scriptures (s. 3.2 on that), they were more reserved on the time of it, than in their presentations and said they had were not fully assured whether that came out of the Scriptures or prophetic insight.

3.2 “Triumphant church of the end-time”? (2)

Annotation (2): While the individual comments were quoted literally in the internal protocols (including where those had been found), in order to make sure the same thing was being discussed, it is more significant for the following summary of those papers, that the contents are made obvious, while it is less important, who said or wrote what, when and where. Because we do not want to consider individual persons here, but teachings and basic assumptions, which we find in many places. Some of it was also used in the “theological orientation” (s. chapter 1 in the book), thus both texts will add to each other.

a) unity in truth or the teaching of the church

If it is our mission to become one in Christ, we must also strive for good relations with each other and for truth. In past centuries, the last aspect may have been over-emphasized and soon limits were reached, i.e. during the time of Reformation; while today, it is often the opposite, with the tendency placed more on the good relations with each other. The question for the truth and authenticity, occasionally moved so far into the background, that it even seems disturbing, if somebody questions some contribution, which has been made with conviction. This would lead to an undiscerning estimation of everything or to a prevalence of the most impressive presentations, especially when they are presented in the context of prayer and the proclamation of the Word. Therefore, it says in 1 Peter 3:15: ... *Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; (NRSV).*

Thus we need to ask again and again for the spirit of discernment, with individuals as well as in large events, we need to sit back and listen to the well-understood teaching of the Church and ask God for his light, so we do not follow, as if natural, the first impression we receive (s. 1.4). On the other hand, we must wonder where the conviction of some non-denominational teacher or church-founder originates from and if he is ready to put his partial insights into a greater context and to learn from others.

It certainly is a miracle of the love of God that in 2000 years, He used again and again human beings to convey His message, that He suffered our limitations and entrusted His spirit despite incomplete and erring views, if only He found a certain availability; that He suffered the separation of His church and did not fully deny His blessing to any part and still desires that we strive together for the *one truth*. For the danger of deception is greater than we comprehend. How else would so many Christians of good will contradict each other in important matters over centuries? In gratefulness, we have become aware anew today, how very united we are in many central truths; but wherever we see central truths in danger, we owe each other the ministry of discussion; for mistakes in the proclamation will be, sometimes on the long run, damaging to people.

The contribution to the “unity in truth” the charismatic movement from all confessions could bring is pondered in Peter Hocken’s book, *One Lord, one Spirit, one body* (Münsterschwarzach, 1992). It certainly will not be, next to the many churches to join new churches (that were supposedly the “perfect church?”), but to prepare all Christianity and ourselves for those charisms of the Spirit, that he wants to give in our time. Doing this the Holy Spirit will let some truths shine forth anew and will make us aware of truths that are “new” to us. He will do so also, by teaching us to stand fast with what is good and true that has already been given to us by God.

Thus, I want to add to the discussion some theological insights and teachings of the Catholic Church, in order to proof some respective aspects of modern proclamation. For when Jesus encourages, a disciple that is knowledgeable of the Scriptures, to *bring out old and new things from his treasure* (Mt. 13:52), God will not contradict himself. Moreover, He again and again corrects the various “human traditions” and uses the “tradition” authenticated as “truth of faith” to develop a teaching in Christianity to give a solid foundation.

Regarding the teaching of the Church itself, we are accustomed in ecumenical dialogue to respect the position of the one we are in dialogue with, without giving up our own. Even when some do not insist on apostolic succession – as the roman, orthodox and anglican church do – it is agreed that the Church continually was in existence from the times of the apostles until today. Therefore it is very problematic to speak of a “re-establishment or restoration” of the Church, as it is done occasionally. Of course Christianity is ever again in need of a spiritual renewal (“*ecclesia semper reformanda*”) and all those numerous renewal and revival movements that existed in *all* centuries belong there. But this does not mean, as “restoration” is often interpreted, that the Church had been deprived of all essential means of salvation and those had to be reinstated completely anew by God.

In the tradition of Christianity, there have been prophetic and charismatic gifts in all centuries, even when they have not been called so. “Renewal” means a new going forth, charisms coming alive, but *not* a *total* new start. Thus we see in our century a certain emphasis on gifts of the Spirit that blossom anew, but deem it a simplification when the working of the Spirit is classified in “phases” or “waves” (like “Latter Rain”, “Third Wave” or “Prophetic Movement” – as if, now it was especially the time for the prophetic). The impulses of God often do not always work at the same time in the various churches and ecclesiastical communities and are much more complex, even if there are different stages of development and various phases.

We, as Catholics, also cannot accept the proclamation of a new “apostolic ministry” that is now being restored (= given again) by God and the teaching connected to it of “round two” that pretends that a second phase of the Kingdom of God, begins on earth that is “greater and better” than the primitive church (and also better than all the generations in between) and will be the last phase of church history. In internal discussions, such statements have now been corrected by some representatives – but what is in the public? What was said and is said in their own circles and during large events? All these questions are connected with the view of eschatology.

b) Do we live in the “end-time”?

We already said everything necessary regarding the term “end-time” (1.2). It is often heard in Pentecostal - Charismatic environments, that *the last phase of church history* begins or began in *our days* (“the last days”) and that we are living in “the last days *now*” – while it remains unclear how long this phase is going to last. A *present* “near expectation” (s. 1.2), which is particularly acute, when Paul Cain and Mike Bickle, for example base their message on it, of the “new generation” that is to be awakened by God among our youth of today for the “last days”. When questioned about it, it was emphasized that they have no certainty of the exact time, whether from the Scriptures nor from their prophecies. But how then can

they tell young people today that God will awaken this “triumphant church of the last days” among *them* (s. 3.3). And what will their listeners hear?

Surely, there is the voiced or unvoiced opinion that it will take long yet until the “return”. But this is not a *teaching* of the Church (s. 1.2). Also it cannot be proven from the Scriptures that the world will end in our days (s. 1.3 and 6). Therefore it is not appropriate to ask, in response, if it might not be that God would reveal the secret in the real “last days” and thus give such insight - today - to some prophets. Is the “near-expectancy” intensifying to new dramatic heights, because it is *now really* (how fast?) approaching the end? However, the Scriptures say: We do not know!

In Tradition, the “last days” were mainly associated with horrible events, while the prophetic movement promises the phase of a *triumphant church*. Will that precede or succeed it or come about simultaneously? Paul Cain writes in the “congress materials” from Bern 91 (p. 5): “If it is true that God wants “a triumphant church” of the “last days”, we must *urgently start now*” to prepare for “*the greatest revival of all times*”. These statements are based on the conviction that we live “in the last days” “now”, that we are more or less “immediately before his return” – But how, when the pre-conditions are not met?

c) the spiritual context

It is often so difficult to see through such statements, because those who present or accept them, frequently lead a very committed spiritual life and manifestly the Holy Spirit can be perceived in their life (s. 1.4). Well, God is not waiting for us to be perfect before he uses us. But if the listeners become aware, after a while, that some things were not right – will they not also doubt the truth that they heard in this proclamation? This will depend in part on how important the announcement of the end-times were for the individual. If his relationship to Christ was the decisive thing, he will be sooner ready to correct such mistakes; but if the sensational was in the foreground, he might be distracted from Christ by it, would have been stuck with phantasies and might in disappointment turn away.

In any case preachers need to do everything to deliver a sound proclamation and must beware of pronouncing wishful thinking and impressions of the moment – even if those came in prayer – as a message. It may be that God also grants revival in that context; but then *that* is the true core while the “end-time stuff” is an exaggerated interpretation. For here there seems to be the very problem that is known to every Christian: thoughts about a scripture, personal impressions or prophecies, personal experiences and needs or interpretations of events quickly are woven or melted into each other without discerning the result sufficiently! It all seems so plausible.

But only the truth will make us free (John 8:32)! And for that a healthy “teaching” and a theology that is directed by the Spirit are indispensable. For us the teaching of the Catholic Church (with the customary differentiation of true “dogmas” and “theological opinions” etc.) provides the background and basis, because we perceive in it the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the centuries. In that sense a “dogmatic” argument is something positive, as well as, a biblical one – in difference to some non-denominationals.

If therefore the conviction that we are living in the last phase *now* is *taught* in a certain denomination, we must distance ourselves as Catholics from it. In ecumenical gatherings, it can be expected that such views are held back consciously in order to emphasize what is common and to move to the background what separates.

As end-time expectations are connected usually with (also other) *prophetic* words, we are dealing here *in our context* not only with different interpretations of teachings, but also need to prove the theological teaching regarding the *content of prophetic statements*.

Actually, as far as I know, the *presence* of the end-time that is the fixation of a “close” event in time in non-denominational contexts is also not based on scriptures but on signs and prophecies. Thus Jack Deere referred among others to a young man who foresaw the collapse of the Bay-Bridge (yet that need not even be prophecy, premonitions of that kind are frequent and often natural), as a proof that men now have special prophetic gifts or that certain contents have been “revealed”. Yet striking works of God are not signs for a fixed time of the end. Some of our partners in discussions seemed not very aware that prophecies, wonders and signs existed in all church history. In that sense every *true* prophecy, if accepted willingly, will lead to our being prepared and not being surprised by the return of the Lord, like a “thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:1-11, see also 6:2 in this text).

However, if the conviction that we are living in the last phase of church history is based on prophecies, we arrive exactly at the question; which our argumentations are about: Are prophecies, whose content announces this, true? Of course, they cannot be discerned by themselves. Means that are mutually acknowledged are the Scriptures and the charism of discernment. While there is an undisputable common basis for other prophecies in the Pentecostal-Charismatic context, this is not the case here.

As Catholics, we must voice our misgivings and all involved should – if they wish to continue the dialogue – bear with these mutual questions about each other. The gift of ecumenical togetherness consists also in looking for the possible measure of unity, even if there are different convictions we respect. In that regard it can also be painful to have to say in certain places: “We cannot follow here.”

3.3 Regarding some “scriptural proof”

The teaching of the “triumphant church of the end-time” is presented by Paul Cain with reference to the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, we want to verify some of his interpretations of the Scriptures. The basis of Christian proclamation is the Holy Scriptures in the hand of a living community of faithful, i.e. for us Catholics: under the guidance of the Spirit, which God gives through history to the faithful in unity with the episcopal magisterium. While we consider (in chapter 4) an *individual* interpretation of the Scriptures, we speak here on how to use the Holy Scriptures in *teachings and proclamation*.

The differentiation between *direct* and *applied meaning of the Scriptures*, between *general* and *particular (i.e. arising from the situation) statements* leads to the insight that particular statements of the Holy Scriptures can sometimes be “applied” by the Holy Spirit on other situations, but should not be “transferred” by us. This will be further explained below (4.2).

In as far as, particular statements have a testimonial character, they are encouraging and warning “examples”; promises and threatened punishments only allow for a cautious attempt of analogy (transfer under consideration of the varying circumstances), always under the guidance of the Spirit, of course. So it is clear that a text can be directly “applied” *in proclamation and teaching*, only if that is an immediate call or mission of the spirit in a person’s experience – and that needs to be discerned accordingly. It was done thus, for example, when New Testament authors interpreted the death of Jesus, as the intended aim of the paschal lamb or when Peter interpreted the Pentecostal events, as a fulfilment of Joel 3:1-5. “Applications” like that then have the quality of revelation in themselves; they are – in the examples given above – under the inspiration of the Scriptures.

a) discernment of some interpretations of Scriptures

In the background of the teaching of the “prophetic movement” regarding a triumphant end-time church there are many articles and teachings of its representatives, still I will now refer to some statements made by Paul Cain in “Congress Material Bern 91, p. 5-7) that were also made by John Wimber.

Paul Cain began: “I believe that the Scriptures teaches that there will be a triumphant church in the last days”, and “she will be characterized by four preeminent signatures: power, purity, unity, intimacy.” Here are the four proofs he deduces from the Scriptures:

Regarding 1 - Power: “Unique *authority*: In the last days, there will be a special out-pouring of the Holy Spirit with signs and wonders, prophecy and evangelisation. In John 14:12 it is said: “*Who believes in me will do the works I do and even greater ones*”. This he sees as “greater miraculous deeds”; “the fulfilment of this promise” has yet to come for until now “the disciples never did greater works than Jesus; like the walking on the water, the calming of the storm or the feeding of the 5000.” And this will happen soon before the end comes, for it is said in Rev.11:3-6 that “in the end-time the two prophetic witnesses will accomplish miracles that surpasses the miracles of Jesus on earth”.

Assessment: But Jesus did not say that only *humans that are alive just before his return* will do “greater works”, but “who believes in me”. This general statement thus cannot be restricted to a certain time. Therefore, it must be applied for all times of the faithful. Also: Who can prove that there never were “greater works of miracles” in church history until now? Does Paul Cain know what has been reported from various eras and from the lives of many saints? Also, it does not result from the quoted Scripture that this “greater thing” will be the “triumphant” church *in the last days*, equipped with a unique authority to work miracles. That could happen in any period of church history, yet to come and others might follow. The reference to the two witnesses of Rev. 11: 3-6 also does not say (s. 1.3) this could “only” happen in the “last days”, let alone that it has not been proven yet that these days have begun *now* and that the fulfilment of the presumed “promise” is coming to life in the representatives of the prophetic movement and its listeners.

The statements made are presented like an argument from the Scriptures in those teachings, not as a prophetic announcement. Yet the “argument” is actually based on a very subjective interpretation of history, a superficial interpretation of the texts and on unfounded deductions. How often, the Revelation of St. John has been interpreted with much

imagination and was misused! And that in the end-time “more men will convert than in earlier revivals” cannot not be proved by referring to Rev. 7:9, 13-14; the repeated “and they did not convert” (s. 1.3 and 8.2) would sooner hint at the opposite. But both are an illegitimate fixation of these texts on a concrete historical situation. However, the basic forces of the history of the world and the salvation are pictured there in a metaphorical way (s. 1.3 and 8.3).

Regarding 2 - Purity: A second preeminent characteristic of the end-time church is to be a “unique *purity*”. Here Mal. 1:3-3, Eph. 5:27 and Rev. 19:7-8 are combined to prove that the *church of the last days* will be especially pure.

Assessment: Yet Mal. 3:1-3 is already applied by the New Testament authors on the time of the Messiah, Eph. 5:27 is about the work of Christ before and after his resurrection, and Rev. 19:7-8 does not speak of the church in history but means – using the picture of the bride – all those redeemed (s. Rev. 21:3,9). From these texts nothing results for a special phase of the church soon before the end and especially not that – according to a prophecy by Bob Jones (s. 2.2, 3 and 5) - then there will be a sinless group of witnesses.

Regarding 3 - Unity: It is deducted from Jn. 17:29-23 and Eph. 4:11-13 that the Church in its last phase has been promised a “special” *unity*. Paul Cain assumes that the prayer of Jesus for unity has not been fulfilled yet, that is that, its fulfilment is yet to come; “for it is unthinkable that the Father will not hear the prayer of His Son”.

Assessment: But does this imply that it can happen (only) in the last days? And what would this “unity” be? Did the fulfilment of the prayer of Jesus not start at Pentecost already? Sure, Christendom is divided and sometimes it almost appears the longer, the more. But does that mean that the prayer of Jesus has been without effect over all this time? Are not the many individual steps that Christians have made towards unity a daily grant to this plea? This unity is actually base on a unity of hearts, in truth and love, not an external perfect magnificent manifestation.

In all these texts there are not a single point to found the claim that the last generation will be “incomparable in unity” compared with other generations. *According to the measure* that unity is present among the Christians, however, the world will have a motive to believe in Jesus. But that the prayer of Jesus *must* lead to a *perfect, external, visible* unity in this era and only just before the return of Jesus, cannot not be concluded from these words.

Also, a special level of unity before the end cannot be deducted from Eph. 4:11-13. The ministries that God gave are to *work for* that unity. But that does not mean that the “perfect shape” will ever be accomplished within time. It is more the opposite: Until the end of time we will not be finished with evangelisation (s. Mt. 10:23) and also the Church will be a church of sinners until then. Therefore there will be no “perfect unity” before Judgment Day, even though we must strive, supported by the prayer of Jesus, with all our strength for an increasingly better unity.

Especially, we Catholics know how the Church is in danger to present itself with triumphalism, be it in worldly or ecclesiastical “power”, be it with laws or impressive “successes”, like signs and wonders or great waves of conversions. The Catholic Church

always knew, even in times, when it had external power and success in missions that despite of all God-given indestructible, objective holiness (in the Word and the Sacraments) it was a congregation of sinners and needed daily atonement. The “judgment of the house of God” will only finish at the Last Judgment. We want to ask our Protestant and Non-denominational sisters and brothers urgently not to fall to the temptation of a “charismatic triumphalism”. Surely, God will show his redeeming power always again, but the vessels that carry this treasure in them remain weak human beings (2 Cor. 2:10; 4:7).

Regarding 4 - Intimacy: A “unique *individual relation with God*” is to be the fourth characteristic of “the Church of the last days”. Paul Cain deduces this from Rev. 14:1, “his name will be written on their forehead” which is supposed to say that “their thoughts are made captive under the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Assessment: First, this raises suspicions because it is in contradiction to a basic rule of spiritual life: “Never compare the saints.” It is not our place to believe one group of Christians to be “more intimate with God” than another, nor is it the way of God to reveal something like that for ourselves (simply because that would endanger humility).

Further the connection of Rev. 14:1-5 with 2 Cor. 10:3-5 is unjustified because the texts are focussed on different attitudes: When Paul says that he himself “brings every thought, that contradicts God, into captivity”, the apostle shows up the false teachers in the church (it remains open, if those will convert or not). But in Rev. 14:1-5, we hear from people who submitted themselves gladly and willingly to the Lamb and who *love* God. When Paul Cain now characterizes the attitude of those who follow the Lamb out of love with a text meant to show up recalcitrant persons, he uses texts to interpret each other that speak about irreconcilable matters. The second one actually does not express the “intimacy” that can be seen in the text from Revelations. Also, 2 Cor. 10:3-5 does not mention anything of those enemies “being made captive and *sanctified*”. There are two kinds of “captivity”: that which someone takes on voluntarily by conversion and accepting holiness and another into which he is led by force. Those two kinds must be distinguished because they characterize the two camps in the Judgment. Therefore as well, the combination of the texts is not admissible. It is illegitimate to see in the “144 000”, who stand before the Lamb “on Mount Zion”, the earthly *end-time church* (the whole? some elected?); as can be seen from the complete interpretation of Revelation (s. 1.3 and 8.3). And in the fight with his opponents, the “false apostles”, Paul says nothing regarding when or how quickly they are “made captive”. Even less is it possible to transfer this text to other situations and to arrive at an analogical conclusion that this will perfectly succeed in every situation. The “fight” will be eventually done on Judgment Day that is *through the return of Christ, not before*.

When, elsewhere 1 Cor. 15:24-28 is mentioned to support this, in that text “the enemies” are eventually “subjected” *against their will*. Something totally different is, in this era to hope, that by evidence of the “mighty weapons of God” (2 Cor. 10:4) men permit themselves to be converted and sanctified. The meaning of 2 Cor. 10:5 is not that through the “ministry of the Last Days” “every thought” will be “made captive in *the obedience* of Christ” within this era. This contains several errors in thinking, among others that a general formulated sentence that expresses an *intention* is made into a concrete and “unique” *statement* about the end.

Joel 3:1-5 is quoted as a third text for a “unique intimacy with God in the end-time”. But that Scripture does not contain any hint of a *special* outpouring of the Spirit in our century or decade or at the end of time. It is already applied by Peter to the Pentecostal events and since to all church history. There is no hint in the text that the author of Acts referred with Joel 3:3f (=Acts 2:19f) to a (farther?) future, in contrast to the verses before. Actually Joel 3:1-5 is quoted in a way that the text supposedly is applicable *in its wholeness and then*, so that since then “everyone who calls on the Lord is saved”. Quotes like that may not be torn apart like that. If someone believes that the “signs of heaven” (Acts 2:19) have not yet been fulfilled, the author of Acts obviously saw no difficulty to see them fulfilled in the pictorial descriptions of Pentecost. Else he would remove them, from that said before. He obviously knows that prophetic words often strongly use pictures that stand for a deeper reality. And insofar “miraculous signs in heaven and on earth” happened at Pentecost, also in the tongues of fire, the “roaring like a storm” and the shaking of the whole house.

In another context Paul Cain brings together the special “intimacy” the “end-time servants” supposedly have with God with the assertion that they will be kept from the martyrdom. As true as it is that a deep relationship with God is a spiritual protection for us, so wrong it is, to deduce from this that it also protects us even more from sickness, physical damage or persecution. The early Church considered it a special grace, if someone was found worthy to be a martyr. Whether in the individual case, Mk. 16:18 (“if they drink deadly poisons, they will not hurt them”) or John 21:18f (“another one will tie your belt and lead you where you do not want to go”) will come true (also “is applied”, see 4.2) is up to God. It is even more unbiblical to say that a whole “generation” (a large group of elected) will be externally (and internally?) “Invincible”; it is without pastoral responsibility for it lulls the listeners – who gladly refer this to themselves – in a false security. In as far as, those “prophets” are convinced to have received this as a prophecy, this “prophecy” needs to be rejected on the base of its contents. But to present it as a biblical teaching is insupportable.

b. You know neither day nor hour

In the “interpretations” presented here and similar ones there is apparently the following basic structure:

Main sentence: A certain text says something specific about the “last days”;

but (1. minor sentence): this means the last phase (= end phase) of Christendom, that is the period immediately before the return as different from other phases in church history;

but (2. minor sentence): now is (or begins) this “end phase”; therefore: the text can be applied today directly (specifically).

One error in this thinking is that the term “last days” is applied without hesitation to the end phase of history without differentiating between “end-time” in a greater or narrower sense of the word (s. 1.2). Further the conviction gained elsewhere that we are living in the end phase (in the narrower sense) is intertwined unreflecting with a Scripture (Joel 3, for example) so that the result sounds like a scriptural argument. If questioned about it, the representatives of the prophet movement actually admit that Scripture makes no explicit mention of the time of the return. But then the second minor sentence needs to be argued in another way. For if texts like Joel 3:1-5 in the New Testament are generally applied on the time from Pentecost until the return, there has to be an explicit argument for it, if someone

thinks to perceive *also* a *specific* meaning in them regarding the *end-phase* – something that would require a specific revelation. Also there would have to be a specific reasoning, if a promise that is understood to in a particular way (like a special “ministry of the last days”) is applied to a *specified group of people*. Argumentations of that kind are usually made unconsciously; still they have to be formulated explicitly if the appliance of certain Scriptures is to be accounted for.

Let us remain open for God’s will to let his glory shine forth in the Church always again; but that it would shine brighter in the end-time than ever before and that the present Renewal (Pentecostal-Charismatic or another that surpasses it?) is the “last”, really this should not be presented as a statement from the Scriptures or a result of interpretation of the Scriptures. Much more, we should take serious the call for repentance in the Scriptures and the individual decision to return to the Lord, than to expect great things and the exact time of the end (Acts 1:7) and the question whether the present or beginning renewal is the last and greatest, entrust it to Him.

Therefore the concluding sentence of Paul Cain: “If it is true that God wants a “triumphant church”, then we absolutely must start now to prepare ourselves for the greatest revival of all times” is to be discerned diligently. Does not the motive of spiritual “success” push forward here – let alone that the precondition is not met? Will not the end time church be also a church that follows the Crucified One (Mk. 8:34; 2 Cor. 4:7-12; 6:1-10); Gal. 3:2) as well? Else it might be that such a “triumphant church” is derived from our dreams more than from His promise. And are those that read it really awakened to a greater love of Christ? Impure motivation can easily lead to fanaticism or resignation as soon as those representations are not fulfilled.

The whole dialogue shows clearly how quickly an isolated interpretation of the Bible can go wrong – and always is happening again and again! Someone *believes*, to just interpret the Scriptures and is not aware, how man (premature) human conclusions are part of his thoughts. This is one of the reasons why all exegesis – whether scientific or in bible groups – always needs to be integrated into an ecclesial context, bound into two millenniums of meditation of the Scriptures under the protection of the Magisterium.

3.4 Discerning the prophecies

In the context of our dialogue we addressed, again and again, some concrete prophecies that we attempted to discern. Here are some of the results. (Positive and basic information regarding this gift are under 5). The necessity of such an “examination” (s. 1 Cor. 12:10 and 14:29) assumes that we *must be prepared for deceptions*, not only to unmask fraud but yet more because those concerned and those addressed can be in error. In a wider sense every faithful has part in the “prophetic ministry” of Christ. But in the following we are concerned with a *special gift* of prophecy that is given only “to one or another person” (1 Cor. 12:10 and 1 Cor. 14: prophecy in the *strict* meaning of that word).

a) Who and Where are the examiners?

By whom should prophecies be examined? If they are addressed to individual or small groups, then by the group or congregation, itself (1 Cor. 14:29); this is the “first level”

because they receive it, experience it and know the speaker, personally. Therefore prophecies need to be given at every gathering in a way that the congregation, sees itself asked to discern it in peace. Further this group, as a whole needs to be part of a greater ecclesial context (denomination, confession, ecumenical). For Catholics, all examination needs to refer back to the Bishops and the Pope (s. Vatican II, Constitution on the Church 12). Thus also the Charismatic Renewal is under the guidance of those ministries. In the ecumenical, together, we expect of a group of prophets that speak into that ecumenical field that they see their brothers and sisters not only as hearers but also as examiners of their prophecies. It is problematic when prophetic words are strongly emphasized by rhetorical means or are present in publications in a way that does not allow for questions concerning them.

In our case we already saw that the question of the exact time was not based on the Scriptures but eventually only on prophetic impulses. But a basic message like the announcement of the return of Christ in a very near time would concern all Christendom. Therefore, they would have to submit to the examination by all faithful and could not present with such absolute conviction, but would do it in a way that the willingness to be examined by the respective spiritual authorities is obvious. To put it more clearly: After something has been accepted within the own denomination, it would have to be introduced into the ecumenical dialogue by the prophets and their leaders, asking for discernment.

Of course, here the whole misery of the separated church is shown, as the insight to be ready for a dialogue with other prophets and the understanding of ecclesial authority is underdeveloped or their principles are not really thoroughly thought through to the end. Since ecumenical gatherings start from the premise to emphasize what is common and not to deny what separates, there is a tension that needs to be endured. On top of that there is the vagueness of our partners in dialogue when they talk, as if naturally of the “present end-time” in their teachings and announcements, but admit if questioned on it that they have no assurance of that (s. 3.1c; 3.2b).

b) The content of the prophecies

Further we need to consider the *contents*. Do the prophecies match the basic message of the Gospel? In our case: Basically, it is the same mistake to believe we know that the return is still far away just as much as to believe it is almost on us. Instead we must reckon with it at any moment without “knowing” whether it will be now or much later! The reason is that we should live in constant vigilance (s. 1.3 and 4). We must not seek security in knowing the time and hour, but in the trusting relationship with Jesus, our Saviour.

Further, it is not according to salvation plan of God to give those he calls the *consciousness* that they are “*better*” than others or their predecessors. It contradicts sound biblical teaching and the spiritual tradition of our church to tell a whole group of people in the name of God that they will not sin anymore (s. 3.3a-2 and 4), as in the prophecies and teachings on “Joel’s army” (interpreting and applying Joel 2:1-11). Apart from that seducing to a false self-security, we must expect and receive salvation from God in faith and hope. As long as, a person lives in this world, he will be prone to the temptations of sin. Sure there are prophets in the Scriptures, who “condemn” people and announce “greater works than before”, but the one called knows exactly about his sinfulness and the endangerment of his vocation.

Also those “prophets” are not clear about who belongs to this present “army of God”. Thus you can wriggle out of responsibility in individual cases when someone or another who was believed to belong there, did not eventually. (Personal failure certainly could not have happened after a promise like that.) This prophecy is absolutely arbitrary and as such suspicious. – Generally we learn to be cautious from it, if a prophecy predicts a great future in the service of God to its listeners and thus sort of “builds their image”; this is contrary to true “edification” that encourages, but sometimes is hard to recognize.

It is similar with the announcement of a “new apostolic generation” with a special spiritual authority. When questioned John Wimber emphasized that he then did not consider the institution of a new “authoritative ministry” – although the new churches have to allow to be questioned on what they base authority in their church. Spiritually, it is very questionable to make distinction between those with more authoritative authority and others. The nature of ministry is in a certain way independent from the person who carries it and is carried through all times by the working of God. Also, thinking like that seduces to compare people who carry authority with each other and to turn to the one who appears – according to someone’s subjective judgment – “stronger”. But that would be the dissolution of the ecclesial ministry of leadership.

c) The ways and behaviour of the prophets and the prophecies

Next, we need to consider the manner in which prophetic contributions are *presented*. It is suspicious, if prophetic assertions seem exaggerated or when “prophets” makes their appearance in huge groups”. The Old Testament prophets usually were individuals, with few disciples, like the prophets of church history or the “starzy” of the Eastern Church, while the “schools of prophecy” with their many adherents are more easily tempted to be shallow, like the prophet adversaries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Also, in the primitive church there apparently were no such “schools”. In any case a prophet needs to have a very individual process of maturing.

When prophetic ministry is encouraged so extensively and globally, as it occurs in the mentioned conferences, there is an increased likeliness that simply some natural gifts are awakened that might be taken prematurely as prophecy by the individual person. Something similar is the case, if after a prayer to the Holy Spirit any spontaneous reactions are considered the working of the Holy Spirit, as could be observed during the Wimber Congress in Frankfurt/Main. And an individual prophecy always needs to be examined in regard of whether it helps people to be disciples of Jesus or sooner nourishes curiosity and desire for the sensational. This conveys understandable once more why a prophet never may act isolated, in a space of his own, but only under the protection of ecclesial authority – even if he has to tell unpleasant things to this authority. The history of the saints proves this sufficiently.

This leads us to question; *the ways and kind of the prophetic impulses themselves*. For we must reckon that the tempter “disguises himself, as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) and inspires good and pious thoughts (Mt. 4:11). The fault then cannot be seen in the contents (for these seem to be good), but especially in the manner of the individual “spiritual” insights and experiences themselves – as taught by good spiritual tradition (s. 5.2). Therefore, *person*

and ministry/office needs to be discerned. It is important that the prophet “has the ways of his Lord” (Did 11.8; s. 5.5), but even then, he may be deceived in an individual ministry. On the other hand it can happen that someone has an apparently effective ministry and yet fails morally (Mt. 7:22f; 1 Cor. 4:4; 2 Cor. 2:10). Of course we must strive to bridge the breach. Thus an examination needs to consider, if the prophetic processes are embedded into *reverence for God* and accompanied by *peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*. There, not only the state of the prophet is in question, but also that of all concerned. In a small group, such a step of examination starts with individual persons sharing the effect a specific word has/had on them – always in an attitude oriented towards God (s. 5.2). This is more difficult with prophecies of a wider context, but needs to be done similarly. If the person who gives a presentation positions himself positively or demands a positive affirmation to what he says, the community is not taken serious as a partner in a spiritual process (of discernment) and this painfully reminds us of Col. 2:18.

General preaching/teachings of a prophet are therefore to be distinguished from *individual prophecies* with special regard to its *interpretation*. Only an individual prophecy may be of divine authority, while everything else is always possibly a result of human errors. Ignatius of Loyala writes in his book of Spiritual Exercises (No 336), that the immediate, new insight needs to be discerned from the time following it. For often persons, form during this subsequent time “through their own thoughts about relationships and conclusions from terms or judgments or through the good or evil spirit various intentions and opinions that have not been given directly by God our Lord.” But because they apparently are connected with the original impulse, there is the danger to give them the same authority. When preachers present insights they received before, this reproduction and explanation never has the same quality, as an immediately received and spoken word. And it takes great vigilance not to add own things in this phase, even though in good faith.

d) Either – or?

A single prophecy is in its core *either from God or not*. As far as its origin is concerned, there is no in-between. Even when God uses subjective terms and ideas of the prophet as material in the making of the prophecy, the decisive impulse either is from God or not. With this precondition set, the content is not to be criticized but either completely authentic or not authentic. This is the background of the instruction in Did 11, 7 (s. 5.5): “You shall not discern a prophet *while* he speaks in the Spirit” – because discernment is for later. Yet then it is to be discerned *whether* something is from God but not which part is good and useful and which not. The prophet may not add to or omit from whatever he receives in the Spirit (Ez. 33:1-9; s. Rev. 22:18); he must faithfully report what was given to him. He also has the duty to make clear to those he speaks to when he reports a word of the Lord and when he speaks out of his own.

This does not mean, as one of our conversant suggested, that every marginal vagueness leading to error is of occult or demonical origin. Some impulses can originate from natural spontaneity and subjectivity; others can be spiritual deceptions that any prophet must reckon with. Deceptions are an imitation of spiritual inspirations and resemble the authentic ones at first, so considerably that they are mistaken for such. Occult or “demonical” influences in a strict sense are to be differed from those, as well. Only, if someone has

sufficiently tested experiences in these discernments, he may be allowed to live his prophetic ministry in public.

We should also be aware that this alternative only applies to the proper prophetic impulse while many human influences are at work in its execution and reporting, thus that the “either – or” cannot be used anymore. Maybe some prophecies that speak of the “impending” return should be interpreted like the corresponding Scriptures: Whatever is urgent calls for vigilance but is not fixed to a concise time? The subject is not settled yet in theology. From a spiritual and psychological point of view, it could happen easily that a basic impulse for vigilance and the longing for the return actually come from God but that the concise formulations (unconsciously) include many human things and thus the form resulting cannot be called “authentic” anymore – other than the Scriptures. But if the basic impulse itself originates from “individual spontaneity”, these might be ideas and thoughts or special natural forces like clairvoyance. This need not be demonical. But the basic discernment “of God or not” must not be dropped, because else every prophecy would be totally arbitrary. Often we will have to ask: Is there a core that comes from God and that is worth to merge or is everything from other sources? That is why we need the “gift of discernment”.

Some things can be measured by the *tendency* of the prophetic impulses. Ignatius of Loyala emphasizes for every individual (EB 333): “We must be very diligent as for the sequence of the thoughts” and if something “*distracts or is less good* than what the soul aspired to or if it weakens the soul or disquiets or confuses it, stealing its inner peace”, then this is the sign of a deception. Of course, always provided that the person has good intentions, finds a “sequence of good thoughts” in himself (EB 332; 334) and walks on ways of discipleship of Jesus (EB 315 and 328f). – What is said for one person here, analogously applied to spiritual currents and also seminars. Thus we will pay attention, if prophecies slowly distract from the way of discipleship, that eventually not Jesus but the sign becomes the centre (s. John 6:26) – even though those responsible for the event did not intend this.

It is an important criteria of authenticity that a prophetic forecast *is fulfilled*. But this can only be ascertained afterwards. In our talks, we were met in response with the advice of Rabbi Gamaliel: “If this is a work of men, it will be destroyed; if it is from God, you cannot destroy it” (Acts 5:38f). But there it is, the council of an observer, who is not concerned himself, a man who removes himself and his listeners from the immediate prophetic claim of the message of the Gospel. This cannot be the response of a congregation (community), who is presented with a prophecy. In our case that would mean, we will see on Judgment Day; but then there is no more room for action!

Every prophecy must be proved trustworthy (“authentic”) *before* it becomes reality, if it contains an appeal or intends to cause an action. If we would wait inertly until it becomes real, it would have failed its intention; which is to move people to a change *beforehand* or to strengthen their faith (Jonah 3!). Exactly that is shown in Jer. 16:11-24, when “some of the elders” perceive that it is an *authentic* prophetic word and changes their attitude before it comes true (26.4f, 17-19), the word itself is spoken under the condition: “if you do not listen ...”. The example demonstrates that there are criteria other than the fulfilment that testify for the authenticity. The examination of a prophecy which necessarily *always* uses *several* criteria therefore has to be made *before* the fulfilment, so it can have a healthy effect.

e) Prophecy and leadership

A frequent problem, which is especially visible in the case in question, is that some “prophets” speak out many things that really come about or that they apparently “do miracles” (s. 1.4). Jesus exhorts his listeners to discern well. Even if the person in question subjectively is sincere and strives for a life in the discipleship of Jesus, it can be that unknowingly something is considered as divine which is not. Church history gives us sufficient examples until today that men of good faith fell into error; and on a smaller scale everyone experiences this in his own environment.

Here the focus is on the kind of *leadership*. If it is expected in public gatherings that prophetic words are first presented to a leader a four-fold function is met: the leader will check:

- 1) if he thinks the word *authentic* and mature
- 2) if it is to be told *at all* (Paul reckons with a surplus of prophecies when there is loud praying in tongues: 1 Cor. 14:26-33)
- 3) if yes, if it is told *publicly*
- 4) and *when* it is told.

In the context of the process in which our dialogue took place, there were guidelines by John Wimber that certainly contained many helpful things; but if some contents are concluded principally, it is a tempering with the prophetic ministry. If someone really receives the words of God, men do not have the right to keep one or another of them secret because of their content (Heb. 3:16-21; 33:1-9). Else we presume to judge the Holy Spirit, what he may impress on a person and what not. If some contents make you suspicious (for example, that a woman is to have a child), there can be different reasons. Is it that something that should be told only private, not in public, that the “prophet” may be partially manipulative or that we wonder if there is some faulty content and thus the word cannot be from God? But it is not right to keep back certain contents, which are good in themselves by principle (s. 2.2 and 2.4). A prophetic announcement of the birth of a child is actually biblical.

If someone often passes on a word that does not come true or is inadequate and creates confusion then the *ministry of this person* is questionable and there should not be a selection of certain contents. At least that person should not minister prophetically over a longer period, especially not publicly – until he learned to discern better. It is part of the basic formation of a prophet that he learned to discern by the kind of his impulses which are from God and which not. Where there is lack of clarity and things are mistaken, the one who confuses is already at work. A prophetic ministry needs a high level of clarity.

Perhaps after these arguments there is the impression that a prophet needs a thorough *theological education*. But that would be an error. Usually they are not theologians! And there is a deeper meaning to that. I believe, that God thus counters the danger of the influence of “human knowledge” on the message. The authenticity of a prophecy is also shown in that the prophet passes on the words without seeing through them. In contrast, theology is the instrument of examination and reflection, not an element of prophecy itself. The fact that prophetic words are nevertheless theologically correct is an important (though not the only) hallmark that they are from God.