The Prophetic Spirituality of Maria Petyt and the Latin Manuscript about the Dutch War

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Introduction

As Michael of St. Augustine arranged all Maria Petyt's texts according to their content (autobiographic notes, texts about Jesus, about Mary, about the Eucharist, etc), in this manuscript he collected those texts in which Maria Petyt treats the Franco-Dutch war.¹ She wrote these texts during the last five years of her life.

What strikes me in reading this particular collection of texts are the many associations with prophetic spirituality. Since Maria Petyt was a Carmelite Tertiary with a Carmelite spiritual director (Michael), it is understandable that the prophetic tradition might resonate in her writings. The Carmelite Order originated in the tradition of men (and women) who wished to lead a life like that of the biblical prophet Elijah, the solitary one *par excellence* and the prototype of all hermits. The first Carmelites on Mount Carmel were eager to walk, literally, in the footsteps of Elijah. From that time on, Elijah has been considered to be at the core of Carmelite spirituality.²

In this article I will read the texts of Maria Petyt³ in the manuscript from the prophetic perspective. What can the manuscript in question teach us about the prophetic dimension of Maria's religious life? For the theoretical background of prophetism I will use the biblical studies of Kees Waaijman⁴ and I will look at its distinctive characteristics. A first characteristic of the prophetic dimension is that it is initiated by the Word of God (*The Beloved Speaks*). Second, prophets see from the point of view of God's future (*Perceiving the Future*). Third, in biblical tradition, prophets play a role with respect to

1 See Giovanni Grosso's contribution to this volume, p. 83ff.

2 See for instance: Boaga (1990).

3 We just have the Latin manuscript provided by Michael of St. Augustine (and its English translation by Veronie Meeuwssen). Unfortunately we do not have the original Dutch texts of Maria Petyt.

4 Waaijman (1985) 14–21; Waaijman (2002) 196–200.

kingship (*Related to Kings*). Fourth, the prophetic word can turn out to be either positive or negative (*Divine Judgement*). Finally, biblical prophets viewed themselves as belonging to a tradition (*Prophetic Tradition*).

The Beloved Speaks

The first text (in the original sequence) recalls the origin and core of Maria Petyt's position in relation to the Franco-Dutch War:

On the 3rd of May 1672 during Vespers the Beloved seemed to indicate to me, that the King of France did a pleasing thing to Him by invading Holland, and He even promised him the victory. The Beloved charged me to help him by my prayers and to be in that sense as a helper and ally in his army (38r).

The text starts with a date just after the beginning of the Franco-Dutch war in April 1672. Maria recalls that it was during liturgy (vespers) that the Beloved (Jesus, God) seemed to indicate to her that He was pleased with the invasion of Holland by the king of France, and that He promised her that this king would triumph. The Beloved entrusts Maria with the task of helping the king, by means of prayer.

It is typical for prophetic spirituality (as we explicitly find in Scripture), that it results from the Word of God. God speaks directly to the prophet. It is 'a dialogic event of contact'.⁵ 'The first step and also the final source of a prophetic act was a moment of deep personal contact with God' (*persönlicher Gott-ergriffenheit*).⁶ The Word of God 'happens' to the prophet, 'occurs' to him and this has an immediate effect on him.

In the text of Maria Petyt this divine word (address) is pervasive. If Maria Petyt has a prophetic gift (it is too early to say so, but if so) it originates in her mystical experiences: she tastes the Beloved. She has no choice, since her mystical experiences compel her to act personally. As Jeremiah said: 'If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name', then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.' (Jer 20:9). This is a core character of prophecy.⁷

⁵ Waaijman (1985) 15–16.

⁶ Fohrer (1969) 239.

⁷ Waaijman (1985) 16.

In the introductory lines of the text, cited above, Maria Petyt testifies that she receives messages from 'the Beloved'. Maria Petyt speaks a lot about the Beloved. She explicitly mentions 'Jesus my Beloved' (32v) and the 'Beloved God' (31v), but in most instances she uses the name 'the Beloved' without further designations. It demonstrates the divine unity that she perceives: the One God (Cf. John 10:30: 'The Father and I are one.'). Also, by persistently using the name 'the Beloved', Maria Petyt affirms that she is relationally connected to the divine reality, and that this relational connection is a connection of love. This specific name, 'the Beloved' (which is a widely used name in mystical texts), reveals that Maria Petyt has been touched by God, and that her heartstrings are tugged.

As was mentioned above, the 'dialogical event of contact' between God and the prophet is the heart of prophecy. Maria Petyt beautifully describes how she desires God and that her soul *cannot* do otherwise:

...and the soul does not want or desire anything less than God: to whatever God turns, to that also my soul ought to turn. Whatever God loves, the soul also has to love, from whatever God turns away, from that also the soul turns away, nor can the soul act in any other way, because God possesses it, moves it, leads it and is united with it, where it is one being, one working, one understanding and one willing with God. (31v)

Maria Petyt perceives a close and open connection between her soul and God. The soul desires to be guided by God, to follow God. It cannot desire, turn, love or act otherwise, because it is fully united with God who governs the soul. This immediate connection between God and the human soul is the source of prophecy. As the biblical prophet Amos says: 'The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?' (Am 3:8).

Hearing the Word of God is a combination of being addressed and hearing content. About the first aspect, being addressed, Maria Petyt shows no doubt. She describes exactly this close and open connection between God and her soul. About the second aspect, the content, Maria Petyt is somewhat reserved. She testifies that the Beloved '*seemed* to indicate to me', and that He '*seemed* to show me'. Although Michael of St. Augustine is more outspoken in his comments (the headings) about the truth of her perceptions, Maria often articulates her own perceptions with some restraint: 'I felt', 'it seemed', 'I perceived'. Her wording, her style of writing (as far as we can conclude from the translations) shows that she is very near to her own inner self: she is aware of the fact that she interprets her perceptions and searches for understanding. Remarkably transparent, she articulates this restraint. However, it does not prevent her

from acting according to what she perceives and understands. Throughout the texts, more and more she seems to trust her perceptions as truly the vision of the Beloved, especially because of its continuous confirmation in her prayers.

In this manuscript, Maria Petyt also writes about her reflections on how she should appreciate the messages about the war that people bring her (41r). She struggles with the fact that her inner perceptions do not correspond to what she hears from the people (30v). The differences between these messages and her own understanding cause her to have serious doubts about the truth. When the Beloved gives her 'confirmation about those things', all doubt is gone (43v-44r). Later on, however, (February, 1673), when Maria Petyt receives reports about the sins of the king of France and messages that he is losing the battle in Holland, as a reaction, she tries to alienate herself from that king and to reject as false all her former inner feelings in favour of him. However, in prayer she receives new clarity of the Beloved, which makes her certain of the opposite stance and revives her zeal again (46v-47r). This critical reflection (which is an aspect of discernment)⁸ can never be brought to an end. Maria Petyt beautifully shows that these critical reflections are fundamentally part of the divine-human relational process: she keeps searching, not-knowing, willing to hear, questioning herself, being insecure. But also, again and again, Maria Petyt discerns in favour of her inner knowledge – what she perceives as coming from her Beloved. When 'the Beloved speaks', it overrules all other voices.

Perceiving the Future

In the opening sentences of the text, cited above, Maria Petyt mentions that the Beloved has promised the king of France the victory. This might be a question of foreseeing, that of the various possible outcomes of the present invasion, his victory is the one that is expected. About one year later, when the battles continued – army against army – Maria Petyt perceives 'that the French in that conflict brought back the victory and that the king of France would occupy Holland' (46r). She evaluates it as a prophetic vision:

This vision of this future event, in God, was such as it was in the Prophets, when they foresaw some future things, like one year ago or thereabout, as

8 Waaijman (2002) 492–500. See also Veronie Meeuwse's contribution to this volume. p. 240ff.

if it had been demonstrated and insinuated how the future would be... (46r).

Maria Petyt refers to a second prophetic characteristic: providence. Her description corresponds to a broad understanding of what this prophetic gift implies. However, a study of biblical prophetism gives another understanding of it.⁹ Prophets see from the vantage point of God's future. This is the work of God: the Lord tears his prophet away from the 'now' and places him in the future from the vantage point of which the prophet looks back at the present. 'A prophet sees as already having happened (prophetic perfect) an event that is a mere possibility in the present.'¹⁰

We can read a beautiful example of this biblical prophetic dimension in the opening pages of Maria Petyt's text (original sequence). This text is from the 4th of May 1672, just at the beginning of the war:

The Beloved, commonly and familiarly speaking and interacting with me, seemed among other things to show me his great joy, happiness and rejoicing, because the time had already come that Holland would become Catholic (38r).

Here we see the prophetic perfect: 'the time had already come'. This is the perspective that Maria Petyt will keep in mind during the war that has just started: that it will please God that the Dutch Republic has become Roman-Catholic instead of adhering to the Reformed Church. This perspective is affirmed in her prayers in which she perceives the word of the Beloved. She cherishes this perspective. The overwhelming joy of the Beloved has thrilled her. She cannot let it go; she has to remain loyal to this perspective, this possible future. She is seduced.

The prophetic perspective Maria Petyt perceives guides her and she cherishes it. However, she does not pin down the Beloved with it! God's future is still open. Even when Maria Petyt receives from different people reports that are in favour of the king of France (news that would be in agreement with her cherished perspective) she does not follow those reports because they are not confirmed for her in her prayer in the spirit (48r).

⁹ Waaijman (1985) 16.

¹⁰ Waaijman (1985) 16.

In her mystical experiences, the prophetic perspective – that Holland will be Catholic – is nourished.¹¹ This perspective derives from these experiences, but it is interesting that it is also connected to the context of these experiences: Catholic liturgy. Maria Petyt often testifies that the Beloved speaks to her or shows her something during liturgy or at times that are connected to liturgy: ‘before and after holy communion’ (43r; 47r; 49r), after holy communion (42r; 45v; 49r), ‘while I went to holy communion’ (35v), on or after ‘the feast of...’ (39r – Holy Trinity; 40v – Blessed Sacrament; 45v – St. Louis King of France¹²; 47r-v – Purification of the Virgin; 49v – the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul; 34v – Holy Trinity, Christmas, St. John¹³; 37r – St. Louis), ‘sometimes in the presence of the most Blessed Sacrament’ (37r), and ‘during vespers,’ or ‘at the time of vespers’ (38r; 32r; 47r). From this perspective, it is no wonder that Maria Petyt is so zealous for the primacy of the Catholic Church above the Reformed Church: all her visions seem to be connected with the liturgy, often connected to the Eucharist. Maria Petyt, who perceived in her inner self a close union with God, would have been affected emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually by the suppression of the Catholic faith. Theologically, her main objection against the Reformed tradition is that they ‘destroy the certain grace of God and the salvation of so many souls’ (33v). Throughout the text this seems to be her only interest, it plays an active role in her reflections.

The prophetic perspective – perceived from the vantage point of God’s future – is indissolubly connected to her own viewpoint. This solid connection can be explained as a result of a process of ‘transformation’. In the manuscript, Maria Petyt not only describes her experiences of being immediately addressed by the Beloved, she also describes how she receives and interprets the words, images, visions, and thoughts that she receives in this contact. In her texts we can read in what way her understanding of what happens in the war is formed and dictated by this contact with her Beloved. She is aware that she is standing in the midst of a tension. She chooses a journey of resistance against her private nature. She cannot neglect that the spirit guides her into an area that she would never have chosen for herself. (30v-31r).

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- 11 In 1672, also the Catholics who lived in the Republic (about 40% of the population) and the Catholics in the Southern Netherlands hoped that the Republic would become Catholic again. Some also had visions in this direction. See: Frijhoff (2002).
 - 12 In Western Europe, the French king – more than other anointed kings – was considered to represent the Biblical Kings. See: Bloch (1973). Many kings of France were called Louis, but the only canonised king was Louis IX (1214–1270).
 - 13 Probably Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist is meant here.

Maria Petyt explicitly presents her experiences as a process of transformation: 'I ought to do nothing but to remain in union with the divine spirit and to endure that divine operation' (31r). This process of transformation takes place in her inner soul and has its effect on her actions.

An example of this transformation is that Maria Petyt sees herself as a mother in this war: 'the Beloved (...) made me so to speak its mother' (32v; cf. 39r; 30r; 30v; 43r; 49r). She is transformed by the Beloved who plants in her a loving heart. Maria Petyt testifies that both the king of France and the king of Spain 'were my sons' (45v). This image of herself as their mother shows her experience of being indissolubly connected to both of them, with a motherly heart. For instance, she feels that she has to ask forgiveness for the offenses of the king, and that she has to compensate the Beloved (his father) for him: 'like a mother uses to plead the case of her son with the Father, and seeks to reconcile her wrongdoing son with the offended father' (49r). Thinking about both kings, her motherly heart speaks. And her motherly feelings are not restricted to those kings; her motherly heart also goes out to the French soldiers in their battle for the glory of God and the conversion of the souls in Holland (32v).

Related to Kings

In her prayers, Maria Petyt is primarily concerned with the leaders in the Franco-Dutch war (especially with the Catholic kings) and even sees herself as an ally in the army. This is also one of the characteristics of prophetic spirituality, that they are related to kings.¹⁴ The prophets of Israel consistently played an accompanying role with respect to kingship. In Scripture we find many examples of cooperation between kings and prophets, but it comes to a conflict between them when the king breaks the relation with God.¹⁵ Not just prophetism, also kingship is rooted in a mystical transformation by God.¹⁶ That is also what Maria Petyt recognises and appreciates in the king of France:

I was once moved by a very tender love and benevolence towards this King, because he had presented his life and crown to the Beloved with such zeal to lead Holland back to the Catholic faith (45v).

¹⁴ Waaijman (2002) 199.

¹⁵ Waaijman (2002) 199.

¹⁶ Waaijman (1985) 21.

Towards the other king, the king of Spain, Maria Petyt is primarily critical: She perceives that the Beloved is unhappy and angry with this king, because he tolerates and conceals many serious and weighty sins among his people. He follows his human passions, while he neglects divine grace. According to Maria Petyt, he would do well to take the example of the king of France (48v).

As ordered by the Beloved, Maria Petyt assists the king of France by her prayers. Repeatedly, she testifies that her prayer has great effects. By the power of her prayer, 'many graces flowed to that king'. He receives 'divine help and divine cooperation in carrying out his plan and intention' (41r). The power of prayer is well known in Scripture. As the 17th Century Carmelite Daniel of the Virgin Mary explains in *Konste der Konsten*:¹⁷

Our Holy Father the Prophet Elijah was a mortal man similar to us. And he has prayed that it would not rain (to punish the great and awful sins of the people of Israel) and it did not rain for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and heaven has given rain and the earth fruits. By prayer, Joshua has halted the sun until he had conquered his enemies. Isaiah has turned the sun backwards. The above mentioned prophet Elijah raised – by prayer – a child from death. The same the Holy Apostles did, and many others, who – by means of their prayer – raised the dead to life, gave health to the sick and did many other miraculous works.¹⁸

In her prayer Maria Petyt supports the French in their attack against the Dutch. For her it is 'no wonder that the French prevail, and have so much victory in Holland! God is with them' (44r). The power of her prayer, its effect, depends on God. That God is with the French, Maria Petyt has also seen in a vision:

Once I saw in the spirit how the spirit of God was brought to rest over the army of the French like once the spirit of God was brought to rest over the waters (44r).

This vision of Maria Petyt reminds me of the vision of the Carmelite sister Anna of Saint Bartholomew. She had a vision when she was praying, and in her prayer recommended to God the Carmelite friars who had gathered in a provincial chapter. She did this with special zeal. The Lord showed her, so she testifies, the monastery of the gathering, with above it a shining cloud. In the midst of that cloud, she perceived 'Our Holy Father Elijah', who had spread his

¹⁷ Daniel of the Virgin Mary (1669) 3f.

¹⁸ Cf. 1 Kings 17:1; 18:42; Josh 10:12; Isa. 13: 10; 1 Kings 17:20–22.

S. Propheta ELIAS visus est à ven. Matre Anna à S. Bartholomæo pallium suum Valisoleti extendere supra Carmelitarum Capitulum; cuius mirabilis, et inexpectatus fuit exitus. Cap. 24. vitæ M. Annæ à S. Barthol.

FIGURE 10.1 Abraham van Diepenbeeck, Vision of Anna of St. Bartholomew.

mantle over the room of the chapter 'like a father covers his children with the shadow of his mantle and takes care of them'. After the chapter the newly chosen provincial stated that:

When we went into chapter it seemed like we were all united with God. This made us all have the same opinion and made us all inflamed by the love of God.¹⁹

A depiction of this vision is made by a contemporary of Maria Petyt, the well known artist Abraham van Diepenbeeck (1596 's-Hertogenbosch – 1675 Antwerp).²⁰ In a series of 41 copper engravings of the life of Elijah, Van Diepenbeeck also made a copper engraving that refers to this vision of Blessed Anna (Figure 10.1).²¹ In the front we see Sister Anna from the rear. Diepenbeeck lets us stand behind her and to see what she sees: Elijah spreading out his mantle over the Carmelite chapter.

Divine Judgement

The fourth characteristic of prophetic spirituality that sheds light on the manuscript under discussion is that the prophetic word can turn out to be either positive or negative.²² The word of the Beloved as Maria Petyt perceives it is primarily positive for the king of France and his army, and negative for the Spaniards and the army of the Emperor. Moreover, it is negative for the Reformed Church of Holland.

In Scripture, a negative prophetic word is nourished by the conviction that only through destruction is a new beginning possible. This might explain how Maria can speak about 'moderate spilling of blood' (33v) and that she can say:

no wonder that the Beloved allows our side to be defeated! For how long do our people cling to and support that impious nation and draw down upon them and their country the wrath and indignation of God (37r).

Not without reason she refers to Scripture: 'that what our people have sown they will also harvest' (Gal 6:7–8), and 'God who knows the hearts of all, will

19 Anne of St. Bartholomew (1669) 62–63.

20 Zoege von Manteuffel (1913) 243.

21 Daniel of the Virgin Mary (1680) 114. Cf. Kotschner (1985) 76–77.

22 Waaijman (2002) 198.

recompense according to the works of each one, and not according to the judgement of men' (Cf. Prov 24:12; Luke 16:15) (36v). As was said before, it is a process of inner discernment that Maria Petyt is writing about. At one moment, when it seems to her that she is asked to curse the Spanish soldiers and the soldiers of the Emperor, she rejects it as if it comes from an evil spirit. However, the pressure she feels is severe. Therefore she turns towards her Beloved and says:

Beloved, if you curse them, I also curse them, but I ask, that that cursing fall only over their bodies and not over their souls (46r).

At another moment she prays likewise for the people of Holland: 'May God ensure that their punishment will only be temporal and that their souls will be saved' (37r). To Maria Petyt these negative prophetic words are unavoidable steps in the direction of God's future.

Prophets are counter voices which continue to 'undermine the self-delusion of power'.²³ Maria Petyt claims to see and understand what has real power. For instance, although the unity between Holland and the Spaniards seems to be strong, Maria Petyt understands that this unity will never persist: it is 'vain', 'worth nothing', 'full of tricks and deceptions' (33r).

Also, if two or three strong armies would oppose the king of France, in her mind and heart these armies are 'like a swarm of flies'. For when she considers the strength and power of God (who is in favour of the king of France), those two or three strong armies appear to be without any strength or courage (31r). In her final notes (August 1676) she repeats this self-delusion of power when she states that 'all that multitude appeared to me as a multitude of weak flies, that would succumb no matter where.' (37v).

A biblical example of this undermining of the self-delusion of power we can find in the story of Elijah at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–40). Elijah battles the power of the prophets of Baal and their influence on the people and king Ahab. In this battle, the prophets of Baal are exposed as powerless prophets. The result of this unmasking is that Elijah orders that they have to be killed (1 Kings 18:40). That is a verse in Scripture that many people stumble over.

It is interesting to look at a depiction of this verse made by Abraham van Diepenbeeck (Figure 10.2). Although not many artists have taken up the challenge of presenting this verse, Van Diepenbeeck did.²⁴ In this representation of the life of Elijah, he shows him in the midst of the killing.

²³ Waaijman (2002) 213.

²⁴ Daniel a Virgine Maria (1680) 70. Cf. Kotschner (1985) 32–33.

FIGURE 10.2 *Abraham van Diepenbeeck, The killing of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40).*

FIGURE 10.3

Abraham van Diepenbeeck, The killing of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40) – detail.

Looking at this specific engraving, our attention is immediately drawn to the faces of the prophets of Baal who are lying on the ground. The picture shows swords and lances, used by men dressed in military uniforms. We see the intention to kill and we see the results: wounded or unconscious or perhaps dead people, faces grimaced from pain and terror, some seem to call for mercy. Remarkably, we see hardly any blood (the figure in the front has a spraying shoulder wound and one figure shows a scratched cheek). At the centre, we see the prophet Elijah, dressed in a Carmelite habit. He points at the soldier in the front who is stepping on the fertility (the vital parts) of one of the prophets of Baal.

Elijah seems to be stoic towards the suffering of the prophets of Baal. However, when we look at the close-up (Figure 10.3), we can see that Elijah's face is not stoical: his upper lip is lifted (instead of a so-called stiff upper lip) – Elijah shows emotions. Also his eye-brows seem to frown.

Elijah's face is surrounded by the aureole, with a kind of empty space in between. Looking at this face, the world around the face seems to have the significance of a vision – a symbolic representation: Elijah – as in a prophetic sight – looks at what happens: the prophets of Baal are stripped of their power, of their fertility. This is an image of the self-delusion of power.

Often the Word of God is most uncomfortable. First of all it is uncomfortable for the prophet but also for the audience of the prophet. The Word of God confronts as in the words Elijah spoke to King Ahab (1 Kings 17:1; 18:18; 21:17–26) confronting the king with his acts. It is not without reason that Elijah fled as soon as he spoke to Ahab (1 Kings 17:1–2), and that he mostly remains in solitude, coming down, showing himself to the king, only as the word of God speaks to him.

A clear difference between Maria Petyt and the biblical prophets seems to be that Maria did not speak out. Unlike the biblical prophets, she did not tell the people what was wrong. The core-business of this lay Carmelite, who has withdrawn into a hermitage, is her prayer. But is this difference really crucial? It depends on the perception of prayer. For Maria Petyt her prayer was without any doubt influencing and changing the world (41r; 30r; 43v; etc.).

Maria Petyt testifies that she never received a divine command to go physically to the king. Her call is to help him by prayer (43r; cf 38r). She knows that the Word of the Beloved that she perceives will not be welcome in her country. She explicitly asks for these writings to be kept secret as long as she lives. They were meant to be known to her spiritual father (Michael) alone. The reason for it is that she fears a time of trial in which she can be attacked (30r). Her fear is not without reason. She writes and bares her inner thoughts that do not correspond with the thought of that time. On the contrary, they are completely opposite the general opinion. By writing down these inner thoughts about the invasion of the king of France, she makes herself vulnerable. What she really seems to fear is that it might influence her inner conversation: the spirit would be 'obscured' (31r).

Prophetic Tradition

We have considered the manuscript from the perspective of four aspects that characterize prophetic spirituality: that prophecy originates in the Word of God, that the prophet sees things from the vantage point of God's future, that the prophet is concerned with kings and that the prophet announces a divine judgement.

My question was: What can this manuscript teach us about the prophetic dimension of Maria's religious life? The main contribution, in my opinion, is that Maria Petyt tries to describe what is behind the biblical expression 'The Lord said'. In Scripture, we hear very little about the processes of discernment that prophets have to endure. Maria Petyt repeatedly tries to put words on it. In this perspective it is interesting that Maria Petyt also recaptures an expression that is at the heart of Elijah's prophecy: standing in front of the Lord (1 Kings 17:1). Maria Petyt experiences this in her inner self:

There the spirit sees his Beloved God as it were face to face, there he speaks as it were with my mouth to His mouth, with my heart to His heart, there he is allowed as it were to rest and take refuge within the heart of God, something divine which the soul cannot explain (31v).

The manuscript shows more remarkable similarities to Elijah. For instance her use of the word 'zeal', recalling Elijah's famous words: 'I have been zealous with much zeal for the Lord' (1 Kings 19:10.14). Likewise, Maria Petyt finds zeal in herself and she encourages the kings and their soldiers also to have zeal for the Catholic faith (38v). Another similarity is that she writes that her prayer is opposed to the prayer of a large number of people. Maria Petyt is convinced that her prayer will be more effective than theirs, for the power of her prayer stems from her Beloved. It reminds us of the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, when he was alone against four hundred prophets of Baal and that only his prayer was answered (43v). Also Maria Petyt's suffering of sadness, hostility, bitterness and darkness (34r) is known in the Elijan tradition (1 Kings 19:4.10). Finally, when Maria Petyt describes how prayer nourishes her more than a sumptuous banquet would (47r), she uses a biblical image of divine feeding. It reminds us of Elijah, who received a scone and a jar of water that gave him the remarkable strength to walk for forty days and forty nights. (1 Kings 19:6–8). These associations between the story of Elijah and the writings of Maria Petyt reveal that she might well have experienced herself standing in the prophetic tradition.

What this manuscript can teach us about prophetic spirituality is how it is rooted in the inner life in which God speaks and transforms the prophet to the core. In Scripture the focus of the texts seems to be primarily restricted to the content of the Word of God. Maria gives us the opportunity to hear explicitly about the inner processes that lie beneath the prophetic action.

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