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

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¹ See Giovanni Grosso’s contribution to this volume, p. 83ff.
³ We just have the Latin manuscript provided by Michael of St. Augustine (and its English translation by Veronie Meeuwsen). Unfortunately we do not have the original Dutch texts of Maria Petyt.

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The Prophetic Spirituality of Maria Petyt

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

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5 Waaijman (1985) 15–16.
6 Fohrer (1969) 239.
7 Waaijman (1985) 16.