

THE CHARISMATIC & THE SOCIAL PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET ELISHA

O MINISTÉRIO PROFÉTICO CARISMÁTICO E
SOCIAL NA VIDA DO PROFETA ELISEU

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt of integrating the charismatic and the social prophetic ministry approaches because there is a strong tension between the “spiritual” Christian and the “socially committed” Christian. Is it possible to integrate these two traditions and currents? In which sense is the gospel the message of spiritual revelation and social transformation? Here in this article I propose to analyze the life and ministry of Elisha in order to show how this prophet exhibits social prophetic and charismatic prophetic approaches and how he integrated these two traditions in his life and ministry. To help me in the analyses of Elisha’s life and ministry, I introduce the word of a Protestant, Jacques Ellul, very well known French scholar. I also would like to mention two recognized Catholic voices: one Charismatic, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens, Belgian, and the connection to the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Charismatic Renewal Movement, and the other, Don Helder Câmara, a face of the Social Prophetic current who worked for many years as Archbishop of Olinda, in Brazil. They created a dialogue between these two currents in order to integrate them in a more faithful demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

KEYWORDS

Charismatic Ministry. Social Ministry. Prophet Elisha.

RESUMO

Este artigo é uma tentativa de integrar as abordagens dos ministérios carismático e social porque existe uma forte tensão entre o Cristão “espiritual” e o Cristão “socialmente comprometido”. É possível integrar estas duas tradições e correntes? De que maneira é o evangelho a mensagem da revelação espiritual e da transformação social? Aqui neste artigo eu proponho analisar a vida e ministério de Eliseu para mostrar como este profeta exhibe abordagens integradas destas duas tradições na sua vida e ministério. A ajudar-me na análise da vida e ministério de Eliseu venho introduzir a palavra de um Protestante, Jacques Ellul, bem conhecido acadêmico Francês. Eu também gostaria de mencionar duas reconhecidas vozes Católicas: uma Carismática, o Cardeal Léon-Joseph Suenens, Belga, e a conexão para o relacionamento entre a Igreja Católica e o

Movimento de Renovação Carismática, e o outro, Don Helder Câmara, a face da corrente Profética Social que trabalhou por muitos anos como Arcebispo de Olinda, no Brasil. Eles criaram um diálogo entre essas duas correntes para integrá-las numa mais fiel demonstração do evangelho de Jesus Cristo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ministério Carismático. Ministério Social. Profeta Eliseu.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is important to know the Brazilian evangelical context in order to understand my proposal. The Brazilian Evangelical Church has great difficulty in examining itself, because it is quite enthusiastic about its own growth. Unfortunately, most of the evangelical churches preach a shallow and utilitarian gospel. It is a gospel of results, where what is least interesting is the meaning of conversion. Today we have a pragmatic church, where fitting in or getting results is more important than being right. Today, the parameter of God's blessing is prosperity; radio programs do not exist so that the gospel is preached, but so that the Brazilian people listen "to the vision that God gave to us."¹⁰⁵ It's a spirituality completely dissociated with life.

Also, it is important to point out that the biggest crisis in the Brazilian church is its lack of integrity. We have "much power" and not many ethics, to which Peter Kusmic said during the Lausanne II Conference in Manila in 1989, "Charisma without Character is Catastrophe." Many evangelicals of the integral and holistic approach have raised the question for years, "why the ethical churches do not grow and the non-ethical churches grow?"¹⁰⁶

At the same time there is "a new movement" in some churches that is pointing towards a more lively spirituality. These churches are recognizing their need to leave behind techniques, and to have a relationship with God without having in mind

¹⁰⁵ *This is the most common statement said by many of these leaders of the Prosperity Theology.*

¹⁰⁶ *This has been one kind of question that has been asked in some leadership Conferences in Brazil, particularly by the historical churches and some non-denominational organizations.*

practical outcomes. It is time for a new relationship with God, a more human biblical approach, and new spiritual values with affection and kindness towards the Lord. There is a reclaiming of “the spirituality of the heart”, including a Christianity with more affection for the Triune God.

Also, there is a strong renewed and charismatic movement that has grown a lot lately but without much consciousness that “the prophetic stance must come from a place of intimacy with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁷

However, I haven’t seen any movement that has tried to integrate the charismatic and the social prophetic ministry. On the contrary, there is a strong tension between these two approaches. The tension between the “spiritual” Christian and the “socially committed” Christian has been a strong one since I was part of the youth department of my church in the North-East area of Brazil some 35 years ago and which still continues nowadays.

Some questions had and have arisen amongst the social prophetic about the charismatic people, because charismatic Christians were perceived to be either politically indifferent or conservative (and therefore silent supporters of a given status quo): Should we reject the charismatic tradition as a current that might foster social stagnation? Aren’t the charismatic alienated people? Aren’t they completely blind to the needs of the marginalized and exploited? Is prayer a desertion of responsibility or, on the contrary, an urge to serve God in the very heart of the world? On the other hand, the charismatic people asked these questions about the social prophetic people: Aren’t they completely alienated about the spiritual life? Why are they only concerned in doing good deeds and yet they forget to be full of the Holy Spirit? Why are they such “carnal” people?

How can we solve this tension? Is it possible to integrate these two traditions and currents? In which sense is the gospel the message of religious revelation and social transformation? Here in this paper I propose to analyze the life and ministry of Elisha in order to show how this prophet exhibits social prophetic and

¹⁰⁷ Bob Ekblad. Lecture given in the course *Lift Up Your Voice: Prophetic Ministry In Scripture, Church and Society*, in 02/18/2006.

charismatic prophetic approaches and how he integrated these two traditions in his life and ministry.

To help me in the analyses of Elisha's life and ministry, I introduce the word of a Protestant, Jacques Ellul, very well known French scholar, who wrote about Elisha in his book *The Politics of God & The Politics of Man*.

I also would like to mention two recognized Catholic voices: one charismatic, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens, Belgian, and the connection to the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Charismatic Renewal Movement, and the other, Don Helder Camara, a face of the Social Prophetic current who worked for many years as Archbishop of Olinda, in Brazil. They created a dialogue between these two currents in order to integrate them in a more faithful demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the small book called *Charismatic Renewal and Social Action: A Dialogue*. Afterwards, I will conclude with a proposal for the integration of these two currents.

2. ELISHA'S CALLING - 1 Kings 19:16-21

Elisha was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was active for a period of some 50 years (c. 850-800 BC) during the reigns of Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash (Joash). Elisha was the successor and disciple of Elijah. However, unlike Elijah who lived in caves in the desert, Elisha stayed in the cities (2 Kings 6:13, 19, and 32). (ELLISON, 1969, p. 43)

Elisha was a farmer who lived with his parents at Abel-meholah (location uncertain; 1 Kings 19:16-21). He was plowing with 12 pairs of oxen when Elijah met him; it has been suggested that his father was a wealthy landowner. Elisha was bald (2 Kings 2:23) and carried a staff, which was common to rural residents and aided travel in the rugged hills of Palestine (2 Kings 4:29).

Elisha's call was revealed in a threefold way. It was revealed through the message given Elijah at Mount Horeb, through the mantle thrown on Elisha, and through the ministry of Elisha. God first revealed Elisha's call when He spoke to Elijah on Mount Horeb during a momentous occasion. He said to Elijah, "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room" (1 Kings 19:16). In Elisha's day the Word was

revealed through God's prophet and then the prophet revealed it to the people. In Elisha's calling, God first told Elijah who then conveyed the Word to Elisha through the casting on of the mantle.

The mantle revealed the Call. As Elisha was out plowing one day, "Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle [cape-like cloak] upon him" (v. 19).¹⁰⁸ Such action gave an unmistakable message. It indicated Elisha's appointment to the office of a prophet. Elisha did not ask Elijah what he meant by casting his mantle on him, for he knew very well the meaning of it. "He knew that the mantle was the insignia of the prophetic office and that the casting of the mantle on him was his appointment to the prophetic office."¹⁰⁹

The ministry of Elisha revealed this Call. The performance of Elisha caused others to recognize his calling. As an example, the call of Elisha was evident to the school of the prophets at Jericho. They said, after Elisha came back from seeing Elijah depart to glory in the whirlwind, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15). Also the woman of Shunem clearly recognized Elisha's call; for she said to her husband regarding Elisha, "I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually" (2 Kings 4:9). Anyone reading the Scriptural account of Elisha would see so much evidence in Elisha's performance that they would never question his call.

Elisha demonstrated total commitment to the call when he "took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with instruments [harnesses, yokes, etc.] of the oxen" (v. 21). He literally burned his bridges behind him. He made it difficult to return to farming. Elisha had a farewell feast after he was given his call. "He feasts his people to show his gratitude for his call."¹¹⁰ He slew the oxen and "gave unto the people" (v. 21). This feast let others know in a very pronounced way what his calling was. He was not ashamed for others to know even though they might be

¹⁰⁸ Adam Clarke says that "The cloak, was the prophet's peculiar habit; it was probably in imitation of this that the Greek philosophers wore a sort of mantle, that distinguished them from the common people; and by which they were at once as easily known as certain academical characters are by their gowns and square caps. The pallium was as common among the Greeks as the toga was among the Romans. Each of these was so peculiar to those nations, that Palliatus is used to signify a Greek, as Togatus is to signify a Roman."

Adam Clarke, **Commentary on the Bible**, Electronic Version at <http://www.e-sword.net>

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible**, Electronic Version at <http://www.e-sword.net>.

¹¹⁰ Albert Barnes. **Notes on the Bible**, Electronic Version at <http://www.e-sword.net>

unsympathetic and unkind. At a time when Baal was the popular religion, there would be many who would not look kindly upon Elisha's calling.

Then Elisha arose, and "went after Elijah, and ministered unto him" (v. 21). The first responsibility of Elisha was a very humble one. He was simply a servant of Elijah. He "ministered unto him." As an example, he "poured water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Kings 3:11), until the day that Elisha was to take Elijah's place. "Elisha . . . shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room" (v. 16). And so when Elijah left for glory via the whirlwind, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." (2 Kings 2:15)

In his ministry, a wealthy woman of Shunem provided him with comfortable guest quarters (2 K 4:8-10). Apparently, he also maintained his own house in Samaria (2 K 6:32; cf. 2:25, 5:3). He often appears in the company of groups of prophets ("the sons of the prophets" 2 K 2:3-15, 4:1, 5:22, 9:1), and he frequented religious centers such as Bethel (2 K 2:23), Gilgal (2:1, 4, 38), and Mount Carmel (2:25, 4:25).

3. HOW ELISHA HEARD, SAW, AND RECEIVED REVELATION FROM YHWH AND HOW GOD SPOKE/REVEALED TO THE PROPHET

Elisha always fascinated me, not only because of his life and miracles, but above all, for his intimacy with God, for being called often "a man of God", and for being the most impressive seer of the Bible, with an extraordinary spiritual accuracy of the spiritual world.

The first clear episode that revealed how Elisha used to hear or receive a revelation and visions from God was shown in the resurrection of the Shunammite widow's son when she goes to look for Elisha to ask for help because her son had died. When she came to meet him, Elisha said to Gehazi that she was in bitter distress, "But the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why." (2 Kings 4:27) Elisha seemed surprised. This was not common because ordinarily God revealed everything to him; nothing was hidden from him. This episode shows that even though God used to reveal to Elisha the inner heart condition of the people, He did not do so at this time.

The second episode that revealed how Elisha used to hear or receive a revelation and visions from God was shown in the Gehazi's episode. After healing Naaman, Elisha refused to receive anything from Naaman. But Gehazi took clothing and silver from Naaman. Elisha confronts his personal sin and asked Gehazi where he had been, and Gehazi lied to Elisha saying that he hadn't been anywhere. Then Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). For Matthew Henry this episode reveals that "Had Gehazi yet to learn that prophets had spiritual eyes? Or could he think to hide any thing from a seer, from him with whom the secret of the Lord was?"¹¹¹

The third episode that revealed how Elisha used to hear or receive a revelation and visions from God was shown in the episode of "hide and seek" of the kings of Israel and Aram. Every time the king of Aram wanted to ambush the king of Israel, Elisha said to the king of Israel for not going to such places. The king of Aram felt betrayed but one of his officers told him that there was no betrayal, "But Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." (2 Kings 6:12). Matthew Henri says that "The work of God's prophets is to give us warning; if, being warned, we do not save ourselves, it is our own fault, and our blood will be upon our own head... Nothing done, said, thought, by any person, in any place, at any time, is out of the reach of God's cognizance."¹¹²

Afterwards, the king of Aram sent his men to capture Elisha. The great lesson of Revelation is the same vision Elisha's servant saw: "And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. His servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' So Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.'¹¹³ Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the

¹¹¹ Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible**, Electronic Version at [Http://www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net).

¹¹² Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible**, Electronic Version at [Http://www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net).

¹¹³ For Keil & Delitzsch the "Opening the eyes was translation into the ecstatic state of clairvoyance, in which an insight into the invisible spirit-world was granted him." Keil & Delitzsch, **Commentary on the Old Testament**. Electronic Version at [Http://www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net).

mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15-17).

In this fourth episode it is clear that the way God spoke to Elisha and frequently revealed himself was through a clear vision of the spiritual world. When Elisha's servant saw the troops surrounding the town, he became frightened. Elisha asked God to open his eyes so he could see the forces on their side. God responded by giving Elisha's servant visual revelation. Yes, this episode shows that Elisha was a seer, a person able to see even with open eyes the spiritual world.

The fifth episode that revealed how Elisha used to hear or receive a revelation and visions from God was shown in the episode where God reveals to Elisha that Hazael would become the king of Aram. Hazael was sent by his king Ben-Hadad asking to be healed. Elisha said that he would be healed, but he would in fact die. Afterwards, Elisha stared at Hazael with a fixed gaze and began to weep. When Hazael asked him why he wept, he told him what a great deal of mischief he foresaw that he would do to the Israel of God (2 Kings 8:12), what desolations he would make of their strongholds, and barbarous destruction of their men, women, and children. And Hazael asks how this would be possible? And Elisha said, "The Lord has shown me that you will become king of Aram." (2 Kings 8:13). Yes, God showed Elisha. He could see everything. He was a seer.

All these episodes reveal that Elisha is in the level of the "Prophetic Office" as taught by Mike Bickle. He teaches that there are four levels in the prophetic ministry: 1. Simple Prophetic – which is the level where "a simple prophecy is given when any believer speaks something God has brought to mind. This is usually within the scope of encouragement, comfort and exhortation, as explained in 1 Corinthians 14:3"; 2. Prophetic Gifting – which is the level where believers "regularly receive impressions, dreams, visions or other types of revelation...being in the form of parables and riddles"; 3. Prophetic Ministry – which is the level where "Believers whose gifting has been recognized, nurtured and commissioned for regular ministry in the local church."; 4. Prophetic Office – which is the level where "Believers whose ministry is somewhat like the prophets of the Old Testament...They often minister in signs and wonders and are known to speak 100 percent accurate words from God." (BICKLE, 1996, p. 120) Yes, I

really believe that Elisha was not infallible, because he was a man, but all of his words were 100 percent accurate and came true in the Bible.

4. ELISHA'S MESSAGE

What message did Elisha address, to whom and on behalf of whom? Who were the implied beneficiaries of the message? What image of God would they have perceived through the prophet's advocacy?

In all his addresses Elisha was faithful to obey God's words despite many dangerous situations. But above all, all kings and ordinary people respected him and saw him as a man of God. In all Elisha's actions they perceived an image of God that He is a God of provision, a God that cares, a God of justice, a God that is pasturing His people. Naaman is a perfect example of a person who from the time of his healing saw God as the only and true God in the entire world.

Elisha is the voice of God to Jehu in the "coup d'état" in this time of divine judgment in Israel and also a voice to Hazael in the "coup d'état" in Syria. In all situations Elisha is present. But his message was not only a message of condemnation, but at the same time, a message of hope and consolation.

Elisha addressed messages and made predictions that were completely accomplished. Firstly, he addressed a message of victory to the kings of Israel and Judah regarding the destruction of the king of Moab (2 Kings 3:15-27); secondly, he addressed a message of hope to the king of Israel in 2 Kings 7:1,2, regarding the end of a strong famine in Israel; thirdly, he addressed a message to Jehu anointing him king of Israel and that he was the instrument of God to bring justice against the house of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Kings 9); fourthly, he gives the message to Hazael that he is going to be the king of Syria (2 Kings 8:13).

Elisha was a sign and instrument of God to bring justice and mercy. In my opinion, Ellul brings a wonderful view of Elisha's message that was confounded with his life. Ellul says that,

During the whole of the long life of Elisha Israel is under constant trial. It moves from defeat to

famine and from revolution to massacre. The hand of God is heavy upon it at this time. Chastisement follows chastisement. But it should always be remembered that God does not strike without healing, that he does not condemn without consoling, that he does not judge without the gospel. During these seventy years of testing Elisha is there. Elisha is the visible and active presence of God himself. At every instant he carries consolation for the poor and afflicted. He is the constantly renewed miracle of an incarnate Word. He can grant consolation to the people in every crisis, for he is the sign and proof and witness that God has not abandoned his people. (ELLUL, 1972, p. 90)

5. PROPHET ELISHA AS A MODEL OF INTEGRATION OF THE CHARISMATIC AND THE SOCIAL PROPHETIC TRADITIONS

5.1 THE SOCIAL PROPHETIC APPROACH IN ELISHA

For Jacques Ellul, "The Second Book of Kings is probably the most political of all books of the Bible" (ELLUL, 1972, p. 13) and he sees Elisha with a strong prophetic and political ministry, similar to that of Jesus. Elisha is a prophet of power; his acts and interventions signify the universality and the proximity of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has drawn near, completely changes political life like everything else. For Ellul, "When we are told that the kingdom of God is at hand, this has a political sense too, and the political sense is the one which Elisha brings out." (ELLUL, 1972, p. 11)

How did Elisha address the powers? How did he address personal and collective sin? "Like the gospel stories, the accounts of Elijah and Elisha were told in the context of conflict in political-religion, the abuse of royal power, and the disenfranchisement of the peasants." (BRUEGGEMANN, 1990, p. 86) Elisha labored for over 65 years, under six different kings of Israel, from Ahab to Joash. He was fearless in telling the wicked kings the truth and rebuking them for their wickedness.

Elisha's work within Israel involved two areas: personal and political. As a man easily accessible to the people, he frequently interceded in the ordinary events of life that bring anguish and crisis. The purification of a vital spring (2 K 2:19-22), the raising of the Shunammite widow's only son (2 K 4:18-37), the provision of an antidote for the poisonous stew (2 K 4:38-41), the healing of Namaan's leprosy (2 K 5:1-19; cf. Luke 4:27), and the recovery of a borrowed axe head (6:1-7), demonstrate Elisha's ministry on a personal level. But these stories within the larger context also show the power of God over all aspects of nature, an indirect challenge to the worship of Baal. Similarly, the increase of the widow's oil (2 K 4:1-7), the multiplication of grain (2 K 4:42-44), and the restoration of the Shunammite's land (2 K 8:1-6) demonstrate God's power in the economic and social spheres.

But Elisha's greatest work was what we would call a political level (although from a biblical, political and religious perspective they were not different categories). In accepting the hairy mantle of Elijah, Elisha also accepted the commission of Elijah. As his master had been deeply involved in the politics of his day so Elisha went on to complete the tasks assigned to Elijah (1 K 19:15-16, 2 K 8:7-15, 9:1-10). He became constantly involved in the affairs of the nation. He provided water to a thirsty army (2 K 3:4-20), was instrumental in routing the Moabites (3:21-27), warned the kings of enemy plans more than once (6:8-12), helped avert disaster at the hands of the Syrians (6:13-7:23), was involved in the overthrow of Ben-Hadad of Damascus (8:7-15) and Jehu of Israel (9:1-36), and from his deathbed prophesied Joash's defeat of the Syrians (13:14-19).

While Elisha was often termed a patriot, like Elijah, much of his political involvement was directed at bringing the apostate monarchy and nation back to recognition of God's sovereignty in the world and a demonstration that every facet of life is subject to God's control. Also, Elisha demonstrates the sovereignty and power of God at work in spite of the political scheming and the personal crises of a nation, and in spite of the adulteration of commitment to God by the influence of Canaanite Baal worship.

Social Prophetic is about speaking the truth before the powers on behalf of the marginalized. Bob Ekblad says that,

One of the roles of the prophets is to name the power, name the principality... All the negative

words of Biblical prophets and Jesus are addressed to those in power, civil power, and religious power. Comforting words are addressed to the oppressed, the outcast, the tax collectors and sinners. It's the underdogs who receive the words of comfort and grace...A prophet needs to have lived in solidarity with the poor and the homeless, the marginalized. Prophetic person needs to be a friend of sinners.¹¹⁴

6. THE CHARISMATIC APPROACH IN ELISHA

Elisha was greatly respected by the people of Israel. He was strong in the spirit and in the faith, and he also had a gift for seeing the future. His actions, notably using his staff as an instrument of activity (2 K 4:29; cf. Exod. 4:2-5) and using music to induce a prophetic trance or state (2 K 3:15; cf. 1 Sam 10:5-7), recall an older era of prophets represented by Moses and Samuel. He is remembered in the biblical stories as a man of wisdom and a worker of miracles, both on behalf of his nation in times of crisis and in the lives of individuals in time of need. (ELLISON, 1969, p. 44)

In the succession of Elijah, when Elisha asked to inherit a double portion of Elijah's spirit, it is written in the translation of the Portuguese Bible in the New International Version that Elisha asked the following: "Faze (Hace) de mim o principal herdeiro de teu espírito profético" (2 Kings 2:9); and then, the company of the prophets from Jericho said that "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." (2 Kings 2:15), but in the Portuguese version it is repeated again: "O espírito profético de Elias repousa sobre Eliseu." So, the sense that Elisha is the heir of the prophetic ministry of Elijah is much clearer in the Portuguese translation than in the English one.

During his life, prophetic brotherhoods in the kingdom of Israel thrived more than ever before or after him. Among his most glorious miracles was the resurrection of a young man, turning fresh the salty waters of a spring in Jericho, and healing Naaman, a Syrian military commander, from leprosy. Mark Stibbe sees Elisha

¹¹⁴ Bob Ekblad. Lecture given in the course *Lift Up Your Voice: Prophetic Ministry In Scripture, Church and Society*, in 02/18/2006.

as an Old Testament prototype of the combination of prophecy and healing in evangelism. (STIBBE, 2004, p. 143)

Also, he says that in Naaman's healing, Elisha exercised great wisdom because he didn't want Naaman to think that he was responsible for what was about to happen. He wanted Naaman to know that it was God who was going to heal Naaman. (STIBBE, 2004, p. 146) In his opinion,

Elisha operates not only prophetically but also in faith for healing. He knows what God wants for this general, even though he is a pagan and an enemy of Israel. With a mind unclouded by prejudice, Elisha sees what God is doing and sends the general to wash in the river Jordan where he is completely healed. This leads Naaman to acknowledge that there is only one God, the God of Israel. (STIBBE, 2004, p. 147-148)

For Ellul in the healing of Naaman,

The text does not tell us that Elisha corrects or condemns Naaman, nor that he gives him a lesson in theology. Naaman still entertains the ideas of his age, but he bends and subjugates them in the presence of the true God. It is to serve this true God that he acts in a way that seems ridiculous to us. It is in order to love exclusively, to make a rigorous demarcation, to affirm his break publicly, that, adopting the manners and ideas and customs of his day, he uses them to show that his God is not the same as that of others. Thus the very absurdity of his act is pleasing to God. (ELLUL, 1972, p. 36)

Mike Bickle says that in general God "offends the mind to reveal the heart" and the case of Naaman is an example of this aspect. He says that God's "Dealing with Naaman's stumbling block of pride was the first and essential step to his healing, which he received when he was humbly obedient to Elisha's words." (BICKLE, 1996, p. 69)

Besides, the prophet Elisha secured numerous victories for the kings of Israel by his wisdom and ability to see the future. Elisha died a very old man in the city of Samaria during the reign of king Joash (Ch.2-13). Even after his death a miracle happened. In 2 Kings 13:20, 21 it is said that "Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so, they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet." Yes, Elisha's life was a life full of divine surprises.

7. SIMILAR FEATURES OF ELISHA'S CHARISMATIC AND SOCIAL PROPHETIC APPROACHES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In his writings Jacques Ellul recognizes Elisha as "a type of Jesus Christ, the more so as Elijah describes him in the same way as John describes Jesus, namely, as the one who is to come. It should also be noted that the names of Jesus and Elisha have the same meaning – God helps, or God has helped" (ELLUL, 1972, p. 10)

Also, he sees Elisha with a strong charismatic ministry full with the Holy Spirit similar to Jesus, what he calls "The explosive presence of the Spirit" because all superabundance of Elisha's miracles "As in the case of Jesus...is simply to indicate the unbounded presence of the Spirit." (ELLUL, 1972, p. 10-11)

It is very interesting how Jacques Ellul says that people tend to look at the miracles of Elisha as pure and simple acts of magic, and tend to dismiss him as a mere wonder-worker, and how we forget that some of the miracles of Jesus also seem to have a magical aspect, for example, the clay mixed to cure the blind man, or the healing of the woman by simply touching the garment of Jesus, and how other miracles performed by Jesus and Elisha were very similar, for example, the multiplication of the loaves in almost exactly the same terms "(Give ye them to eat)"¹¹⁵, and the raising of the son of the Shunammite widow at the very same place where Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain. In all these proofs, Ellul, concludes, "There is more than chance here." (ELLUL, 1972, p. 10-11)

¹¹⁵ 2 Kings 4:42-44

Richard Horsley & Neil Silberman say that the sudden wave of healings of Jesus was an “unmistakable sign of God’s presence, since the ancient Israelite prophets’ descriptions of the coming Kingdom of God had often told how the People of Israel would be restored to physical health.” (HORSLEY, SILBERMAN, 1997, p. 50) Then, they cite some prophets who also were used by God to bring physical healing or longed for these manifestations, including Elisha in a very wonderful passage of the book:

Isaiah had looked forward to the day when ‘the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy’ (35:5, 6). Psalm 146 spoke of God’s power to restore sight and heal even the most crippled of bodies (v. 8). And the prophet Elijah, empowered by God, had been able to raise people from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-23) and his protégé Elisha knew how to cure leprosy (2 Kings 5:10-14). (HORSLEY, SILBERMAN, 1997, p. 50)

Also, I can see that the revelation of Gehazi’s sin and heart to Elisha was similar to the revelation Peter received about the sin and heart of Ananias and Sapphira. Matthew Henri says that it was the gift of discernment that was exercised in both episodes when he says, “Now he thought himself sure of it, and applauded his own management of a fraud by which he had imposed, not only upon the prudence of Naaman, but upon Elisha’s spirit of discerning, as Ananias and Sapphira upon the apostles.”¹¹⁶

8. CONTEMPORARY EQUIVALENT ISSUES THAT ELISHA ADDRESSED

Elisha addressed some issues that are very contemporary such as:

1. Our political involvement in the political life. Elisha was closely involved in the political life of his day.

¹¹⁶ Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible**, Electronic Version at [Http://www.esword.net](http://www.esword.net).

2. War and the need for reconciliation. Elisha was a strong voice in the war of Israel against the Aramians in 2 Kings 3, but at the same time he was a voice of reconciliation and forgiveness in 2 Kings 6:20-23. After taking all soldiers of Aram into Samaria, instead of listening to the king of Israel that wanted to kill them all, Elisha said that a feast should be prepared for them and they could return in peace to their land. It is said, that after this gesture "The bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory." (2 Kings 6:23).

3. Elisha addressed the issue of bringing hope in the midst of calamities in 2 Kings 7. All the words that he brings are that God is going to change the horrendous picture of the famine in the besieged Samaria. When there was no food and against all perspectives he said that they would have plenty of food and provision. Yes, hope, "is the refusal to accept the reading of the reality which is the majority opinion...is the decision against despair, against permanent consignment to chaos (Isa 45:18), oppression, barrenness, and exile" (BRUEGGEMANN, 1990, p. 65-66)

4. We need to evangelize through "the prophetic evangelism." As God used to speak and reveal to Elisha the inner hearts of the people, also was the same with Jesus, as Mark Stibbe says: "Jesus had a special knowledge of the human heart. By prophetic revelation he read the lives of everyone he met." (STIBBE, 2004, p. 154)

5. Elisha addressed collective issues, in his talk with political leaders, such as justice, corruption, and personal issues such as debts, hunger, sterility, etc., ordinary issues that are our issues today. Ellul says "Between his actions in relation to Moab and Naaman come the miracle of the oil and that of the raising of the small child. Between the siege of Samaria and the drama of Hazeel comes the act of justice on behalf of the disinherited woman. This close intermingling of the public and the individual is the specific testimony of the prophet Elisha." (ELLUL, 1972, p. 15)

6. We need to preach the mystery of God's sovereignty and human freedom. In 2 Kings God uses a host of concurrent agents to achieve his own end. There is the little girl who speaks with such deep conviction. There is the king of Syria who intervenes with the lofty disdain of power. There is Elisha who remains anonymous and absent, who does not even see Naaman, who encloses himself in the secret and mystery of the will of God. There are the servants

who formulate the common-sense simplicity of the natural man. More and more I am convinced that I don't need to explain how God's sovereignty and human freedom come together. I only know they do. Yes, "We must insist on the complete liberty of God and the mysterious character of history" (ELLUL, 1972, p. 28) because "It is always hard for us to understand to what degree we are incorporated together into Christ by the act and decision of God, so that in God's plan our actions are complementary and necessary to one another." (ELLUL, 1972, p. 78-79)

9. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CHARISMATIC AND SOCIAL TRADITIONS

Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens and Don Helder Camara, created a dialogue between the Charismatic and the Social Prophetic currents in order to integrate them in a more faithful demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their proposal in the small book called *Charismatic Renewal and Social Action: A Dialogue* is a wonderful demonstration that it is possible to work together and even for a person to live and integrate these two approaches in his/her personal life.

Don Helder Camara says that "The charismatic movement is helping us to be aware of the wonderful realities linked with the Spirit of God – realities which we ourselves, Christians though we are, had practically forgotten." (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 75) Also, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens and Don Helder Camara said that there is no contradiction in being a Christian who integrates the Charismatic and the Social Prophetic tradition because this is part of our identity as Christians.

In our view, a Christian who is not charismatic – in the full sense of the word, that is to say, open to the Spirit and docile to his promptings – is a Christian forgetful of his baptism. On the other hand, a Christian who is not 'socially committed' is a truncated Christian who disregards the gospel's commandments. We felt that the simplest way of working together – in musical terms, we might say playing a kind of duet – would be for each of us in turn to explain how he envisages the Christian of our time: at once wholly open to God and totally

dedicated to the service of mankind. (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 3)

For them, the reason of this conflict is that the so-called "horizontalism tendency" arises, in part, from a legitimate reaction against "a disembodied Christianity of the pietistic type, which is not sufficiently mindful of the gospel's social implications," (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 8) and the "verticalism tendency" arises as a reaction against "a Christianity without the risen and living Christ." (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 9) For Suenens & Camara when we accuse the "spiritual" Christian of pietism and the "socially committed" Christian of materialism, we are, in fact, doing injustice to both. For them, these terms verticalism and horizontalism are not adequate, because "The cross is at once vertical and horizontal." (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 9)

Each Christian has to participate actively, according to his personal vocation, in the work of humanizing the world. So, as Christians we need to recognize that "Both the socially prophetic and the personally prophetic (charismatic) need each other. The full life is the inclusion of both."¹¹⁷

Again, Cardinal Suenens says, "We could easily ease the tension between 'charismatic' and 'social' if we understood the depth and the breadth of the Holy Spirit's action, and if the theology of the charismas progressed beyond and corrected certain too narrow and restrictive exegetic interpretations." (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 39)

For Suenens & Camara this integration between the Charismatic and Social Prophetic approaches and currents is a question of finding a point of equilibrium and complementarities, because "to be a Christian means to be 'tuned in' to both Jesus Christ and the world's events; to be open to God in one's very openness to the world; to be at once a man of prayer and a man of action." (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 9)

¹¹⁷ Bob Ekblad. Lecture given in the course *Lift Up Your Voice: Prophetic Ministry In Scripture, Church and Society*, in 01/14/2006.

10. CONCLUSION

This has been my personal challenge and this is the proposal I brought here: It is possible to be a believer of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for today, a contemplative, a mystic, in short, a Charismatic person full of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time to live a life of compassion and be an active social prophetic voice in the world. Yes, for Suenens & Camara!

“We are pledged, willingly or otherwise, to welcome the whole of this mystery into our lives: the service of men and the contemplation of God are intimately united. For us, the desertion of the world in the name of God is just as unacceptable as the neglect of God in the name of temporal commitments. The false, disembodied mysticism cannot give way to a political faith that has lost its Christian resonance. What is at stake is our true identity as men and Christians.” (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 9-10)

No Christian can live in a vacuum, a private world of his/her own. We see Jesus over and over dealing with the immediate needs of the poor, sick and disadvantaged, as well as with those of the rich and advantaged. Yet he did not serve for service sake, or for the psychological need of the people to respond in kind, but for the building of a Kingdom community made up of poor and rich, disadvantaged and advantaged. Yes, “What constitutes the prophet is exact and rigorous proclamation of what God does, of God’s decision, today... The prophet offers a living Word for the present. He offers a Word relevant to the actual situation of men.” (ELLUL, 1972, p. 49)

As Christians, we have to model the manner in which Christ resisted the culture of His day. He worked at transforming the heart condition of the people by serving them, by showing them how to walk together, to know and love each other as brothers and sisters. In order to have relevance in today’s society and in order to have an effective ministry, the Church, specifically its pastors, must learn to understand the way Jesus lived His life and ministry, particularly the way He heard the Father’s voice, because we need to “Hear the voice of God for personal reasons, but also hear the voice of God for society.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Bob Ekblad. Lecture given in the course *Lift Up Your Voice: Prophetic Ministry In Scripture*,

The Christian needs the Spirit and his gifts, his charismas, not only for his personal life, but so that he may contribute to the healing of society's ills. Don Helder Camara calls all Christians "to live together the mystery of Pentecost, which was and ever remains a mystery of profound transformation, turning the timorous into courageous apostles, faithful to the point of martyrdom." (SUENES; CAMARA, 1979, p. 79-80)

Without the Spirit and His charismas there is no church. At the same time, in our ministry of praying for healing and bringing health to people "We have to be careful of seeing Jesus as healing as God. He is healing as a human, not as God."¹¹⁹

Christ is not only "the soul's life," He came to give life to the whole of man. We are not called to a fragmented, but an integrated life, which means to have "an integration of heart and mind, intellect and emotion" as the Puritans believed. (SMITH, 2001, p. 90)

We need to unite both sides: the charismatic and the social prophetic in order to have a holistic vision and life of the gospel. Elisha is the integration of both approaches. Bob Ekblad says that "Elisha is led by Spirit, and he brings together the social prophetic and charismatic prophetic traditions in a way similar to Jesus because a prophet needs to be informed by the Holy Spirit."¹²⁰

Fracis MacNutt makes an appeal and proposal to both sides because many of the conservative Christians have little sense of social injustice, while social justice activists have little understanding of the reality of evil spirits and the value of deliverance:

Why can't we have not an either-or but a both-and situation, believing

1 - that there are demonic, personal powers that control regions, societies, political systems and institutions (including those that influence churches);

Church and Society, in 01/14/2006.

¹¹⁹ Bob Ekblad. Lecture given in the course *Lift Up Your Voice: Prophetic Ministry In Scripture, Church and Society, in 02/17/2006.*

¹²⁰ Bob Ekblad. Lecture given in the course *Lift Up Your Voice: Prophetic Ministry In Scripture, Church and Society, in 02/17/2006.*

2 - that there are also evils to which we are blind that influence the same regions, nations and societies, in which our human greed and selfishness become institutionalized and larger than life, beyond the ability of any one individual to reform and, therefore, 'demonic' in the sense of being an evil that has a kind of life of its own. (MACNUTT, 1995, p. 262)

So, from both sides we need to look for an integration of the charismatic and social prophetic in order to live and speak with relevance in our world today, above all, knowing that "Love is the heart of the matter."¹²¹ Yes, even Jacques Ellul says, "Elisha's work is a close intermingling of political action and the individual witness of love." (ELLUL, 1972, 14-15)

If we want to be relevant to our generation today we need to know that "All functions of the church can and should be prophetic voices" (BRUEGGMANN, 1990, 125) and understand the prophets in the Bible and their relevancy in order to bring God's justice, in integrity and power because "The Christian cannot read the Bible and hear what God says through the prophets, who denounced the injustices of their time, without concluding that the prophetic word is still valid for us and our time." (SUENES;CAMARA, 1979, p. 49)

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