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"SPEAK, LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING!" (1 SAM 3:9) 25 YEARS OF LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD FOR A WOUNDED WORLD

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Abstract. The Bible serves as a vital spiritual guide in today's world, filled with mixed messages, particularly due to technology that spreads both facts and false information. In the Diocese of Kalookan, we face serious challenges such as the bloody drug war under Rodrigo Duterte, the COVID-19 pandemic, and environmental issues. Currently, the Synod on Synodality inspires the adaptation of pastoral plans and the refinement of the diocese's vision, mission, and priorities by encouraging the listening and participation of all members. In this presentation, it is presupposed that interpreting 1 Samuel 3 through the lens of the synodal spirit highlights the task of listening to each other and mutual discernment of responses to today's challenges. The Synodal approach fosters collective conversations to discern the Holy Spirit's guidance. The phrase "SPEAK, LORD!" in the story of the young Samuel encourages a communal sense of listening to God's Word and spiritual growth. Though Samuel initially mistakes God's call for Eli's, his eventual delivery of God's message affirms the necessity of attentiveness in faith. This presentation has four parts. It first discusses how the prophet is called to listen and then expounds on how Yahweh speaks. Next, it briefly discusses mimetic irony to look at the pivotal

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role of Samuel in Israel's history and draws parallels between 1 Samuel 3 and Numbers 12 as well. It concludes with a reappropriation of how it is to listen to and speak for God can be done in the context of the Diocese of Kalookan today.

Keywords: listening, synodality, prophecy, mimetic irony, drug war

Introduction

Thank you, dear colleagues and friends, for inviting me to share some thoughts on this beautifully formulated theme for our 25th anniversary as a Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines: "25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a World in Crisis," taking as source of inspiration—1 Samuel 3:9. Indeed, crisis situations are among the most opportune times to draw from the rich resources of our Judaeo-Christian faith—our Sacred Scriptures.

The Bible continues to serve as our most effective spiritual "hearing aid"[1] in a world often overwhelmed by a cacophony of discordant voices, especially in this digital age dominated by social media. The very technology that disseminates information has become just as potent for propagating disinformation, giving us a glimpse of both the best and the worst of human behavior.

The local Church that I currently serve, the Diocese of Kalookan, has faced three of the worst crises in recent memory of our nation: the brutal drug war under the government of former President Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022), the Covid 19 pandemic, and the ecological crisis

[1] The analogy was made in an intervention by the former Superior General of the Society of Divine Word, Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD, at the Synod of Bishops on the topic "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," held in Vatican City in 2008. Fr. Pernia used the expression "hearing aid" as a metaphor for the role of a missionary congregation like the SVDs in the Church through their involvement in the biblical pastoral ministry, drawing laughter from the Synod delegates gathered in a general assembly. That, by the way, was the Synod that resulted in Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, published in 2009.

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caused by reclamation projects in Manila Bay. We are also in a period of transition as a diocese, taking a new direction in our diocesan pastoral planning. This transition is being shaped by the ongoing Synod on Synodality.[2] We recently revisited and reformulated our old vision and mission statements, setting new pastoral priorities for the diocese. What has made a significant difference is the synodal orientation that brings about new energy to our pastoral planning process. Our former DPP (Diocesan Pastoral Planning), which we now call DSPP (Diocesan Synodal Pastoral Planning), has not merely been qualified by a new adjective—synodal. That singular qualifier has made all the difference by introducing us to a new way of being Church. This shift has revitalized our pastoral planning by disposing us towards greater attentiveness, consultation, inclusivity, and participation in all levels of ecclesial life.

Interestingly, 1 Samuel 3 has figured prominently in the ongoing theological discourses on Synodality, especially by theologians who emphasize the related synodal themes of listening, discernment, and openness to God's voice.[3] The Synodal way of being Church has put

[2] As we were holding this convention, preparation was being made for the second session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, or more commonly known as the Synod on Synodality, which was held in Rome from September 29 to October 27, 2024. Pope Francis approved the final document of the synod in its Italian original on October 26, 2024. An official English translation entitled *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* is available at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf

[3] See, for instance, the contributions of Richard Gaillardetz, Austen Ivereigh, and Massimo Faggioli. Gaillardetz highlights the importance of attentive listening in synodality. He uses 1 Samuel 3:9 as his point of departure for developing the same posture of openness that is central to synodality, where both leaders and members of the Church are called to listen carefully to the Holy Spirit, as well as to one another, in a spirit of communion. Ivereigh takes 1 Sam 3:9 as an illustration of the role of elders or experienced leaders—represented by Eli—as facilitators of discernment. He points out that the role of the ordained leadership in synodality has to do with the more essential task of guiding the faithful in listening to God and discerning His will communally, in the same way that Eli guided Samuel in responding to God's call. Faggioli points out that synodality

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a premium on the method of Scripture-guided "Conversations in the Spirit" and the practice of the discipline of communal discernment towards consensus-building in the Church, where the faithful, ordained, consecrated, and lay, women and men alike, listen together to the Holy Spirit. Within the framework of 1 Sam 3:9, "SPEAK, LORD!" has to mean, primarily, "Speak TO US, Lord…" before it can mean "Speak THROUGH US, Lord!" A synodal Church empowers its members through communion, participation, and mission to become a truly prophetic Church, a Church that "listens and responds to God's Word for a wounded world."

The Prophet Listens

The prophet is indeed one who is called to proclaim God's Word, but first, he must listen. Let me highlight just a few important contributions in this regard, by Walter Brueggemann, Abraham Heschel, and N.T. Wright.

In his seminal work, *The Prophetic Imagination,* Walter Brueggemann emphasizes that attentive listening is central to the prophetic task. He points out that prophets must first listen to God with openness and humility before they can speak on God's behalf. Otherwise, they merely speak from their own perspective or carry out their own agenda. For Brueggemann, true prophecy begins with "yielding to God's voice, often in quiet reflection." Only thereafter does the prophet act as an instrument of divine communication.[4] Many other

opens the Church to new, sometimes unexpected, voices, including those of young people, marginalized groups, or those outside traditional structures of authority, including those who may not traditionally have been given a platform. This openness to God echoes Samuel's calling as a young, unheard voice raised up by God to bring change. In Richard Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 92–95; A. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014), 213–215; and Massimo Faggioli, *A New Era in the Church: The Synodal Process*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2021), 56-58.

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 22–26.

scholars likewise emphasize the foundational importance of attentive listening to the prophetic role. This posture is not passive; it involves active engagement, reflection, and cooperation in communicating the divine message. Whether seen in the example of Samuel or through the apostolic tradition, listening remains a critical aspect of proclaiming God's Word both in ancient and contemporary contexts.[5]

Biblical theologians usually point to Samuel as the biblical model for attentive listening in the context of his prophetic role. Ironically, in 1 Samuel 3:9, it is the inattentive old priest Eli who disposes the young Samuel to respond with attentiveness to God's call by instructing him to say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." We will delve into this narrative critical tool called "mimetic irony" later. Suffice it to say for now that this text reflects the importance of first listening carefully to God's message. This attitude of readiness and humility sets Samuel apart and is expected to be a key characteristic for those who proclaim God's Word today.[6]

Although a bit dated, Abraham Heschel's work, *The Prophets* (1962), remains insightful in that it underscores the fact that attentive listening involves more than just hearing words; it requires a "spiritual sensitivity" and a "deep moral engagement with the message received". Heschel explains that prophets are not to be treated as mere passive receivers of a divine message; they actively respond to what they hear, aligning their lives and proclamations with God's will. Heschel also notes that this kind of attentiveness is marked by a willingness to be transformed by the Word before proclaiming it to others.[7]

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[5] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 22–26; See also D.T. Lamb, *1 & 2 Samuel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[6] See, for example, D. T. Lamb, *1 & 2 Samuel,* 45–48.

[7] A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 245–247.

For his part, N.T. Wright reflects on how present-day preachers and proclaimers of God's Word are tasked with discerning God's voice amid the noise of the world, requiring deep spiritual attentiveness and reflection. Wright says faithful proclamation can come only from listening carefully to Scripture and the Spirit, ensuring that the Word of God is transmitted authentically.[8]

Yahweh Speaks

Not a few scholars have pointed out the notable textual difference between the instruction, as given by Eli in 1 Sam 3:9, and the actual reply of the young Samuel in v. 10. Already from v. 8, the author tells us that Eli "realized that Yahweh was calling the boy." And so, Eli's instruction in v. 9 was as follows, "If someone calls you, say, 'Speak, Yahweh, for your servant is listening'." And then we are told in v. 10 that when Samuel heard the voice for the fourth time, omitting the divine name, his reply was simply "Speak! For your servant is listening."[9] Some scholars suggest that the omission of "Yahweh" in Samuel's response could be intentional.[10] Namely, that it reflects the fact that Samuel, up to this point, did not yet fully recognize or know the Lord (as explicitly stated in 1 Samuel 3:7). Therefore, his response is neutral, not explicitly naming Yahweh, which would be more consistent with the graduality of his awakening to the divine call. Other scholars view the omission of "Yahweh" as a "literary technique", suggesting that the omission is intended deliberately to create a narrative tension.

[8] N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 32–35.

[9] P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary, The Anchor Bible,* vol. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 95. McCarter notes the text-critical variance between LXXB, which omits *YHWH,* as against MT and LXX, which include *YHWH*. He favors the omission. This subtle omission obviously raises some issues about textual transmission, theological intent, and scribal practices.

[10] See, for example, David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel, New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 167–170.

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That way, Samuel's eventual recognition of Yahweh's voice and calling is presented unfolding slowly, and the absence of the divine name "Yahweh" in verse 10 will reinforce the graduality of the process of spiritual revelation.[11]

Eli Instructs Samuel

The author establishes the context of this call narrative[12] from the start: the corruption of the two sons of Eli, who had inherited the priestly office from their elderly father, and the looming crisis situation that is about to befall Israel. It is the chapter that immediately follows the infancy narrative about the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 1-3)—namely, Israel's impending defeat in their battle against the Philistines, the capture of the ark of the covenant, the death of thirty thousand foot soldiers and the disastrous end of the sons of Eli (1 Sam 4).[13]

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[11] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 117–119. See also John Walton, who notes that "in ancient Near Eastern texts, the specificity of a deity's name could be a marker of familiarity and recognition." In Samuel's case, Walton points out that the omission of "Yahweh" could signal the early stage of Samuel's prophetic journey, where he has not yet fully understood or developed the intimate relationship with God that would later define his role as a prophet. In *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament, Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 240–242.

[12] Some form-critical scholars, such as Walter Brueggemann, have questioned the classification of 1 Samuel 1–3 as a prophetic call narrative. Brueggemann argues that chapters 1 and 2 are not really focused on prophetic themes but rather on the prayer of Hannah and the dedication of Samuel to temple service. He suggests that while 1 Samuel 3 is indeed consistent with typical call narrative structure, the surrounding chapters make it serve broader narrative purposes, including priestly corruption and national renewal. See Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel,* Interpretation Commentary (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 20–22.

[13] The author depicts Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, as corrupt priests who abuse their priestly authority, "taking the best portions of sacrifices and committing immoral acts" (1 Samuel 2:12–17). He also underscores the fact that, despite knowing about their actions, Eli fails to discipline them. This situation

Samuel could not have discovered his prophetic calling if, as yet a young boy, he had not been taught by the old priest Eli to direct his response to the one who was really calling him: God.[14] The realization that the call was coming from God actually dawned on Eli already after the third call when the boy came rushing to him again and said *Hinneni, ki qara'ta* for a third time. And so, he would instruct Samuel to say, "Speak, *Yhwh,* your servant is listening." Could this mean Eli had realized that God was trying to bring across a message to him through this young boy?

Eli was not exactly clueless as to what God's message was about. The author tells us that in the previous chapter, 1 Sam 2:27-36, a "man of God"[15] had already conveyed to him God's displeasure about the behavior of his two sons, and about Eli's inability to restrain them from committing any further depravity in the way they exercised their priestly leadership over God's people. In vv. 33b-34, that unnamed prophet had already pronounced an oracle of doom against Eli's house: "…all the rest of your house will fall by the swords of men. And this, which will happen to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you: both of them will die in a single day."

And so, fast forward, the morning after the persistent calls that roused Samuel and prompted Eli (after the third time) to instruct the boy what to say in reply, Eli summons the boy and asks him to disclose the message that he received from God. It is noteworthy that the author does not write in detail what God had asked Samuel to say to

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eventually leads to God's judgment on his household. See the Commentary on the Books of Samuel in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol.2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998).

[14] The Hebrew reply to a call is *hinneni*, which literally translates, "Here I am!" The boy's actual reply is even longer: *hinneni ki qara'ti*, "Here I am, for you called me." Curiously, in Tagalog we are able to express the exact sense of this long statement with just a two-letter word: *"Po?"*

[15] Meaning, a prophet. This was just one of the various nomenclatures for the earlier or "non-writing prophets." The other terms used were "seer," "visionary," "medium," etc. See commentaries on 1 Sam 9:9 and Amos 7:14.

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Eli. He simply says in v. 18, "So Samuel told him everything, and held nothing back." After hearing it, Eli does not even react with surprise about it. Instead, in a mood of resignation, he would simply say, "He is *Yhwh*. Let him do what seems best to him." This could only mean that what Samuel had reported to Eli was basically just a reiteration of the oracle that had earlier been pronounced against his family by a "man of God" (1 Sam 2:27-36). It merely confirmed for him the authenticity of the unnamed prophet's earlier message to him. But now he already had an idea who the "man of God" meant when he closed his oracle predicting the coming of "a faithful priest who will do as I intend and desire. I will build for him a secure house, and he will walk before my anointed forever" (1 Sam 2:35).

Mimetic Irony

It was at the Loyola School of Theology where I first heard the term "mimetic irony."[16] The professor was bringing with him a poster to illustrate what this narrative-critical tool was supposed to mean. The poster portrayed a bearded and long-haired character looking like the typical caricature of Jesus hiding behind a rock while a group of theologians wearing black clerical shirts and suits was busy looking for him everywhere except where he was, bowing low like he was playing hide and seek with them. None of them could locate Jesus, except a little child who could see him plainly from where he was standing, next to the rock. The child tries to call the attention of the theologians, but he is too small to even be noticed by them. Meanwhile, Jesus is making a gesture to the child with his index finger crossed against his lips, as if to say, "Don't tell them, ok?" The poster did not say much, but it did make me understand what a "mimetic irony" was basically about.

It is what some scholars tell us we are also dealing with in 1 Sam 3. The dramatic contrast cannot be missed between the old priest Eli on the one hand, and the young boy Samuel on the other hand. How he, on the one hand, who is the seasoned priest, is portrayed as spiritually

[16] Narrative critics use the term "mimetic irony" to refer to a literary technique where the narrative mirrors or imitates a situation or behavior in an ironic or contradictory way.

dim and unable to "hear" God's voice. Meanwhile, his innocent young assistant, on the other hand, is the one who hears God's voice and casually responds to it, although he misinterprets it to be a call from his old master. This paradox is what scholars might call a "mimetic irony".[17] One cannot fail to recognize the apparent discrepancy between expectation and reality in the roles played by the two characters.

Samuel: Pivotal Figure in Israelite History

As an important Biblical figure, Samuel's uniqueness lies in the fact that he held all three roles of priest, prophet, and judge at the same time. It is a rather rare combination in biblical history. He plays a pivotal role in Israel's transition from the time of the Judges to the establishment of the united monarchy, first under Saul, and later under David. His role as a prophet distinguished him as God's chosen messenger, while his priestly duties and judicial leadership established him as a multifaceted leader in Israel during a critical period of its history. It was under Samuel's leadership that Israel got stabilized as a nation and transitioned from being a loose confederation of tribes into a kingdom under a unified monarchy.[18]

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[17] See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 114–118, where he discusses the layered use of irony in biblical texts and highlights how Samuel's repeated failure to recognize God's voice and Eli's eventual realization is both "a reflection of and commentary on Israel's spiritual state." See also Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 21–24, where Alter elaborates on the ironic dynamics in the story of Samuel's call, noting how Samuel's misunderstanding of God's voice and Eli's eventual recognition are used "to reflect both the personal and national crises in leadership at the time." See also David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 165–172, where he explains that the narrative's irony is part of a broader literary strategy that emphasizes the contrast between the spiritual readiness of Samuel and the blindness of Eli. Samuel's initial misunderstanding "mirrors the larger disorientation of Israel at the time".

[18] Scholars attribute the repudiation of the monarchy in 1 Samuel 8:6–9 to a later redactor. In this text, we hear about Samuel's apparent displeasure about the nation's request for a king, which he grants, nevertheless, because the Lord had

Samuel is often regarded by scholars as the first significant prophet after Moses. His role as a prophet is essential in the leadership transition in Israel from judges to kings. Samuel's prophetic authority was crucial in guiding Israel as it shifted from tribal confederation to monarchy. He would anoint Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, emphasizing the theological conviction that kingship was under divine control. Meaning, if the prophet's role was to speak on behalf of God, the king's role was to rule on behalf of Yahweh, the real king.[19]

Samuel is likewise being presented by the author as the turning point from the prophet as a "seer" (*hozeh* or *ro'eh*) to the prophet as a messenger or spokesperson (*nabi'*). This shift in the role is consistent with that famous parenthetical remark of the same author in 1 Sam 9:9, "In former times in Israel, anyone who went to consult God used to say, 'Come let us go to the seer.' For the one who is now called prophet (*nabi'*) was formerly called seer (*ro'eh*)."[20]

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told him, "You are not the one they are rejecting. They are rejecting me as their king." It is interesting to note how this redactor would characterize the monarchy as a repudiation of God's kingship. See *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), vol. 2, 938–947.

[19] See Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991; reprint edition), vol. 2, 292–296.

[20] But see P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *Commentary on 1 Samuel, The Anchor Bible,* vol. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 177, who says, "But we may not conclude that it derives from a time when *ro'eh,* 'seer,' was an obsolete term requiring editorial explanation… The notice is redactional, intended to harmonize the present tale, in which Samuel is called 'seer' and 'man of God,' with the preceding material in which he is called "prophet.' …(T)he author of the notice considers *nabi'* 'prophet' to be the primary, contemporary designation and that he regards *ro'eh* as somewhat old-fashioned." That redactor seems to be reflecting a mentality that comes closer to the time of Amos in the 8th century BCE, the southern prophet from the Tekoa in Judah who prophesied in the north. He was, therefore, being driven away by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel of the northern kingdom of Israel, and asked to return to his country. In Amos 7:14, the latter refers to Amos pejoratively as a "seer" (*hozeh*, Amos 7:12). But Amos reacts vehemently and says: *Lo nabi' anoki* "I was not a prophet." (Amos 7:14) He explains that he was not what the priest thought he was—namely, a seer who "earned his

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1 Samuel 3 and Numbers 12

Scholars see in 1 Samuel 3 what they call an obvious allusion to Numbers 12, where the one who is being presented as the prototype of the prophet as messenger, or the prophet par excellence, is no less than Moses himself. Speaking to Aaron and Miriam, who were questioning the authority of Moses, Yhwh supposedly said, "If there are prophets among you," *bamar'eh elaw etwadda' bachalom 'adabber-bo* "in visions I make myself known to them, in dreams I speak to them…" The author is obviously alluding to the older template of prophetism—people who foretold the future based on dreams and visions whose authenticity could be validated only by the actual occurrence of what has been foretold. In Moses, the author is presenting the only prototype of what a genuine prophet was supposed to be—namely, the humble servant who is *ne'eman* "worthy of *Yhwh's* trust" Num 12:7, and to whom Yhwh speaks *peh el-peh* "face to face" (Num 12:8)—meaning, *umar'eh welo' bechidoth* "plainly and not in riddles."[21]

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bread" by engaging in fortune-telling, or in prophesying in its earlier sense—as a "visionary" or as a dream interpreter who did it as a source of income or a means of livelihood. Amos asserts, rather, that he was in fact "a sheep-breeder and a dresser of sycamore trees," meaning—a relatively well-off man who did not even demand money for his services as a prophet. Rather, he was prophesying in the sense of *nabi'*, God's messenger, because he had received a message from Yhwh and was bound by obedience to convey the message whether or not the intended addressees found it favorable. In Amos 3:8, the prophet attributes the compulsion to a divine mandate: "The lion has roared, who would not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who would not prophesy?"

[21] See Exod. 33:11, where the author underscores God's intimacy with Moses: *wedibber Yhwh 'el-Mosheh panim 'el-panim ka'asher yedabber 'ish 'el-re'ehu*—"The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a friend…" Not seeming to mind the contradiction, the author would, however, qualify the intimacy when later in the text Moses would make a request in v. 18 to be allowed to see God's glory (*har'eni na' 'et-kebodeka*), and God grants his request in vv.19–20 but qualifies, "I show favor to whom I will… I grant mercy to whom I will, but *lo' tukal lir'oth panay*—you cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live." This tradition about equating the idea of "seeing the face of God" with death is verbalized by the prophet Isaiah in Isa 6:5, where he says after seeing a vision of Yhwh "seated on a high and lofty throne." The prophet exclaims, "Woe is me, I am doomed.

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This gift of being able to communicate "face-to-face" with Yhwh seems to be the whole point behind the covenant relationship being initiated by Yahweh, such as with the patriarch Jacob.[22] In the conversation between Jesus and Nathanael, the writer of the Fourth Gospel makes a deliberate allusion to this dream narrative in Gen 28 when Jesus reacts to Nathanael's sudden confession of faith in him as "the Son of God…" and "King of Israel," assuring him that he was yet to see "greater things" (Jn 1:50), namely, "the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (Jn 1:51). In short, the writer is going to the extent of suggesting, not just the idea of God coming down and standing face-to-face with humankind, but the Son of God becoming himself a Son of Man and serving as the bridge or the covenant between heaven and earth, between divinity and humanity.

In 1 Sam 3, the boy Samuel is obviously neither having a dream nor a vision. Rather, he is "hearing" God calling him directly and wanting to communicate a message to him. However, he is yet unable to pick up God's message, misinterpreting the call to have come from Eli because, as the author explicitly states in the text, 1 Sam 3:7, "Samuel did not yet recognize the Lord, since the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." That line is enough to suggest what the author's understanding was about this "new form of prophecy"; it is not about the seer's glimpse of the future through a dream or a vision,

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For I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." But then the author notes in v. 7 how Isaiah is spared of death after the angel touches his mouth with an ember from the altar and cleanses him of sin.

[22] See Gen. 28, where Jacob's call to be the ancestor of a covenant people is beautifully represented by a dream that leads to his naming of the vision site as *Bethel*—"house of God." One tends to miss out the whole objective of this graphic portrayal of a stairway, connecting heaven and earth like a bridge, and of angels "ascending and descending" on it, when one fails to notice the most important detail in the dream in v.13: *wehinneh Yhwh nizzab 'alaw*—"And behold, there was the Lord standing beside him (i.e., Jacob)…" and introducing himself to the ancestor who would later be named Israel: *'ani Yhwh 'Elohei 'Abraham 'abika wE'lohei Yizchaq*—"I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac…"

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but rather about "the Word of the Lord" being revealed to him the way it used to be revealed to Moses through a direct communication. Therefore, the author would say later in 1 Sam 3:20 that "All Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to know…" *ki ne'eman shemu'el lenabi' laYahwh* "…that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord." That line is again an obvious echo of Num 12:7, where Aaron and Miriam, after questioning the prophetic authority of Moses, are being told by Yahweh: "Throughout my house he (i.e., Moses) is trustworthy (*ne'eman*)."

Hananel Shaphira characterizes Samuel as a "representative of the entire prophetic legacy." He says, "the narrator uses the narrative's peculiarities to validate the essence of prophecy and the prophetic role" and that "the peculiarities in Samuel's call narrative converge to form a web of allusions to another biblical narrative relating to prophets and their credibility, namely Num 12." Furthermore, he says, "The reader of 1 Sam 3 is supposed to be puzzled by the events, just like Samuel himself was, since it is indeed a puzzle, a riddle—the very manner by which the Lord speaks with his prophets, as implied by the description of Moses' audience with God in Num 12: "*Not so* with my servant Moses ... with *him* (as against the other prophets) I speak ... clearly, *not in riddles*" (vv. 7–8.12).[23]

The mimetic irony in 1 Sam 3, which we earlier spoke about, is actually established already in the two chapters that preceded it. There is a sharp contrast between the corrupt and abusive sons of Eli on the one hand, who served as priests in the temple, and Samuel the son of Hannah on the other hand, who also "served in the presence of the Lord" (1 Sam 3:1), but who "was growing in stature and in worth in the estimation of the Lord and the people" (1 Sam 2:26). The portrayal of

[23] Hananel Shaphira, "Subversion through Allusion in Samuel's Call to Prophecy (1 Sam 3)," *Vetus Testamentum* 74 (2024): 4. Shaphira says, "By presenting Samuel's prophecy in a way that conforms to the description in Num. 12 of non-Mosaic prophecy, the narrator lends credibility to his own narrative and reinforces Samuel's reliability. Rather than directly quarreling with Num. 12, which asserts that only Moses is a credible prophet, the author of 1 Sam. 3 accepts this text and uses it subversively. If you cannot beat them, join them." Ibid., 15.

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Samuel "lying in the temple where the ark of God was kept at a time when the lamp of God had not yet been extinguished," (1 Sam 3:3) and hearing God calling his name for the first time in v. 4, "Samuel, Samuel," and answering *Hinneni!* "Here I am!" cannot but make one think of Moses before the burning bush and hearing his name called out by God for the first time, "Moses, Moses," and answering *Hinneni!* "Here I am!" (Exod 3:4)

Appropriating 1 Samuel 3:9

With due indulgence, allow me now to share some thoughts on my personal appropriation of 1 Sam 3:9 in my own life and ministry.

I was also an innocent four-year-old boy the first time I learned from our parish catechist that there was a way of finding out whether or not God was present inside the Church. Namely, by checking if the vigil lamp next to the tabernacle at the altar was on fire. I remember how the very awareness of God's presence had filled me with childlike excitement. It motivated me every day to drop by our parish Church twice a day during school days, from home on my way to school, and from school on my way back home. I did not even know yet how to pray. But I found myself coming back daily. Inside me, I felt satisfied just seeing the vigil lamp burning. This was long before I learned in my theological studies that the perpetual vigil lamp in our Churches was actually a remnant of the perpetual fire that was supposed to be kept burning by the priests in the meeting tent and later in the temple that housed the ark of the covenant.[24]

Fast forward, fifty-four years later, I became bishop of Kalookan in a serious time of crisis for countless families in our diocese—the brutal war of the former president against illegal drugs. From 2017 on, I found myself waking up at past midnight almost every day to

[24] See Exod. 27:20: "You shall command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of crushed olives, to be used for the light, so that you may keep the lamps burning always"; and Lev. 6:5: "The fire on the altar is to be kept burning; it must not go out…" And in v. 6: "The fire is to be kept burning continuously on the altar; it must not go out."

check on the messages on my phone. My fault, because I deliberately turned on its ringing tone to check on messages that came in every day from a group of journalists who jokingly referred to themselves as the "nightcrawlers". My fault again because I had made a deal with them. I had asked them, in exchange for free coffee, to send me names and photos of drug suspects who were victims of EJK, especially those killed in the cities of Caloocan, Malabon, and Navotas.

On one of those nights, my phone did not stop beeping from one until three in the early morning, registering new notifications about yet new victims. That was the night when Kian de los Santos was killed. After looking at the photos of one victim whose brains had been blasted by several gunshots, and images of his mother in a state of hysteria, I felt my guts turning over. Since I could not sleep anymore, I found myself inside my oratory, before the Blessed Sacrament, where I have my daily "Coffee with Jesus" first thing in the morning. This time, it was just past midnight. I fixed my gaze on the vigil lamp, and as I closed my eyes, the little flicker of light became a burning bush in my imagination. The "fire blazing in my heart, imprisoned in my bones", as the prophet Jeremiah once described it, was now speaking to me as it did to Moses, to Samuel, and to later prophets like Amos and Isaiah. I found myself scribbling what I entitled "A Prophetic Oracle Against Murderers", following the literary form of the oracles of judgment in the prophetic literature. I read it in the San Roque Cathedral for the first time on September 22, 2017.[25]

> *The word of the Lord came to me thus: 'Son of Man, I appointed you as a watchman for my people. Proclaim this oracle from housetops!'*
>
> *Woe to you who call addicts "non-humans" deserving of death. Who gave you the right to pass judgment on people who are sick? You claim to care about the future of young people in this country. What future awaits them if they end up dead on a street alley after a "legitimate police operation"?*

[25] This homily was also later on published. See, Pablo Virgilio David, "A Prophetic Oracle against Murderers," *Rappler*, accessed July 16, 2019, http://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/209840-prophetic-oracle-murderers-bishop-pablo-david.

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Woe to you who arrest and detain "drug suspects" without charges and extort ransom money from them and their relatives! You call yourselves "law enforcers" but have no regard for the law! You break into homes without search warrants; you arrest suspects without arrest warrants; you force "drug suspects" to work as assets and force them to point at other suspects for summary execution!

Woe to you who drive the poor victims of drugs more deeply into poverty and misery! You who neither respect human rights nor human lives. You who trample on people's dignity because they are poor and are unable to defend themselves! You who eliminate addicts like chickens infected with avian flu—do you not care at all that your victims have wives who are driven into despair and hopelessness, and children who end up like stray dogs and cats in the streets, sniffing solvents to forget their hunger?

Woe to you who indiscriminately submit names of alleged "drug suspects" to the police, or casually drop their names in drop boxes, knowing that the "drug watch list" is also used as a "kill list"? Do you even realize that in doing so, you are practically pronouncing the death sentence of a fellow human being? Listen! The voice that cries, "Where is your brother?" now confronts you and asks, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10)

Woe to you who claim to be waging a war against illegal drugs but are killing its victims instead of saving them! You who order law enforcers to murder when their mandate is to protect the citizens and defend their right to a safe and secure environment. Woe to you who blindly follow unjust and unlawful orders! You who blindly obey the command to "kill drug suspects if they resist arrest!" Woe to you who plant evidence in order to justify murder!

Woe to you who pretend to care about the lives of your victims! You even bother to bring them to hospitals only to have them declared "dead on arrival"! Do you even get to sleep at night after writing a false police report, claiming that they had fought back when God knows they did not? Do you not have wives and children yourselves?

Woe to you, funeral handlers who are in cahoots with the murderers. You shamelessly arrive at the crime scenes, way ahead of the police! You who circle around human carcasses like vultures, preying on their families while they are still in a state of shock, charging nonrefundable down-payments and exorbitant funeral services! You low creatures who take advantage of the helplessness of the widowed wives and orphaned children of the victims, pushing them more deeply into the mire of debts, just so they could give their dead a decent burial.

Woe to you who just stand by and watch while the masked killers kill their targets in broad daylight! You who dismiss the murder quickly with a toxic whisper: "Must be another drug suspect!" You stare at them sprawled on cold pavement and note the

brains spilling out of their shattered skulls. You stall the traffic by slowing down your vehicle to take a close look, shaking your heads as you go your way. "It's just another one of those low lives anyway," you reason within yourself. It's just one criminal less, one of those elements your family is being "protected from." You do not even bother to cover the cadaver with a blanket or some sheets of newspaper. How long has it been since your consciences died?

Woe to you who would give "due process" to influential people who flood the country with billion-pesos worth of illegal drugs, you rotten vermins who allow tons of shabu to pass through the green lanes of the Bureau of Customs, you who just sneer at your accusers because you have all the means to enjoy legal protection and remedy! Are not the poor who are hunted like rabid dogs and cats in the slums--citizens of this country as well? Are they not entitled to due process because they are poor?

Woe to you who cover your faces with bonnets, ski masks, or helmets, and murder drug suspects like chickens! You who wrap up your victims in plastic bags and packaging tapes and leave them still gasping for their last breath. You who play god and even bother to hang on your victims' necks what you killed them for, not minding at all that you have acted as accuser, judge, and executioner--rolled into one? God knows who you are!

Woe to you, law enforcers who pretend not to know who these serial-killing death squads are! They pass by your police stations, walk through narrow alleys in big groups, drive vehicles with no plate numbers, abduct and murder "drug suspects". But you neither see them nor apprehend them; you neither pursue them nor engage them in a firefight; you neither investigate nor bring to a resolution any of the deaths resulting from their criminal operations. How will these criminals be caught if the ones who should be pursuing them are partners in crime?

Woe to you, barangay captains who are in collusion with killers! You who turn off street lamps and CCTV cameras on cue, except when the killers have failed to "coordinate" properly with you! How often have the families of your constituents run to you asking for CCTV footages and you've given the standard reply, "CCTV not functioning?"

Woe to you, boatmen who, for a fee, drop the corpses of victims into the North Harbor with weights tied around their bodies so as to keep them from floating? You who have no qualms about literally following orders to "fatten the fish of Manila Bay"? How can your consciences give you sleep at all?

Woe to you who call yourselves "Christians" but do not care an iota about the victims of extrajudicial killings, or even about priests who are being murdered. You who can still afford to laugh even when your faith is trampled upon, and your God

is called stupid! You blind fools!! You come to Church and hear the Word of God; you line up for communion to receive the Lamb of God who died for sinners, but you tolerate the murder of those whom he died for! Woe to you who call yourselves "shepherds" but allow your sheep to be slaughtered.

Therefore, because your crimes have reached the highest heavens, and the cries of the bereaved families of victims have been heard on the throne of Mercy, because you have been weighed and have been found wanting, your names will be written on the walls of the deepest recesses of the underworld. You will stumble on the very swords you have used as weapons to bully the poor with. Your guilt will be borne by your children and your children's children down to the fourth generation![26]

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About the Author. **Pablo Virgilio Siongco Cardinal David, D.D.,** is the bishop of the Diocese of Kalookan and a distinguished biblical scholar. He earned his doctorate in 1991 from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, focusing on the Book of Daniel. He later taught at the Loyola School of Theology and the Mother of Good Counsel Seminary. He served multiple terms on the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP), including as Vice-President. In the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

[26] As of printing, the former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte is under the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, the Netherlands, with charges of crimes against humanity for his bloody drug war. With a request from the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), an intergovernmental organization that facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control, Duterte was surrendered by the Philippine government under Ferdinand R. Marcos on March 11, 2025. While Duterte announced his unilateral withdrawal of the Philippines from the ICC on March 15 2018, it only took effect on March 19, 2019. The ICC retains jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was a party from November 1, 2011 to March 16, 2019 so the charge against Duterte was still covered when the country was a signatory to the Rome Statute. The Rome Statute is the international treaty which established the ICC. The Philippines signed the Rome Statute in 2000 during the presidency of Joseph Ejercito Estrada. It was finally ratified by the Philippine senate under the leadership of President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III in 2011. For more information, see "Situation in the Philippines: Rodrigo Roa Duterte in ICC custody," *International Criminal Court*, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-philippines-rodrigo-roa-duterte-icc-custody.

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(CBCP), he has held key roles and has been President since 2021. A fierce human rights advocate, he opposed President Duterte's drug war, facing but overcoming trumped-up charges. For his defense of the poor, he received Ateneo de Manila University's *Bukas-Palad* Award in 2019. As a pastor and practical theologian, he authored the Juan/Juana theology series. In February 2024, he was elected as Vice-President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. David participated in the final meeting of the Synod on Synodality in October 2024, where the Synod of Bishops elected him as a member of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat. On December 7, 2024, Pope Francis made him a cardinal, and on January 12, 2025, the Pope also appointed him a member of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith.

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