

## FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY/METHOD

- Convener: Vincent Miller, University of Dayton  
Moderator: James Keating, Providence College  
Presenters: Holly Taylor Coolman, Providence College  
John Friday, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Holly Taylor Coolman presented a paper entitled “Theology’s Prophetic Commitments and the Idols of the Academy.” The paper argued that imagining theology as a “prophetic” activity is greatly enriched by investigation into the original prophets of ancient Israel. Early historical critical scholarship tended to picture the prophetic as a lone, marginal, iconoclastic figure, and it is this understanding of “prophetic” upon which theologians most often draw. Theology’s “prophetic” critique is often directed toward those structures of power with regard from which theologians are, in fact, marginalized: governmental or economic, for example. More recent study of the ancient prophets, however, has led in other directions. Although some prophets can be described as “marginal,” others (perhaps most) are best described as “central” prophets: those who stood within society’s central structures, even as they critiqued them. The notion of “central prophets” requires a new picture of the “prophetic” and prompts theologians to consider which structures of power they do, in fact inhabit. Increasingly, this sort of inquiry leads to one answer: the modern university.

Although theologians have in recent decades come to new awareness of their own social location in terms of issues such as gender and global location, they have not always considered their prophetic relationship to the academy itself. Rather than critiquing the practices and aims of the modern university, theologians have, for the most part, simply adopted them. In particular, these practices and aims mimic those of the free market, and are marked by competitions, an every-increasing rate of production, and a drive for novelty.

Theology must consider anew what a prophetic stance in this area might mean, including the possibility of turning again to practices such as careful attentiveness and contemplative prayer as means of resistance.

John Friday presented a paper entitled “Facing the Challenge of the Prophetic Commitment and Moving Forward in Light of Lonergan’s Notion of Conversion.” The first part of this paper sketched the nature of the challenge of the prophetic commitment as it was understood by Lonergan and Newman. Newman located the theologian within the prophetic office, yet at the same time did not isolate the theologian in this office. Lonergan shared Newman’s concern by affirming that the theologian ought not only to speak but also to act in such a way that is congruent with her words. The paper noted that the present situation of the academy (i.e., intense and even hostile competition) does not always support congruence between what is spoken/taught and what is actually done.

The second part of the paper proposed Lonergan’s understanding of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as a way of meeting the aforementioned challenge. This nuanced understanding affirms that conversion is a dynamic

process that changes how one understands, decides, and acts. It was pointed out that while conversion is intensely personal, it is not purely private, but occurs within the context of community.

The final part of the paper offered reasons why Lonergan's notion of conversion can be a fruitful source of reflection on the prophetic commitment. First, the attention given to the issue alerts us to the challenge faced by the prophet to speak truthfully and act rightly. Second, the notion of conversion points up the possibility of the prophet being transformed via the very act of teaching. Third, actual transformation is certainly within the realm of possibilities, for God can be counted on to bestow his grace, which itself effects religious conversion, and from a causal point of view, moral and intellectual conversion.

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