**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 under-
standing 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 (per-
haps most) are best described as “central” prophets: those who stood within soci-
ety’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, theolo-
gians 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 careful attentive-
ness 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 iso-
late 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 acad-
emy (i.e., intense and even hostile competition) does not always support congru-
ence between what is spoken/taught and what is actually done.

The second part of the paper proposed Lonergan’s understanding of intellec-
tual, 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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