



The Prophetic Word: Poetry, Philosophy and Theology in Conversation

The Power of the Word International Conference V

Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

13-16 September 2017

Organized by the Heythrop Institute for Religion and Society (Heythrop College, University of London) and the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture (Regent's Park College, University of Oxford).



Michelangelo, *The Libyan Sibyl* (Sistine Chapel)

The fifth Power of the Word international conference, to be held at Oxford in September 2017, focuses on the prophetic genius of literature, particularly of poetry. 'Prophetic genius' is understood here to be that relentless impulse of literature to challenge the world from which it has arisen and, looking beyond, to propose alternative visions, practicable or utopian, of individual and collective fulfilment. In some authors - Dante, Milton and Blake are three obvious examples - the prophetic word is overtly religious, in others - Virgil,



Shelley and Yeats, say - it is not. Often the distinction becomes blurred, as in the poems of H.D., Denise Levertov and Allen Ginsberg. The conference will explore this theme in conversation with theology, philosophy, the three main Abrahamic religions and Greek and Latin literature and learning, and address some universal questions. For example, what do these various traditions and their understanding of the prophetic have in common? Are they mostly different or even in conflict? How do their audiences discern true from false prophets? How do they know when 'good spirits not evil ones choose poets for their instruments' (Czesław Miłosz)? Can poets really claim to have a prophetic authority comparable to that attributed in Scripture to the prophets? How persuasive is Seamus Heaney's sense of the 'redress of poetry', of its power to stimulate alternative ways of being in the world?

The programme will include contributions by literary scholars, creative writers, theologians and philosophers, all working on texts and authors from different backgrounds and traditions. Confirmed keynote speakers: John Barton (University of Oxford), Tina Beattie (University of Roehampton), William Franke (Vanderbilt University), Michèle Le Dœuff (ENS Paris), Christopher Rowland (University of Oxford), Alessandro Schiesaro (University of Manchester), and Mona Siddiqui (University of Edinburgh). The Conference will host a poetry-reading event and a public lecture in relation to the topic of the conference.

Call for Papers

The Power of the Word 2017 invites contributions from established scholars and research students in the fields of literary studies, biblical studies, theology and philosophy. Theoretical reflections as well as discussions of individual texts and authors from different countries and traditions are welcome. If you wish to give a paper (20 minutes), please send a title and abstract of no more than 250 words, together with a brief *curriculum vitae* to the executive team at poweroftheword@heythrop.ac.uk by 15 January 2017. Please include your name on files containing your abstract and CV for ease of reference.

Within the theme, broadly defined as above, topics that may be addressed include:

- Prophetic voices in the ancient world (Tiresias; Cassandra; the Sibyls)
- Prophecy as poetry and poetry as prophecy in the Abrahamic religions
- The theology of prophecy in the Abrahamic religions
- Prophecy, providence and eschatology
- The poet as prophet, the poet as seer
- The theologian as prophet
- The philosopher as prophet
- True and false prophecy, and issues of discernment



The Power of the Word international conferences aim to initiate, foster and support conversations between creative writers, literary scholars, philosophers, theologians, biblical scholars and students of religions on topics of common interest and concern. From their beginning in 2011 their deliberately interdisciplinary character has been a strong feature with an appeal to a wide range of scholars and students. Initiated by Heythrop College, University of London, in 2011, the conferences have been held in London (2011 and 2012), Gdańsk (2013) and Rome (2015).

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