

CALL FOR PAPERS: Modernism, Christianity, and Apocalypse (18-20 July 2012)

A conference organised by the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Bergen, Norway; funded by the Bergen Research Foundation through the 'Modernism and Christianity' research project.

Conference organisers:
Dr Erik Tønning
Dr Matthew Feldman

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Professor Paul S. Fiddes (University of Oxford)
Professor John Milbank (University of Nottingham)
Professor Hans Ottomeyer (Former Director of the German Historical Museum)
Professor Marjorie Perloff (University of Southern California)

INVITED SPEAKERS:

Professor C. J. Ackerley (University of Otago)
Professor Mary Bryden (University of Reading)
Professor Pericles Lewis (Yale University)
Professor Gregory Maertz (St. John's University, NY)
Professor Shane Weller (University of Kent)

The modernist imperative 'Make it new!' posits a break with traditional artistic forms, but also with the entire mould of a civilization felt to be in a state of terminal decay ('an old bitch, gone in the teeth', as a second dictum by Ezra Pound has it). Modernism was steeped in the language of apocalyptic crisis, generating multiple (and contradictory) millennial visions of artistic, cultural, religious and political transformation. This conference will examine the continuing impact of Christianity upon the modernist thinking of Apocalypse in Western culture, covering the period of early-to-high modernism (c. 1880-1945), with glances towards the immediate aftermath of World War II and the Bomb. 'Modernism' is not here confined to the arts, and contributions are warmly invited from scholars across the humanities and social sciences.

The modernist crisis is often depicted as emerging 'after' disenchantment and secularisation. Yet contemporary assessments of Christianity varied strikingly, as modernist thinkers, artists, writers and political ideologues confronted its entrenched authority and formidable capacity for self-reinvention. Certainly, as the historian Peter J. Bowler has shown, the effort to 'reconcile' science and religion was in no way abandoned in early twentieth century discourse. Nor, of course, did the efforts of theologians across the confessional spectrum suddenly cease: on the contrary, theology from Karl Barth to the *Nouvelle Théologie* and beyond delivered penetrating responses to modernity. More radical theorists and philosophers of the modern from Nietzsche onward also grappled with Christianity, often becoming further enmeshed even while prophesying the Death of God. Indeed, whether read through Frazer's dying gods or Freud's paternal totems, the Christian stories stubbornly resisted easy assimilation. Repeatedly, artists and writers exploring radically new modes of religious experience

might find their works subtly infiltrated by biblical or liturgical language and iconography. Christianity also garnered modernist converts: for some, the promise of cultural resurrection would converge on a return to orthodoxy following the liberal dilutions of the nineteenth century; while others freely adapted the tradition to suit their spiritual needs. Even those chary of such a step, or actively hostile to Christian faith, continued to reinvent the cultural resources and imagery of the Christian past – if only in order to overturn it in favour of a new future. The political religions of the twentieth century (Stalinism, Fascism, Nazism) promulgated their own revolutionary visions of Apocalypse and a secular Kingdom, casting Christianity as a chief antagonist, or at least as subservient to a vitalist national-political will. Nonetheless, these alternative salvation histories, too, were undeniably linked to their paradigm in the Christian tradition.

The complexities and ambiguities involved in such historical transactions are obvious: and interdisciplinary insights are essential in mapping them. *Modernism, Christianity, and Apocalypse* thus invites contributions by scholars in all relevant fields. New archival information and empirical research on this period is welcomed alongside broader theoretical and historical re-evaluations of the modernist crisis, or novel readings of central texts. A concerted effort to recover the complex interwovenness of modernism, Christianity and the apocalyptic imagination is especially urgent today, as the very idea of a ‘post-secular’ culture is being interrogated anew in a global context. Indeed, the recent Norway terror by a self-proclaimed crusader for ‘European civilization’ is a horrifying reminder that the contestation of history, and the proclamation of eschatologies, can still turn bloody.

WRITERS:

Suggestions for individual papers/panels (others also welcome):

America, the UK and Ireland: W. H. Auden, Samuel Beckett, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, David Jones, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Flannery O’Connor, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Virginia Woolf

France: Georges Bataille, Paul Claudel, André Gide, Charles Péguy, Simone Weil

Germany: Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, German expressionism

Russia: Anna Akhmatova, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy

Scandinavia: Knut Hamsun, August Strindberg

VISUAL ARTS

MUSIC

PHILOSOPHERS AND THEORISTS OF THE MODERN

THEOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

MODERNISM AND THE BIBLE

SCIENCE – AND RELIGIONS OLD AND NEW

THE NEW MAN AND THE OLD ADAM: MODERNIST AND CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGIES

MODERNISM AND POLITICAL RELIGION

ALTERNATIVE/NEW RELIGIONS

VITALISM, MODERNISM AND CHRISTIANITY

A CIVILIZATION IN CRISIS? MODERNISM, HISTORY AND APOCALYPSE

MODERNISM, CHRISTIANITY AND NIHILISM

APOCALYPSE AND THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

WAR, AND RUMOURS OF WAR, 1914-1945

REVALUATIONS OF THE APOCALYPSE AFTER WWII

APOCALYPSE NOW? CLOSING PLENARY ON CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Conference venue: Hotel solstrand (outside Bergen, Norway)

<http://www.solstrand.com/english/articles.asp?segment=3&ID=139>

CONFERENCE FEE (early bird rate):

NOK 3700: This covers all expenses, including conference pack; two nights at the hotel; three lunches, two breakfasts and two dinners at the hotel (famous for its food); access to excellent sauna, pool and steam-room facilities; and a direct conference bus (at c. 11 am, c. 25-30 mins) to the hotel from Flesland airport (18th), with a return on Friday afternoon (20th, at 4 pm).

There is also a *postgraduate rate* of NOK 3200 available.

PLEASE NOTE: This subsidized rate is offered through conference funding provided by the Bergen Research Foundation. Registration at this rate is therefore limited to 75 delegates. Once this number of total delegates has been reached, additional registrations will cost NOK 4400. All delegates registering after 1 May 2012 will also be charged at this higher rate. Early registration is thus strongly recommended.

To register:

Please send your title, abstract (100-200 words) and biographical information to erik.tonning@if.uib.no for consideration. Upon acceptance of your proposed paper (20 minutes), payment details will be emailed back to you. You will then have three weeks to complete your registration by making your payment: after this time, your place may be offered to someone else. Should you wish to cancel your registration at a later stage, a refund will be available (minus a service charge).