



Chester Ronning Centre
for the Study of Religion and Public Life

Advising the Powerful: John Donne's Moral Suasion at Court

Paul Harland

A Ronning Centre Seminar

How does a public intellectual close to the powerful and influential persuade those authorities to moral and responsible action? The case of John Donne, one of the greatest poets and preachers of seventeenth-century England, offers a fascinating illustration of precisely this problem. Operating under conditions of strict censorship, Donne had to find a way of convincing monarch, courtiers, and churchmen alike that certain courses of action would tear apart the social fabric of his country. Yet, how could Donne find his voice without losing his head? Furthermore, how could he advise in a way that might turn powerful interests away from paths that were personally and socially destructive, and invite them to find better solutions? Donne addresses court corruption in his poetry, warns against royal absolutism in his role as royal chaplain, and attempts to persuade against brutality in England's colonial adventures. Analyzing Donne's words and actions will help us to understand his methods in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Naturally, we will also want to ask how Donne's methods might serve as an inspiration in our own times.



Paul Harland is Professor of English at the Augustana campus, University of Alberta. His teaching and research interests lie in Renaissance and twentieth-century literature, and he has published numerous articles on John Donne and another on Henry James. In addition, he has co-edited Augustana's interdisciplinary liberal arts journal *Dianoia*. Recent interests include politics in seventeenth-century literature and the representation of history in contemporary novels.

Wednesday, 20 October 2010, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

2-004, 2nd floor Forum meeting room, Augustana Campus
No pre-registration is required, and there is no fee to attend this event.

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