

Who are the wisest prophets?

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"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet." In an election year, this passage from Deuteronomy makes me feel slightly sick to my stomach.

Most of us have run across someone whom we are fairly sure is a "prophet who speaks in the name of other gods," but in election years we hear so many voices, all of them clamoring to be more prophetic than the next. How are we to choose the truly prophetic voice? How are we to know who is best suited to receive such power and authority?

Yet the Lord says to Moses, "I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable." We want to get this right.

The final scene in *Caleb's Crossing*, Gwendolyn Brooks's most recent novel, portrays Caleb, a young Native American man, on his deathbed. The book is based on a true story. Caleb was the first Native American to graduate from Harvard College in 1665. He planned to become a minister, having converted to Christianity through the influence of a Puritan preacher and of Bethia, his daughter. The Puritans hoped Caleb would go on to be a prophet to his people, preaching and converting them.

Now as he lies dying, Caleb is unable to find comfort and peace. Despite her strict Calvinistic upbringing, Bethia knows Caleb will only find comfort with the faith of his people. After all her work to convert him, Bethia seeks help from Caleb's medicine-

man uncle, who gives her the secret words, rituals and herbs to help release Caleb's spirit. Bethia concludes her narration of the story knowing that in effecting a sort of reverse exorcism, she has committed a great sin--yet somehow done what is right.

Bethia instinctively restores healing and meaning to Caleb's life, as did Jesus when he healed in a culture that was sometimes shocked and appalled by his choices and settings. False prophets sow division and ill feeling. As we seek out the wisest prophets in our own culture, we can sometimes find them by listening for words that restore healing and meaning, even when the source is unconventional or surprising.