



The Jolly Journalist Goes to Seminary

by Adam Stowell
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We live in the distant wake of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and a host of revolutions that inaugurated a new era of the preeminence of reason. The wily combination of these past events dashed the stable medieval synthesis into a thousand pieces—faith and reason were divorced, and the household of faith has never been the same. Faith and reason—or more properly, philosophy and theology—became a couple in an uneasy tension. Philosophy, the fair maiden to Theology, was usurping her role, and in a bold move sought to dislodge the Queen from her exalted and embattled chair. A little publication, a little revolution, and the aged scepters were up for grabs.

The medieval synthesis, where “philosophy [was] the handmaid to theology” as implied by its very name, was not an overnight development; no bishop or “see” plucked it out of an embankment on his way to Nicea. The synthesis was around, however, in an

inchoate form; in the spirit of Marcus Aurelius a la “Gladiator”, the synthesis was an idea “so fragile that one could only whisper it, any more than that and it would vanish into thin air.” Though Marcus Aurelius was speaking of Rome, Greece is too important to be forgotten. Rome was certainly more than its codes, cathedrals, councils, and clay pots. Greece was more than its peripatetics, Parthenon, and the pageantry of Olympus. Surely one has something to contribute to the other; surely a synthesis was in order.

Greece is the home of western philosophy, as Rome seemed the home of early theology. Socrates (“the gadfly of Athens”) bothered the Greek populace so much it cost him his life and his persistent questioning inadvertently started an entire bothersome school. He thought that the thoughts of others did not consist of good thinking and, having thought about it, thought his own thinking unthoughtful, and was then declared by the Oracle at Delphi to be the most thoughtful among men for thinking nothing of his own thoughts. Plato, his prized protégé, also began a school for thinkers, daring to believe that things unseen were more real than things seen—the eternal more real than the present. Augustine brought Plato’s ideas to bear upon Christian doctrine, showing that a synthesis was not

only possible, but also quite helpful, particularly in defending against heresies. It was Aristotle, however, that would be selected by Aquinas to represent the height of man's wisdom, which he wed to "the foolishness of God," thus making concrete the medieval synthesis.

This synthesis was not without controversy; it was itself revolutionary. There were those who would retort "what has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" which was equivalent to "What does Jesus have to do with Socrates?" One could reply many things are common to both, and surely the comparison far extends sandals and sacrifice, and that extension would fall between these extremes.

There is another revolution underway in our own time, and it is to restore proper balance to the Kingdom. For some time, the handmaiden went her own way, and woke one morning caked in her muddy empiricism, and like the prodigal, decided the palace was to be preferred to the pigs. Serving the scepter was deemed worthier than the sty. And she needs encouragement; there are those within the Kingdom that wish to throw her from the carriage on the way back to the palace. These are the loyal subjects, from positions of leadership in important provinces and

Pasadenic perches, who have forgotten the face of the maiden, and so, at the most, have mistaken her for an assassin and, at the very least, found her an extra mouth to feed; having unwittingly eliminated her position, they find no work for her.

The Queen awoke many mornings with no one to prepare her for the running of her Kingdom, and so her kingdom fell into disrepair; for her garments did not match, and the respect of her court was lost. No one prepared her for her reign in the "buzzing and blooming confusion" (William James) engendered by adjacent kingdoms vying for heart and head. Furthermore, there was one point where she was proclaimed "dead." Since then, these rumors have been shown to be unjustified, via dozens of argument and the marvelous scrolls of information discovered in the double helix. Rather, the scientific community is now more justified in believing Nietzsche dead than the Queen.

Revolutions, though seemingly rare in modern form, are nevertheless unfolding before our eyes. Some are refreshed and energized by it; others appear quite frightened and uncertain. Such is the way of revolution. Theology and philosophy have chosen reconciliation instead of divorce; the Queen and the

maiden are working back towards one another for the good of the Kingdom, and perhaps “woe” is in order to those who stand in their path.

In conclusion, and to snap this piece from relative obscurity, there is a subtle tension in the community between the court of the queen and mendicants of the maiden; between that of the Theologian and that of the Philosopher. Though the ascriptions of those responsible for the tension are ostensibly easily identifiable, the crux of the conflict is more surreptitious than the simplistic analysis proposed here. There are tensions between those who study their respective disciplines, not (historically) between the disciplines. The tension is in the persons, not in the disciplines. Furthermore, there are those in each that represent the norm, and those that represent the distortion. Theology admits of theologians (students of God) as the norm, and fundamentalists (or “fundies”) as the distortion. Philosophy enjoys philosophers (lovers of wisdom) as the norm, and philosophical robots (or “philbots”) as the distortion.

To further elaborate on the conflict between the distortions that unsettle those with greater sensibilities, perhaps a word on my pejorative

coinage is in order. The bane and blessing of negative connotations is that once they are applied, those to whom they are applied are usually embarrassed and, one would hope, they would not stop to “take anything out of his house” in the flight from such labels. And herein is the virtue: if for no other reason than to chase good people from the insanity of their myopic dispositions, negative designations ostensibly serve the greater good. The part, they must realize, is never greater than the whole.

“Fundies” is taken from the work “fundamentalism,” which itself admits of a distortion. A response to save evangelicalism from liberalism turned from a thoroughgoing doctrinal defense to senseless bantering about skirt lengths and hairstyles; they traded the defense of the Trinity for a case on traditional dress; a defense of the incarnation for a doctrine against incandescent lights. “Fundies” are good people in want of a larger vision. They fight for God against the church because it is too much like the world, instead of warring with God to make the world more like Christ. In short, they are stout hearted but squinty eyed; they have stared at the gnat so long they have gotten tunnel vision, and tasted camel so often as to think it chicken.

Contrast the “fundy” with the “philbot,” whose analytic endeavors have also narrowed their adherents. This is due in no small measure to the present philosophical paradigm hatched by the Vienna Circle of Britain. Philosophy, a once edifying discipline, has lapsed into a maddening and pedantic pursuit of clarity, often to the point where we have clarity about things less important than a dinner fork. This is not an invitation to sloppiness, pragmatism, or “fuzzy logic,” but the existence of God and the soul does not hang on an ambiguity. Reality is represented, not determined, by language.

“Philbot’s” are zealous servants of the maiden, who enjoy four-dimensional space-time discussions, have lapsed into one-dimensional personalities. These faithful few, rigorous in their work, often forget their place: to aid the maiden in her endeavors; to serve the Kingdom with honor. Usurping the Queen is neither traditional nor judging truly; in fact, it is treason. The philosopher, in serving the Queen, must bend the knee to the Queen, if for no other reason than to keep her head from inflating, and, more seriously, her heart from dying.

So I close this precarious piece with an invitation for those at the extreme to step in off the ledge; to step

into the fresh sunshine and cool air of large minded, stout-hearted cooperation for Queen, Country, and Kingdom. Theologians should not fear philosophy, for it helps them to make proper distinctions and crisp arguments; to have a metaphysical point of entry into the arena of ideas. Philosopher’s ought to remain humble, and remember that they are “lovers of wisdom,” who follow the quintessential sage in the savior that is Christ. Only then will the Kingdom of God advance, occupying lost ground, staking the banners of reason and faith in the fertile soil of the hearts and minds who have suffered shipwreck.

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