

Giordano Bruno Revisited

Throughout much of Europe, from Copernicus (1473-1543) to Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), Reason seemed to be losing ground to Religion. And now, considering many of the responses to epidemics and environmental disasters, is the same cycle recurring?

How else to explain charges and attacks made against a doctor who at the age of 84 has devoted his life to the scientific method? His refusal to respond has much in common with Giordano Bruno's refusal to recant.

Bruno, the Italian scientist/philosopher/sometimes friar born in Naples, was imprisoned in Rome when he was 44 years old, tortured, and burned at the stake eight years later, in the year 1600. He would not recant his heretical beliefs. His main crime was espousing science and reason (what in modern times is called the scientific method) at a time when faith was prioritized.

Trained in the Dominican order but accepting of other religious perspectives, Bruno left Italy in 1576 after some of his forbidden writings were discovered. He travelled as a scholar, living in Geneva, Lyon, Toulouse, Paris, Oxford, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, and Prague, lecturing and studying in the universities.

Bruno attacked the Aristotelean geocentric view of the universe (with Earth at the center) and said that religion was "a means to instruct and govern ignorant people". He defended Copernicus' view of a sun-centered universe. He kept and annotated forbidden texts, including those of the Dutch humanist and theologian Desiderius Erasmus (1466c. - 1536).

One of Erasmus' most famous works is a satirical oration, *In Praise of Folly*. Folly considers herself the offspring of Plutus, god of wealth, and a nymph, who represents youth. Her nursemaids are two other nymphs, Inebriation and Ignorance, and her companions Philautia (self-love), Kolakia (flattery), Lethe (forgetfulness), Misoponia (laziness), Hedone (pleasure), Anoia (dementia), Tryphe (wantonness), Komos (intemperance), and Nigretos Hypnos

(heavy sleep). The self-laudatory Folly argues that life would be dull and distasteful without her. Hmmm.... Does this sound like someone in power today?

Although Erasmus was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1492, he condemned the corruption in the Church. He studied and lectured at Paris, Cambridge, Oxford, and Torino. One hundred years later, Bruno, also trained as a priest, would admit skepticism regarding Jesus Christ's divinity and the concept of transubstantiation (the literal sense of the Catholic mass).

Nowadays, religious fundamentalism leads many people to defend traditional church values even when these defy logic and deny human rights.

The world has not changed so very much, has it?

— by Norma Jean Bishop

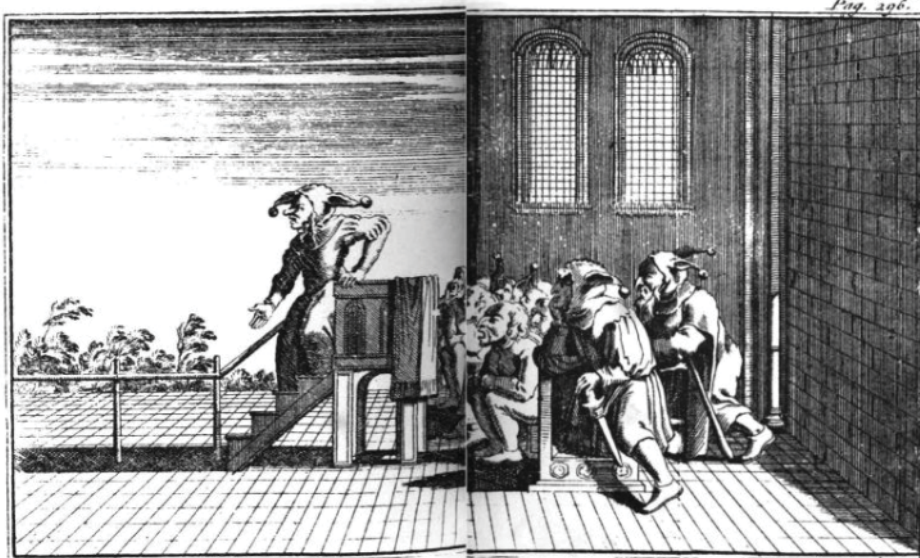
The image below is from Erasmus'

In Praise of Folly,

as Folly concludes the address to a doting public.

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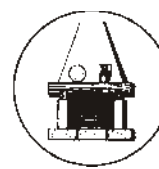
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