

Reflections

*Faith as Constant Revolution:
Some Thoughts on Heretics,
Tricksters and Cynics*



Reformations that transform the constellation we use to navigate and understand life have occurred at various times throughout history. These events don't simply call religion to live up to its ideals, but rather transform the very way we understand those ideals. They are thus fundamental ruptures in the very coordinates of religious understanding.

Words like “religion,” “church,” “God,” “theist,” “atheist,” and “theology” continue to be used, but what these words harbor is so dramatically transformed that the new meanings utterly transform how these terms are understood.

When a religious system starts to be questioned at this (qualitative rather than quantitative) level, it’s possible to identify some revolutionary group both stirring up trouble and getting into trouble. Depending upon the context, the trouble they get into might range from social exclusion and job loss to torture and execution.

Time and again the existing system will tend to (1) identify the heretics (dissidents within the system, in contrast to agitators from outside the system), (2) attempt to inoculate itself against them, and (3) seek to eliminate them. After the dust has settled either the old master has retained power, or a new master is crowned.

At any given time, the heretic can be said to operate in the space between two worlds. Asking questions, critiqu-

ing the status quo and refusing easy answers. They are the tricksters who occupy existing structures in order to subvert the present order and reveal inherent antagonisms in the system. This tradition of the trickster has a long history with figures including Prometheus (Greek mythology), Diogenes (Greek philosophy), the Coyote and Raven (First Nation mythologies) and Mercurius (Roman mythology), right through to various religious prophets and modern figures like Charlie Chaplin.

The question often asked in these moments of upheaval concerns what the new world will look like, what the new orthodoxy will be. When the tricksters have had their day, what will be left, and what foundations will we have upon which to rebuild.

But, in pyrotheology, the challenge concerns how we keep the space between two worlds open. For us, the heretic and the trickster are the ones that nurture the space of the in-between.

From this perspective, the event housed in the name “Christianity” breaks open worldviews, rather than either legitimizing them or creating them. It is a fundamentally heretical posture in that it ruptures ideological systems rather than endorsing them.

This means that the heretic and the trickster are committed to a type of constant revolution. Not a revolution that hates any system of order, but rather one that sees every system as benefiting from being open to challenge and change.

In this way, the true trickster - the one who questions, plays with, subverts, and challenges a given establishment - is not trying to forge a new establishment, but is committed to keeping existing establishments open to transformation.

Christianity, as expressed in such things as the parables, is not a new structure, but the ongoing interrogation of structures create a new utopia, but revels in the positive power of of a mere transitional bridge leading to a more

honest and authentic expression of faith, but rather they act as a direct expression of it.

If we use the analogy of a record on a record player.

The notion that revolutions (political, religious and/or cultural) are problematic because of the way that they simply “revolve” (i.e. overthrow old masters to institute new ones) thus misses the fundamentally productive nature of grassroots revolutionary justice movements. For while these movements do revolve, they are at their best when they act like a needle on a record, with the next revolution of the needle happening on a different level than the last.

A productive revolution places us in a better circle than the previous one, handing on the baton to the next band of heretics. In other words, it's true that new masters will arise, but moral victories can be gained (marriage equality etc.) and these new masters will themselves be overturned in the name of what Derrida called an undeconstructable justice.



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