
A Quick Apology

An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Reverend George Maxwell

Several weeks ago, I went with friends to see a local performance of William Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was looking forward to it. As soon as we found our seats, I eagerly opened the program to answer some of the big questions of life—"who would be playing the role of Bottom, and how they would portray the character of Puck?"

I paused for a moment to read the introductory "message" from the artistic director. That was a mistake. Instead of offering the expected tribute to Shakespeare's genius, his ability to reveal in his characters so much that we recognize in ourselves, the director launched a gratuitous attack on religion.

He labeled the sacred scriptures of religion as "old words," and declared that with so many yet to experience the Age of Enlightenment, these words have tremendous power and inevitably lead to violence. He supported his claim with a quote, but didn't identify the speaker.

I find this kind of thing remarkably annoying.

It's fruitless to talk about "religion" in the abstract, without looking at a particular tradition's development, practices, and beliefs. And, no serious historian believes that the religions of the world are primarily responsible for the violence of humanity.

David Bentley Hart explains all of this in his book, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, and I probably should have just told my friends about the book. But, well, that's just not me. I had to show how these "scientific," "moral" and "rational" attacks on religion aren't really scientific, moral, or rational—and I had to do it right then!

Just like a dog with a bone.

I even went home and asked Google about the unidentified quote. It was from one of Dan Brown's characters, The Royal Historian, Sir Leigh Teabing. "Really?" I heard myself saying. "You denounced all of the world's religious traditions on the strength of the historical judgment of a fictional character in *The Da Vinci Code*!"

As I listen to myself now, feeling again the energy of my spirited defense of the faith, I have to laugh. It's not that I'm wrong, of course. It's just that it doesn't really matter.

You probably already know why. But, if you don't, you will on Sunday. It's Homecoming Sunday. School has started and people are back from their summer adventures. Services will be full and, of course, the Ministry Fair will be in Child Hall.

At some point in the morning, just take a moment and look around. You will realize that although our faith is reasonable, the best argument for the truth of the gospel doesn't lie in its logical defense. It's in the life of the gathered community. It's in the faces of friends, new and old, waiting to ask you how you have been, and eager to hear what you have to say. It's in the sound of that familiar voice behind you, calling you by name.

We are, by the way, already planning to go back to the theater to see another Shakespeare play. The production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was wonderful. I'm hoping to meet the artistic director this time. I'll probably like him.

I'm suspect that will be annoying too!

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