

belong in a simple pastoral ministry, not in a chair of philosophy in some great university.

John Duns Scotus (d. 1308)

He is known as the "subtle" doctor due to his adeptness in side-stepping of questionable issues in his theological system. And English Franciscan, he opposed Aquinas almost totally. God, to him, was reduced to will and almost became impersonal in logical outcome. He supported the conception theology and found himself under considerable attack by his peers, especially those in Rome. Only the friendship of powerful kings prevented his ecclesiastical foes from calling him to task in an ugly way. The term "dunce" as used to describe a dullard in thinking, was taken from his name and ruthlessly applied to those whose thought processes were thought inadequate. Dullard he was not, heretic he undoubtedly was.

William of Occam (d. 1349)

William of Occam was the premier nominalist and had the added distinctive of feeling that it was not necessary that one's theology and philosophy agree with one's teaching. One could profess higher and teach lower...or vice versa. Therefore in theology he made great stress on the nominalist position. He argued that statements of faith, etc., were simply received and accepted for what they were. No sophistication was needed to make them more or less consistent and they did not have to balance with one's personal views in other areas. Constantly in trouble with his superiors, he was excommunicated in 1328 but enjoyed the protection of some powerful nobles who rather liked the idea of frustrating the mandated church.

Occam has given us the fascinating tool known as Occam's Razor. The idea is said simply that "What can be done with fewer assumptions is done in vain with more." You can have a lot of pleasure in theology class just after a noble statement has been given and "proved" by forty Scripture verses, if you simply ask the instructor if Occam's razor 'might not be applied to that list. You will not increase your popularity with the faculty but you will sound scholarly, the other students will be impressed, and in most cases you will be right although the teacher will probably justify himself on some grounds.