

## **Is Christianity Becoming a Crime? (Part Two)**

It's about a year since I wrote the first newsletter insert on this subject. Needless to say, the situation has continued to gain momentum and I now find myself moved to write once again.

In conversation with someone recently, we were discussing my experience of Islam during the several years that I worked in the Middle East. I was asked the question: Did you find they were as devout as Christians? My answer was: yes and, if anything, more devout. They prayed five times a day (often publicly) and they observed the rigours of the month of Ramadan with more commitment than we would Lent, indeed Lent is no longer the "rigorous" season for us that it once was. Having said that, my Muslim colleagues weren't entirely free in their choices during Ramadan which, to me, took the shine off things just a little. For example, my Muslim boss was imprisoned having been reported for eating in his office during the daytime fast. I think it would be far more commendable, and a much more effective witness, for people to be completely free in their choices during Ramadan.

My workmates and I were always very forthright in our discussions about Christianity and Islam; we respected one another's beliefs and we were not out to convert one another. Strictly speaking, while it was probably permissible for us to discuss Islam, it was officially forbidden to discuss Christianity, but their questions were the fruit of enquiring minds and we trusted one another that we could speak openly within the context of our workplace. There was certainly none of the fundamentalism and fanaticism that have come to the fore among certain adherents of Islam in recent years.

There is much to be said for religious conviction, though not for fanaticism - which I don't think has any place in any religion. It is in the area of conviction that I think we are losing out, and losing ground, to other faiths in this country and especially Islam. Ours was once an overtly Christian country even given the proportion of the population who would have claimed to be unbelievers. At least they didn't force their unbelief on everyone else. Sadly these days we are only too well aware of the extent to which we have sold out to multiculturalism in the enforced name of political correctness - and it is our fault. We haven't had the religious conviction to fight back and stand up for what we believe, and some of that must, no doubt, result from the on-going lack of unity and resolve within our own Christian family. We set a fine example, don't we, to other faiths (and non-believers) around us when we submit so easily and accept equally passively the insults that are offered to God especially in the worlds of art and entertainment.

Many will remember the furore that was caused when Salman Rushdie published his book *The Satanic Verses*. To be honest I never read the book and so I don't really know exactly what it was that Muslims found so offensive but, while we wouldn't for a moment condone the *fatwa* death sentence that was issued against him, at least Muslims spoke out vehemently against something they found so offensive to their religion. The same sort of thing occurred when, more recently, a Danish newspaper published a cartoon that ridiculed the prophet Mohamed, with Muslims all over the world reacting violently against the offence that it caused. Again we couldn't condone such extreme actions, but at least we would have to admit that they had the courage of their convictions in such matters.

In contrast, let's just take two recent examples involving things that were highly offensive to Christians and to God. The first was the extremely controversial film *The Last Temptation of Christ* and the second was the musical *Jerry Springer the Opera*. Both were grossly obscene and highly blasphemous – it would only raise the profile of the content and perpetuate the offence to go into more specific detail, but from a Christian point of view both were sickening and if we were as offended as we should have been, how greatly was God offended? But, then, does anyone care? If they did, then why was a decision taken by the BBC (a public corporation funded by our licence fee) to screen the *Opera* in the first place? Sixty-three thousand complaints were received by the BBC prior to and following the broadcast (twice the number received over the recent Brand-Ross affair) and yet the BBC *did nothing*.<sup>1</sup>

In that same article, GP Taylor cited a further example:

*The comedian Katy Brand regularly pokes fun on her television show with the sketch "Jesus' Girlfriend". It portrays Jesus having a girlfriend and not being the Messiah. To many Christians it is deeply offensive and yet is still allowed to be broadcast. Imagine the outrage if it was about the prophet Mohamed.*

Why aren't we outraged? He went on to say:

*Last year, I rang the Metropolitan Police and complained over the content of a TV programme. I was told that as a Christian I couldn't be discriminated against, but a Muslim could.*

Are we not responsible for this sad state of affairs? Even taking into account the fact that sixty-three thousand people registered their objections to the BBC screening the *Opera*, that's only about 0.1% of the population 72% of which claim to be Christian<sup>2</sup>, and that's a disgrace.

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<sup>1</sup> This was mentioned in a February 2009 *Yorkshire Post* article written by best-selling author GP Taylor.

<sup>2</sup> "Population of Great Britain by Religion" (April 2001 Census), Office for National Statistics.

The political correct brigade will advocate the right to free speech as a defence against any sort of objection raised by those who are offended by the examples I have cited above, and yet surely the right to free speech brings with it the responsibility not to be deliberately offensive to people. Surely that would be a minimal requisite of mutual respect? But, then, respect seems to be an increasingly endangered species these days, along with religious principles and conviction.

Daily experience seems to confirm that response from the Met as the Christian faith continues to be sidelined, the victim of political correctness and, for our part, it would seem, apathy. We are simply not fighting our corner.

Just a few years ago in the field of education, the governing bodies of church schools were supported in law in their right to draw up admissions policies that allowed them to safeguard the religious character of their schools. The PC brigade and no small number of our politicians claim this was a discriminatory practice, which is absurd. Yes, priority may have been given to Anglican, Catholic, etc, pupils at application, but it is primarily for them that these schools exist. All other applicants were welcome after places were found for the pupils of the particular faith community – after all those parents were already funding the school through their taxes as well as, in addition, through their financial contributions to their respective parishes. Indeed, and typically, parents of (for example) Hindu and Muslim children have always wanted their children to attend church schools because of the excellence of the general education they receive there (and the discipline that it enforced) and they were always welcome if spare places were available.

More recent legislation has systematically removed any such control over admissions policies in a deliberate attempt by PC-driven government to support multiculturalism and *diversity* – another thorn in the flesh of common sense. As a result church schools now struggle to educate their pupils in the area of faith because that is felt to be exclusive and against diversity. It has also become increasingly difficult to schedule RE classes in a specific Christian religion within the tight constraints of a national curriculum that only supports an all-inclusive study of comparative religions (a cynic might add “or unless it is Islam”). In a twist to the doctrine in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* that “all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others”, in this country all religions (and no religions) are equal but Christianity, it would seem, is *less* equal than others.

Not too long ago an airline stewardess was disciplined (at the behest of the PC brigade) and threatened with the sack for wearing a small cross round her neck and yet, not very long afterwards, a court defended the right of a Hindu schoolgirl to wear a religious bangle (despite it contravening the uniform code

of her school, a code she presumably accepted when she applied to go there). More recently we had the case of the nurse who was sacked for offering to pray with a patient, a request which apparently hadn't offended the elderly lady patient concerned but which was reported by a colleague and the PC brigade stepped in. And so it goes on.

It was suggested in another *Yorkshire Post* article I was reading that, as a nation, we accept far too easily discourtesy and ill-treatment from, amongst others, companies, corporations, service industries and government departments. The article recommended that we should assert ourselves far more and fight for better quality and more acceptable levels of service. The trouble is we are British and we don't like to make a fuss. The same would seem to be the case in terms of defending our religious beliefs. We are giving in far too easily and allowing ourselves to be walked over by the godless policies and practices of those who govern our lives and who are constantly lecturing us from the Book of Political Correctness.

Ours used to be a Christian country, though not to the exclusion of other faiths. Why do we now have to be apologetic to those faiths (and those of no faith) for our Christian beliefs? We don't need to, but we are being made to. How did we allow our tolerance to create a situation where Christianity is struggling to keep its head above the waters of multiculturalism, diversity and PC? In the survey in 2001, 23% claimed no religion or didn't state their religion; only 5% of the population were of non-Christian religions. The remaining 72% of the population claiming to be at least nominally Christian is a sizeable majority and yet our concerns are being ignored and our religious freedoms increasingly curbed. When I was working in Zambia, it was said that no soldier was ever issued with a megaphone because, given the ever-present threat of a military coup, everyone would follow the person with the loudest voice and that should belong to the President. Circumstances seem to be proving that, as Christians, we need to speak up a little, even a lot; our voice is currently nowhere near loud enough.

*Do not be afraid of them therefore...what you hear in whispers,  
proclaim from the housetops. (Mt 10 v 26 -27)*

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Fr Neil McNicholas