

Sacred Cow

Kris King – March 30th 2013

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2013/03/sacred-cow/>

Flipping channels the other night, desperately trying to find something less likely to rape my IQ than, well, pretty much everything that every network has ever shat into its nightly schedules ever, I stumbled on to "Are You Having a Laugh? Comedy and Christianity", an offering from BBC1 in which the self-righteous former MP, epic dance failure, and massive bag of conservative catholic judgement and masturbatory nightmare-fuel Ann Widdecombe was using her loud, barely-contained witch's cackle to whine about how Jesus and his billion-strong gang of sycophantic stalkers have become something of a target for comedy in the modern era, and that this simply won't do. Apparently the one-time candidate for Tory party leadership, frequently referred to by the people of Britain as "Doris Karloff" (presumably because she has the looks and substantially atrophied thought-processes of a recently exhumed corpse), sees the widespread mockery of people's most cherished beliefs (well, hers at least) as being yet another example of the continuing persecution of christians, in wilful ignorance, it seems, of the fact that, actually, *nothing* is "sacred".

For those outside these isles, "Widdy" (as the media and other twats sometimes refer to her) may be more familiar to you as the woman who, along with the Archbishop of Abuja, was roundly pasted by Hitch and Stephen Fry in the [Intelligence Squared](#) debate on whether the catholic church was a force for good in the world (to be fair, though, they never stood a chance, and for two reasons; firstly, an organisation that protects rapists at the expense of their victims, and whose policy on contraception is responsible for millions of deaths by continuing the HIV epidemic in Africa is utterly indefensible, and secondly they were attempting to debate Christopher Fucking Hitchens and Stephen Sod Mothering Fry, two of the most erudite and intelligent people Britain has produced in the last five or six decades). However, to us here in the UK, Ann Widdecombe is a scary, 65 year old possible virgin, anti-woman, anti-gay, pro-death penalty, reactionary Tory whose appearance on "Strictly Come Dancing" was a cringe-inducing, skin-crawling affair that redefined the very concept of embarrassment.

In the program Widdecombe tried to argue that religious beliefs should in some way be protected from ridicule, as if the idea of talking snakes, random genocide, and pond-skating redeemers were concepts that don't deserve to have the piss thoroughly ripped out of them. For Widdy, mockery of one's faith was hurtful (even "wounding"), immoral, and an infringement upon the rights of believers to afford themselves an entirely undeserved immunity from criticism. Obviously I'm only talking about the *christian* faith, here ... it is apparently more than acceptable to have a go at muslims, jews, and anyone else whose theological leanings don't involve the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Jesus H. Christicle himself (she is nothing if not open about her monstrous hypocrisy). For someone so intolerant of others (she opposed 15 out of 17 parliamentary votes concerning equal rights for homosexuals) she seems remarkably thin-skinned when it comes to how people treat her imaginary friend.

This, however, is all par for the course really ... religious people have always carried themselves with a gloriously misplaced sense of entitlement when it comes to the respect they feel their ludicrous beliefs should be treated with (that and the idea that it's an entirely one-way street - they don't have to respect others beliefs, what a silly thing to say!) The rather large elephant in the room they seem to be trying their hardest to stare through (likely because it means having to admit they're wrong and forfeit the pedestal they've put their religions on) is the fact that nothing, not the institution of the church, not the figures within it, the stories it tells, or the individuals who subscribe to it and their beliefs they cherish, is sacred. They can wrap their gods and their prophets in cotton wool, encase them in bubble wrap, surround them with barbed-wire fences and bullet-proof glass, and then drop them into the ocean in a concrete tomb ... it still doesn't make them invulnerable to scrutiny.

Declaring something to be sacred is nothing more than taking the unilateral decision to place something you personally hold dear behind a wall through which you will not allow judgement or

censure to pass. It doesn't, ultimately, mean *anything*, least of all to people who aren't you. Just because you have chosen to install some favoured individual, institution, or ideological concept into the golden throne of your metaphysical plexiglass popemobile it doesn't mean that the rest of us have a moral obligation to go along with it. What you consider sacred is utterly irrelevant to anyone or anything that exists outside of the head you've been compelled to live and form thoughts in because, in reality, there is no such thing as objective sanctity, and for you to deem certain people, places, or parables as being far beyond the horizon for even the most telescope-ready of critical eyes doesn't make you special, it doesn't make you right ... it simply makes you an idiot.

Everything, no matter how beloved, no matter how venerated, is up for criticism, and for anyone to decree otherwise is not only an example of both the kind of arrogance theists regularly ascribe to the godless and the rather bitter-sweet variety of hubris that frequently leads to an appearance in the "Stupid Deaths" sketch on "Horrible Histories", but it is also to stand with ill-conceived pride on the rooftops of the world and announce exactly *where* your ability to maintain rationality begins to break down like a supermarket supply chain when presented with the question, "And what sort of meat is this, then?" This is not so much leaving your ramparts vulnerable to attack as it is supplying the invading hordes with a fleet of JCB diggers to excavate the foundations out from underneath you until the castle, and every one of its terrified inhabitants, drops right the way through the planet.

Even if those of us who do not share the opinions of others when it comes to what they hold sacred opt not to fatally undermine their world-view and instead simply mock it for some perceived ridiculousness, so fucking what? Who cares? You're not in possession of some divinely gifted "get out of a piss-ripping free" card (although it's hugely apparent to us all that you believe wholeheartedly that you are). It is absolutely our *right* to subject to ridicule anything we feel is deserving and, while we may exercise a measure of courtesy by not actively seeking to trample on ideas held by some to be sacrosanct, we're not in any way obliged to. In fact, I would go further and say that it is our duty as thinking beings to never shy away from putting any idea, especially those claimed to originate from some unseen divine authority by those who stand to benefit from such unquestioning reverence and respect, under the microscope.

This is not to say that we should go out of our way to offend people, although it is, I'll admit, a lot of fun sometimes – people who get offended and loudly proclaim the fact are almost **always** the kind of people who deserve to be offended (it's actually one of the many reasons this blog exists) – but it is vitally important to ensure that accountability is not lost, that there are no cracks through which the guilty can slither to avoid being held responsible. Are people going to be upset when their sacred bodies and figures are attacked for their misdeeds? Of course they are – when you feel something to be quintessential to your being you're naturally going to take it personally when it is attacked – but that doesn't give you the right to deny others the right of reply. If you're someone for whom criticism of your religious or spiritual beliefs offends, or even hurts, you then tough shit; you're not special; you're not beyond reproach, and neither are your beliefs.

It might sound like I'm trying to cast comedians and satirists in the role not of the jester but of the knight, defending the honour of the kingdom and the freedom of her people with their razor-sharp swords of truth and the great big hefty axes of saying "fuck" a lot and, in a way, I guess I am. Comedians have, more so than almost anyone, licence to be brutally honest about the way they see the world ... in many ways, it's part of their job description – making people laugh is so often best achieved by saying exactly what everyone else is thinking, letting them know that not only is it okay to think that way, but that they're not alone for doing so. The laughter that results is often born out of the joy of recognition, the shared acknowledgement at some insane absurdity, and the immense relief that one is neither mental nor evil for thinking that people who nightly clasp their hands and whisper requests for an invisible fairy to smite that boil on their arse are a bunch of delusional willies who need a good slap every now and then.

Does this mean, then, that I attribute some lofty purpose to Tim Minchin's "The Pope Song" that elevates it beyond a mere musical experiment to establish how many times it's possible to call one person a motherfucker in the space of 2 minutes (answer: about 23)? Actually, yes, I do, and why shouldn't I? The song was deliberately and intelligently constructed to be as offensive as possible in expressing its point – specifically that anyone who can muster up more outrage for two minutes of F-words directed at the world's most renowned, blinged-up purveyor of latin-clad bullshit than they can over the notion that the same head of a self-appointed moral authority would protect the freedom of priests who fuck children needs to have serious words with themselves – and, by exposing their rank hypocrisy, those outraged serve simply to underscore the song's point. Besides, it's a metric fuck-load funnier than any pro-religious song you'd care to name.

To declare something sacred, placing it beyond criticism, is, without question a form of censorship, and an incredibly effective one at that; the nine o'clock watershed in TV broadcasting isn't, for example, backed up threats of eternal torture if you happen to say "fuck" on the telly earlier in the evening (although, just imagine how much more exciting live television would become if it were – "The One Show" would actually be worth tuning in for if Gordon Ramsey was ever a guest). And it's not just the threat of punishment in the next life; religions have also been quite fond of resorting to violence in this one as part of their ceaseless and insidious attempts to stifle legitimate criticism. Just look at some of the more fruitcake-rich supporters of Islam and their predilection for wanting to maim or kill anyone who dares bad mouth their paedophile prophet or the bevy of righteous, murderous thugs his teachings have inspired.

How is that these archaic, medieval beliefs and the institutions that perpetuate them have been able to grant themselves such a privileged position, one which the rest of us seem to have passively acquiesced to? How ridiculous would it be if, say, millions of believers in Santa Claus were to resort to legal challenges or, failing that, suicide bombing whenever anyone had the balls to suggest that their bearded present-bringer was guilty of several billion counts of trespassing on an annual basis? How would it be any different if there were an embargo on being able to depict in images the antlered servants of the blessed chimney-crawler? The truth is that there is **no** difference; the idea that one could be the subject of a fatwah for disrespecting Father Christmas is just as dumb as it is for having said unpleasant things about the apostle of Allah (at least the only thing Santa has ever tried to slip a child is a train set).

While we're on the subject of Islam, Ann Widdecombe bemoaned the fact that people seem to refrain from mocking Islam in favour of christianity, something she attributed either to the idea that christianity is somehow an "easy target", or that people were fearful of retribution from the religion of peace (feel free to laugh at that paradox). While there may be a small amount of truth to the latter assertion it's much more due to the simple fact that, culturally, we don't really know much about Islam – we've grown up in a Western nation that is predominantly white and where muslims make up less than 4% of the overall population – christianity is what we know, what we're used to. Comedians *could* tell jokes built around the tenets of the Qu'ran, but very few people would actually *get* them. Honestly, what do you *really* know about muslims that isn't based on a dodgy stereotype? Thought so.

And why is it that when christians opine how people mock them instead of Islam for fear of getting their vital organs scattered over several postal districts they do so with a mournful sense of abject disappointment, as if everything would be alright if christians could wield similar weapons against blasphemers and infidels without the risk of attracting widespread condemnation? What is wrong with you, you fucking psychopaths? You don't get to take the moral high-ground just because you've elected not to murder to pieces anyone who slags you off! How about instead of acting all superior for your general lack of retributive violence in the face of apostasy you start contemplating the notion that your faith should be able to withstand **any** attack if it's strong enough. Or maybe that's the point? Are you *really* so secure in your beliefs that you're hurt by **jokes**?

It's not unreasonable to suggest that the act of declaring something sacred is often an attempt by the believer to assure *themselves* of the veracity of their beliefs. Every joke at the expense of their faith is a sign that there's someone out there who doesn't respect it, doesn't *buy* it, and that represents a serious problem to the believer; if their beliefs can be challenged, or even questioned, then it means that there is a weakness – a chink in faith's armour that could enable a potentially fatal arrow to penetrate. The notion that some aspect of religious faith is sacred is, then, not just about protecting the idea (or those who profit from it) from any kind of scrutiny, but it's also about protecting the adherent from reality; when you build your entire life upon an ideological foundation of ancient myths, false promises, and exaggerated claims, the idea that it could sink beneath your feet and drag you under must be positively terrifying.

And, on that note, we return to the positively terrifying Ann Widdecombe herself, a woman whose decision to convert to catholicism after the Church of England agreed to permit the ordination of women priests must surely rank as among the most repugnant of hypocrisies (it's okay for women like Widdecombe's fellow conservative Margaret Thatcher to run the country but not preach nonsense from the pulpit, apparently). Why should it be considered offensive for me to challenge such blatantly misogynistic, homophobic, and racist belief systems when they themselves offend the very dignity of human beings throughout the world? Why should I respect institutions whose definitions of what is sacred are all about self-preservation instead of protecting the vulnerable? They're not even consistent with their own morality, telling us on one hand that life is sacred yet on the other

propagating lies about condoms and employing scare tactics to discourage their use, condemning tens of millions of Africans to a long slow death from HIV.

If you don't want your beliefs ridiculed, don't have ridiculous beliefs. If you don't want your faith criticised, don't use it to justify behaviour deserving of criticism. You don't get to act all fucking wounded when beliefs you hold are called in to question because they've been used to oppress, subdue, abuse, marginalise, defraud, defile, defame, dehumanise, disenfranchise, despoil, deny, and destroy. We **will** criticise. We **will** mock. And there's not a fucking thing you can do about it but sit down, shut up, and accept that we **will** hold you to account. You are **not** immune. You are **not** special. Being mocked is good for you. It reminds you that you're just like the rest of us ... flawed, and not above being brought down a peg or two. You need to be humbled every now and again ...

You need to grow a fucking sense of humour ...

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive letter 'A' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.