

Offence and Religion

George Orwell said: "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

"Liberals" are to blame for creating a culture where raising concerns about people's religious ideas was made taboo.

Conservatives played on that and were delighted that we ended up with a society that made it rude to tell religious people to waken up. For example it was made taboo to tell say a priest-to-be that he might be wasting his life on a relationship with God that is delusion. Now look at what is happening. Wrong beliefs or turning guesses into beliefs has consequences. A man-made faith or religion not only leads to corruption it is corruption for corruption starts with a refusal to face the truth and embrace it if you are wrong.

Being offended is said to be a kind of harm. But the person saying/doing the offensive thing is not responsible for your reaction. You are.

Can you be offended by conduct that is not directly intended to hurt or offend you?

You can - but nobody says its anybody's problem but your own.

Examples of that problem. Should Catholics be offended that Protestants won't come to their novena for the Virgin Mary? Should Protestants be offended at Catholics using magic charms such as Lourdes water? Should Muslims be offended at images of Buddha in Thailand or statues of the Virgin Mary along the roadsides in Ireland?

Religious offence is cherry-picked. Papers can ridicule Christ who is considered a Muslim prophet in Islam but will suffer no violence. But if they ridicule Muhammad. It makes no sense how Christians do not react to what they perceive as the objectification of God's temple, the human body in soft porn images in the papers but do react to something that mocks the Virgin Mary. That is hypocrisy.

Religion often intends to directly offend.

For example, it may say all people are sinners. Atheists find that offensive for they cannot see how God could impute sin to them when they don't believe in him.

To say that Jesus alone is saviour insults religions that say there are many saviours.

To be told the Bible is the word of God is offensive to those who are horrified that its God allowed parents to murder a wayward son.

To be told the Easter Mass is holy offends those who notice it requires that the vindictive story of God unnecessarily drowning the Egyptians be read and a psalm is then said which celebrates this evil. "I will sing to the Lord - glorious his triumph!" And the Holy Week accounts of the Jews killing Jesus are sectarian.

People say for example, "My Muslim friends are not offended by my mass-going and prayers to the Virgin Mary." People think then different religions are usually not offended by one another. But each religion claims that its members fall short of living and thinking in a way consistent with their faith. The question is not, "Does my religious behaviour and religious affiliation offend those of other faiths or none?" The question is, "SHOULD my religious behaviour and religious affiliation offend those of other faiths or none?" Anything else makes you a manipulative fake. Being manipulative is no help in producing good relations with other religions.

Religious people who try to limit the power of the press or whatever to offend or criticise their beliefs are cherry-pickers. Catholics might protest about a pro-abortion charity coming to their town but they will not force the Church to remove the parts of the liturgy that insults the Jews and spreads malicious hearsay about them. Mormons protest when Christians say they are not really Christians while the Mormon scriptures have God saying that all Churches are an abomination in his sight.

If the state makes laws to protect religious beliefs from criticism then what if the beliefs are man-made in origin? Anything that might be man-made should not be protected from criticism. That is giving people the power to use religious belief as an excuse to destroy the freedom and rights of others. And what happens when a new Mormon sect is offended by other Mormons claiming that it is not the real Mormon Church? Where does the boundary get drawn?

Christianity says that faith in the Christian religion and in the doctrines and truths God has revealed is not natural and is a gift from God. This recognises that the religion of God has to come from God and not man for man errs and the religions he

creates could turn nasty or mislead people. A man-made religion is an oxymoron. It can have no binding force. Would you really think you should say abracadabra every day five times just because some man says so? Whatever does not bind or obligate in reality is not a religion though it may be a semblance of one. Religion is in reality the experience of your faith as a gift from a supernatural power that tells you the truth and only the truth and demands obedience. Anything else is fake religion for it is deliberately man-made. It would be terrible if we thought we shouldn't challenge it or criticise it constructively. Anything human is dangerous if it is made sacred or sacrosanct. In short, if man made it, fault it where it should be faulted.

The Bible mocks homosexuals by saying God demanded they be stoned to death. Christians by recognising the Bible and not repudiating it are part of this mockery. If you are offended by something you look the other way for no two people are offended by the same things. But the offensive Christian faith deserves to be offended for trampling on the blood of gay men stoned to death thanks to the God Jesus worshipped! It crosses a line.

The fact of the matter is that offensive speech has in the past led to positive and lasting change. People who have been very strident in asserting their rights and condemning the oppressors have been instrumental in getting the remedy. Offense may anger the enablers of the oppressor but one day they will realise what they have done. It is the enablers who need to be offended more than anybody.

Conclusion:

Religion enhances the sense of being offended and justifies it far more. If you want a thick skin, be an atheist for atheism is for grown-ups. If you are offended then always let the offender know but never try to silence them by force. Combat them with evidence and respect and intelligence.