

## God, Life, and Everything "PC Redux"

A few weeks ago, I wrote about the Myth of Political Correctness. Remember that? Mr. Michael Karpoff did. He took exception to my account of it and felt that I was "calling those of us who are disgusted by it, bigots."

Well, for the record, I never referred to them as bigots. Rude, yes. Obnoxious, yes. But bigot? Not necessarily.

Now, Mr. Karpoff then goes on to prove that I don't know what I'm talking about by listing two examples of rampant PC. The first is of a west coast elementary school that wanted to have a Mexican-themed fundraiser but had to cancel because "one parent complained." The second was of a New York theater troupe that canceled its production of *The Mikado* because of "a single complaint."

I would like to point out several things about these examples. First, they both deal with cultural stereotypes. We'll get into whether or not they really happened (or how) in a moment, but let's just look at the whole racial thing, because that seems to be one of the biggest sore points of those who despise "PC."

The question has been around for a long time of whether or not it is acceptable to mock another culture. Why, even back in the 1940s, producers of *The Mikado* made changes in the libretto to avoid insulting the audience. The change? It removed from the song "As Some Day It May Happen" several instances of a certain word disparaging to African Americans. Would Mr. Karpoff like the word reintroduced?

It occurs to me that other situations that rise to the level of "PC" also have to do with culture. Think of the stink of the Washington Redskins. Fans say it is a great name, honoring first nations people. Members of the first nations, however, say it is demeaning. As a Native American commercial during the Super Bowl (well, it was online during the Super Bowl - they couldn't afford to air it) says: "We call ourselves many things. But one thing we don't..." and then it shows a Redskins helmet.

So, yes, I would say that most of the PC stink has to do with rudeness - it is simply not polite to insist on calling someone what they don't want to be called. It is rude to portray someone in an inaccurate and insulting manner purely for entertainment purposes.

Now, as to Mr. Karpoff's examples. The Mexican fundraiser caused me some consternation. Of course I Googled it - who wouldn't? But I could only find it on what are best described as very conservative blogs such as *The Blaze*. Not even Fox News carried a story about it. So, given the sources, I question whether the event took place at all.

This is especially questionable given that I've never heard of a school canceling an event based on one parent's complaint. Maybe for *a lot* of parental complaints, but one? Highly unlikely.

The example of *The Mikado* was easier to find. However, Mr. Karpoff has misrepresented what happened. It was not "a single complaint" that derailed that production (or delayed it, as the company intends to revise and eventually produce it again). It was a lot of folks from the Asian American theater community. They had a couple of specific complaints. First, they complained that its portrayal of Japanese was grossly inaccurate and stereotypical. For the record, Gilbert and Sullivan knew this at the time but figured they didn't have to worry about it because almost nobody had any

idea what life was like in Japan - it was a fantasy world to most westerners. Things have changed a bit, haven't they?

The second complaint was that the troupe essentially had no Asians in the cast. They argued, if you're going to portray Asians, you should at least use Asian actors (which were in plentiful supply).

It might be of value to note that those who complained are not interested in doing away with *The Mikado* altogether but in doing away with the exaggerated features and over-the-top accents that help give the impression of an entire people as buffoons.

So don't worry, *The Mikado* will be played again.

Do I think it's appropriate to be sensitive to the people about whom I am speaking? Absolutely. I try never to mock another person, knowingly or simply out of laziness. If you want to call that PC, I'm good with it. I still call it politeness.

Oh, and just for fun, did you know that there is such a thing as right-wing PC? The whole outrage over Starbucks Red Cups at Christmas. Remember that?

Remember "God Bless America" at ballgames (which arose after 9/11)? Boy, if you didn't put your hand over your heart for that, you were given the stink eye.

Or how about this personal favorite of mine. Way back in 1996 when artist Chris Ofili displayed his painting of the Virgin Mary - a piece that incorporated burnished elephant dung - conservative Christians went ballistic. There were screams of it being anti-Catholic (though Ofili was Catholic himself) and anti-Christian. Rudolph Giuliani attempted to evict the entire museum which displayed the piece. He failed.

Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I still say that what others call PC (as in the examples above) is simply being respectful.

But then, my mother used to wash our mouths out with soap for telling "Pollack jokes." We got in trouble for using disparaging language about women, too. And in the era of the civil rights movement, my (very Republican) parents did not allow use of the words or images so often used at the time to put down those who were different from us.

Perhaps things just seem more PC these days because the pace of change is so much faster today than it was. We know that mocking someone's sexuality makes no sense. We know that mocking someone else size or physical shape is unacceptable. Maybe, if you're used to saying whatever you want about others without a second thought, this change in having to take the feelings of others into account might seem oppressive.

But it's not, really.

All you have to do - whenever you decide to portray another group (especially for entertainment) - is apply the Golden Rule. Would you like others to portray your culture accurately? Would you like others to use words in reference to your culture that are mocking or hurtful?

Indeed, Jesus says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."