

Friday Night Theology, 21st November 2008.

Strictly

Should John have gone or should he have stayed? In case you're not sure what I'm talking about, I'm referring to John Sergeant, who this week quit the hugely popular BBC1 show, *Strictly Come Dancing*. What made John's resignation unusual was that it wasn't due to injury, ill-health or a personal crisis. It was because of the storm that has erupted over his less than impressive dancing prowess.

Viewers of the show will be familiar with the fact that week after week, John and his partner Kristina have received the lowest scores from the *Strictly* judges. Indeed, one week, one of the toughest judges, Craig Revel Horwood, said the only reason he gave John a 1 (out of 10) was because he didn't have a zero to show.

Yet, despite his three left feet, John has remained in the show because the public just keep on voting for him. And the public vote makes up half of the final tally which decides who stays and who goes. When quitting, John said that there was a serious risk that he and Kristina might actually win which would be a "joke too far". So, in recognition of the fact that he just can't dance, and that many contestants who can have already been voted off the show, John decided to leave.

The question, then, is why the public have stuck with this 64 year old political journalist. It is not because he is amazingly good looking, or because he's a soap or sports star to whom people were already committed. He does have a wry sense of humour, but I'm not sure that it's his gags that are keeping him on *Strictly*. Some think it's all to do with that great British tradition of supporting the underdog – we know he's the worst, that's why we'll vote for him. Others suggest it's because he has a certain charm that *is* entertaining, even if he hasn't got the feet of Fred Astaire. And still others think that the public are doing it simply to spite the official judges. And I have to say, for me, this last idea has the most plausibility.

The reality is that in our individualistic, consumer-driven age, the reigning *Zeitgeist* loves individual autonomy over public authority. We can't bear the notion that there exists some external, objective standard against which things should be measured – whether in respect of dancing or morality or anything really. Rather, we want to be King, and all authority must rest with us. So, we get to be the arbiters of what's true or false, good or bad. The idea of being held to account by some absolute standard is one that rails deeply against our current mode of thinking. Hence, we reject it whenever we can. It's not necessarily that we think the standard is a bad one, we just hate the idea of there being one at all.

Given this, it's no wonder that the Christian gospel has a hard time being heard. For whatever else it is, it involves humbling ourselves before the creator of the universe and acknowledging that he is Lord, not us, that he is the only Rightful Judge. The problem for us, though, is that on that day when we stand before him there won't be any public popularity vote to rescue us. Simply the Judge and us.

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