

## **NOBODY SHOULD GIVE YOU A RELIGIOUS/NON-RELIGIOUS LABEL WITHOUT ASKING YOU FIRST**

Labels can be misapplied. The Church recognises that if a person goes through all the Catholic processes but is not baptised that person is not Catholic no matter who says she is. A religious label is just a word and has nothing to do with the truth if the religious label is misapplied to a person or if the religion is manmade rubbish. If you know your religion cannot be true or believable then if it labels you with itself that labelling is more than just possibly wrong – it is wrong.

### *Advantages of getting a Religious Label*

You are accepted by others and are connected to them for you all bear the same label.

It may promote understanding between people of the same label. Labels are short-cuts for getting to know others who have the same label.

Labelling others helps make sense of the world and those around us.

It may inspire you to work harder to deserve the label.

You have a recognised identity as represented by the label.

But notice that these benefits are hard to come by if the label is exalted above religious practice and faith. For example, labels will not promote understanding but prejudice among people of the same label when none of them cares or thinks about beliefs or faith.

There are in fact no worthwhile advantages.

### *In the Balance*

The dangers of labelling outweigh the benefits. The benefits can be easily got without the label.

Consider how if you are a Catholic who never bothers with religion, it will not stop you benefiting from the label. So sure if you dropped the label you should still be okay? And if you are not, do you really want to be treated well just because of what people want to call you?

### *Violence and the No True Scotsman*

The No True Scotsman fallacy turns religion into a label and nothing else. But it is a label that is all good and faultless so that it is never to blame for what harm it does or harm it permits.

If a man is born in Scotland and identifies as Scottish then you may say:

Every true Scotsman wears tartan or eats Haggis or likes Scottish music so that anybody not doing this is not counted as a Scotsman. That is more than a fallacy. It is just obvious rubbish.

Religion when it claims to be a good thing is using the fallacy. When it has to lie to appear good then how good is it really?

When a religious person does evil in spite of the directives and commands of their faith, they are taken as not being a reflection of that faith and the other people in it. Some say that if a Catholic priest sins seriously he is not acting as a Catholic priest therefore the reputation of the Church should be intact.

That logic makes it impossible to say that there is any such thing as a harmful religion. If a religion has members who behave badly above average then that logic is enabling the problem and denying that the religion is to blame.

The religions do not really accept the logic because each one claims to be the best for its adherents.

If the religion claims to be the work of God and his hospital for sinners where he works supernaturally to make them good and holy, a member doing evil makes the religion suspect.

Religious labels become a problem when other people apply them to you -

\* because a label is either evil or a necessary evil. It is to be avoided where possible. You are being labelled for a reason - it serves somebody's purpose and says something to the political system or to the state. A religious label is not a necessary evil. If you are a doctor does it matter what label you have as long as you do your job well?

\*without your consent - it is your decision how you should be labelled.

\*against your will. They are suggesting that you are somehow a traitor or to be looked down upon if you don't want the label they give you.

\*to discriminate against you because of your label

\*to discriminate against those who do not have the same label as you

\* to create a disconnect between you because of the religious label you have and those who have different labels. This is most blatant in societies and communities where nobody believes in Catholicism but children are still brought for a Catholic baptism. Babies are labelled Catholic when they are baptised by a Catholic priest. It is about the label - not about helping the child by encouraging faith. That is terrible when the region suffers from sectarianism. It is sheer child abuse.

\* to steal the credit for the good you do. People say religion does great good so its existence is justified. Take the religious person who says God does the good they do not them. The most charitable assumption we can make about this person is that the goodness is all hers - it is her goodness as a human being and not her goodness as a Sikh or Mormon or whatever.

\* label-carriers cause a culture of labelling where it is not only religious labels you have to worry about but other ones such as liberal, right-wing, conservative, fundamentalist or whatever. Labelling people is strategic - it is terrible to suck children and the vulnerable into this. Another problem is how religious groups even if all they care about is the label are sub-cultures and use this to receive public funds.

\*to attempt to say what a person believes or what they should believe. They lead to people encouraging the person to believe rubbish if their religion is nonsense. If most people bear a religious label and the religion is rubbish, this still gives the religion plausibility in the public mind.

\*encourages people to see all or some of the religious doctrine or belief as part of themselves: you are bigger than your beliefs. The rationale is that the religion is a set of beliefs, a belief system, thus the label is stating that you and these beliefs are somehow one and the same. Thus if anybody threatens or challenges those beliefs they are slighting you and must be silenced or avoided and according to some religions murdered. The problem with religious people seeing themselves as their beliefs leads to critics of religious prejudice and lies being afraid to speak out. Christianity sees God as representing Christian doctrine and says you share in the life of this God and he lives in you which causes you to internalise the beliefs and see them as being you. The answer to the problem is to see that the beliefs are not part of you for you can change them like you do underwear and still be you.

\*to say what you do not believe and should not believe so it divides the Christian from the Hindu.

\*to feel they have the right to pigeonhole you. If you need a label, then you should be labelled by what you do best and what makes you passionate. A Catholic top musician should be labelled a musician not a Catholic. The musician may get a vastly deeper meaning in life from the music than he does from religion.

\*to put you in a box to make themselves feel they know you. People are more complex than their religious label. The label is an attempt to objectify them and deny their complexity. It leads to black and white thinking and making blanket judgements, "Catholics are good. Protestants are bad." Sectarianism results when people are objectified and stereotyped like that.

\*to define you when in fact if you are in a religion what you should have is not a label but labels. Its more complicated than one label. For example, the Catholic is part-Christian, part-occultist, part-Aristotelian, part-Jew, part-pagan. The Church was created from ingredients and different religions.

\* to slot you into a faction created centuries ago by people who used labels to create political and economic division. It seeks to make you grow in empathy with previous label bearers who were persecuted so that you will feel a sense of solidarity with them and hate those who harassed them.

\* people may say they are in a religion for it forms a community but that is a tactic for creating a division. The huge majority of people are not big into religion. People meeting once a week for worship cannot be called a community. Your community is not a religious one but the one people of different religions and none are part of. It is the general community. The religious label and the "community" that goes with it is a smokescreen to stop you being too much of a general community person.

\* to further a state agenda. Religious labels are often taken account of and considered valid by the law - in some nations if most people call themselves Catholic then the law of the land considers itself possibly entitled to favour laws that have the support of the church. If the people choose to be in the Church and Church and state should not be separate, then the state simply should organise things along Catholic principles. Even if the state doesn't there is a principle at stake - it should and you are telling it to even if you think you are not. The United Kingdom gives official recognition to the Church of England as a religion. It does not afford the same luxury to several other religious entities.

\* the label ends up on the census form. The census is about gathering and comparing information to facilitate policy-making. Thus if humanists or atheists or secularists have a better insight into human rights than believers in Roman Catholicism, then putting down Roman Catholic when you are atheist simply is siding with Catholicism. If the state does not know how many are non-religious that will have a detrimental effect to progress and leads to unbeliever's rights being ignored in policy-making.

\* many countries struggle with how to reconcile laws banning unjust discrimination and religion's claim that it should have the right to unjustly discriminate for religious freedom must be upheld and this politicises religious labels. Changing the law to allow people to place their religiously founded abhorrence of heresy, homosexuality, sex outside marriage, unbaptised people and those who use birth-control above the requirements placed on them by the laws of the land to avoid unjust discrimination is surely dangerous. This cannot be done unless the law starts to decide what religious beliefs are true or not. Or it has to decide that the religious beliefs are plausible enough to be understandable. If a person is to have the right to discriminate against gay people, because it is his freedom of religion, then it has to be proved that this probably really is his belief. And it can only be that if his hatred of homosexuality is understandable even if wrong. Calling it understandable would be homophobic and opening the door to even more rampant homophobia. And first and foremost, the state has to violate secularism by saying the person really is a Christian or whatever he claims to be. That is the state adopting a religious belief or theology.

\* to further a political agenda. Sinn Fein in Ireland is an example of a terrorist honouring political party that seeks admiration or support or both from those to whom the Catholic label has been stuck on. They are not Catholic in their faith and often oppose Catholic doctrine but they use those who have the Catholic label. It is interesting how a Catholic in Ireland is only considered to be truly Catholic if she or he is nationalist - yet his or her repudiation of Catholic doctrine is not enough to warrant saying, "This person is not a member of the Catholic faith community but is merely a nominal Catholic."

\*to empower those who crave power. If you carry the Protestant label, the Protestants may vote you into power in Northern Ireland. Leaders of many nations use those who use the religious label to further and justify their own underhand and Machiavellian ideologies. They say, "Hey world listen to us - our views are not to be treated lightly for look how much support we have!" The pope labels people who were baptised Catholic but who do not really believe the Catholic faith and he points to all 1.5 billion of them and that gets him a unique hearing on the world stage. Mormonism engages in the same tactic - it inflates its true membership.

\*to implicate you in the evil of religion to make themselves feel better - evil people feel good about evil when they all do it together (this is diffusion of responsibility). The religious label will lead to you being considered part of the problem if other people in your religion commit terrible deeds in the name of the religion. It will lead to you being seen as an enabler of lies if the religion is untrue and ridiculous. The Catholic Church teaches that the sins of one mystically damage everybody else in the Church for we are one body. When you get the Catholic label, even if you are good, you are being accused of being potentially harmful to everybody else in some supernatural way. This notion implies - despite the Church's intention no doubt - that if some Catholics are bad that says something about the rest of them too!

\* to take advantage of the fact that it takes little to make groups distrust each other. Though Protestants and Catholics for example are in the same religion, Christianity, the labelling of one side as Protestant and the other as Catholic is enough to spark of hate and violence and prejudice. This shows the power of the label.

\* to empower manipulative or bad religion. What if a religion is intrinsically bad- what about taking its label on you then? Religious fundamentalism is often a bigoted form of patriotism or nationalism in a religious disguise. The IRA campaign was never called Catholic terror - this is an example of how labels can be used to make a venomous religion look like a bunch of lovely roses.

\* to belittle. Religious labels are about claiming a person is an adherent of a religion and about caring more about that than the person's actual spirituality or belief or unbelief. The essence of religion is faith - not a list of names in a membership book or in somebody's head. The label usually belittles and ignores faith. The label stickers do not care much for the good if any that faith can lead you to do.

\* the state, to be fair, should ignore religious claims that a person can be made a member of the religion merely by some rite or whatever. What if a witch cult cast a spell of initiation all over the world and said we are all members of a sect called the Offspring of Isis? If the state needs to give you a religious label or take your religious label seriously then it needs to ask you what you believe and go by that. But that would be a violation of the separation that should exist between Church and state. If the state recognises your baptism as making you a Christian or Catholic or your circumcision as making you a Jew then the state is saying that these religions are true. A label given by false religion or a man-made one means as much as labelling the moon green cheese would. To say the label is authentic is to say the religion is authentic and has genuine and not fictitious power to give you the label.

\* the religious label, especially when the religion claims God comes first or God alone matters, seeks to be the main label put on you. It can seek to be the only label that matters. The label comes first if the God who justifies it comes first. This is demeaning.

\* to further their own unwholesome agenda, they may redefine your label to manipulate you or others.

\* people like to judge and do so all the time. The person who gives you a label is judging you. The one who knows little about you and calls you the label is the worst.

\* as faith in God and magic and religion depend on cognitive dissonance - an attitude where you formulate your belief in such a way that nothing can refute it (eg when magic or prayer fails you argue that it is working but not in the way you expect), it is to be expected that it will lead to people getting religious labels they should not get and even worse, being treated accordingly.

\* the fans of labels use them to promote and enable their own hypocrisy. They may call themselves Christian. When you show them an example of a Christian who was very bad such as Hitler they may say no true Christian would have done what he did. That way they dissociate from him and present themselves as an authority on what a Christian is and therefore as a good example of Christian holiness or charity. It is an arrogant boast. The only way out of this hypocrisy is to let people tell you what they believe and leave it up to you to work out if their beliefs make them truly Christian or not.

\* labels lead to more labels and more problems.

FINALLY

Religious labels are bad. However it is a human right to be granted the power to choose your label or to discard it. But you must earn the label to make it your real label. Otherwise it is just a word. When people carrying a religious label do grave harm we will be warned against taking the worst examples as representative as the whole. That only applies if the harm is normal human badness but it is extreme then it is different. And if a label is just a label and you take the same label as those people then you tarnish yourself. You are asking for it.