

## Religious labelling - where sectarianism starts

Summary:

Religion and politics likes labels for it helps boost their power.

It makes them look more influential than they are and that intimidates critics.

You can take a label you are not entitled to.

A group can take a label it is not entitled to. For example, a group of Catholics setting up a charity to pay for abortions and calling it say Catholic Reproductive Freedom Fund means it has no right to use the name Catholic. A group of Catholics does not mean the group is Catholic.

There must be an objective standard for deserving a label.

A man-made label is not really a label but just a word.

Only a God can have the right to decree how you get a religious label.

If you know a religion is riddled with error, has commanded murder in its scriptures and is man-made and you keep and take its label you make yourself guilty by association. Why honour something like that by wanting its label? The good done by people in the religion is irrelevant and is no excuse. The simple matter is that people in a religion being good does not make it good. They are good not the religion. Calling a religion good as a religion is just an underhanded way of putting forward an ideology.

The Catholic label

Pope Francis has called bad people who claim to be Christian not Christian. His defenders argue has two uses for the word Christian. One is the noun. The other is the adjective. Neither usage is acceptable for nobody can really be a religious label or noun. And those who do evil are called not Christian as in adjective which refers to them not as they are but it is about what they fail to do - they fail to do Christian things. The reason that is deplorable is that it suggests that good works belong to Christianity. They do not. They belong to humanity.

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.

There is no such thing as liberal Catholic, moderate Catholic or conservative Catholic . You are either just Catholic or you are not.

Analysis

Labels can be misapplied. 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.

People say that if say some Christians or Muslims (for example) are religious terrorists that you cannot condemn a whole religion because of the actions of a few. But if the bad and the good are the religion then the religion is doing the bad. What the terrorists do has something to do with the others - there is such a thing as guilt by association. Religion because if its huge claims and lack of credibility incurs this guilt by association more than anything else ever could.

The argument forgets that religion and the religious community are related but not the same thing.

We should think of it this way, the human community is the only real one. There is only one community. We cannot condemn all people for the actions of some but we can say it tarnishes them for it shows what anybody is capable of.

So the evil actions of religious people reflect on the non-religious as well.

Those who are inside a religion and outside label those who are in the specific religious culture with whatever label the religion uses. While it is true that religion creates the impulses that lead to war and hate and violence it is more true that its labelling system does it. The labelling is always more powerful than the religion. A person of a Catholic background in Northern Ireland will be labelled Catholic even if he knows the label means nothing for Catholicism is just a man-made invention and will develop a desire to protect others who are labelled as Catholics and go to war against the enemy: that is those who are labelled Protestants.

The fact that some engage in terrorism has nothing at all to do with showing a religion good for a terrorist group will still be a terrorist group even if they only appoint one person to go out and set the bombs and build hospitals and feed their starving people.

So if it cannot show a religion to be good then the religion is either bad or nothing special. If it is nothing special then it is a con for it acts as if it is great.

The terrorists are to blame but the others share in the blame though not as terrorists. To completely exonerate the others is disgraceful and hypocritical and is, in itself, enabling the terrorism and is not caring enough if at all. When you take on a religion's label you take on the right to be judged as the religion is judged. You cannot complain. You don't need to supply terrorists with weapons or tell them to kill to end up with some or any of the blame. A mother does not need to send her teen out to burgle to be blamed for raising him carelessly and to get some blame for the burglary. It starts with failure to hate violence so much that you protest vehemently against it even if it is by God or in the scriptures and sanctioned in days gone by or as bad (its not worse its as bad!!!) sanctioned now or if it sanctions violence in the future say at Armageddon or something. It starts with failure to leave the religion for one that has harmless scriptures and ideas of the supernatural.

Nobody says they trust a stranger because all humans are not bad but only some are. That is not logical. What has this to do with saying that a religion cannot be condemned for the actions of a few?

Whoever says that a religion is good and should be welcomed and trusted when they have not investigated the religion's doctrine and when they have not dealt with what critics of the religion are warning about is treating religion as a label.

Saying you cannot blame a whole religion or group of people for the actions of a few of them only makes sense if you mean you cannot condemn something good because of what a few do. What do you mean by good? Do you mean humanly good or do you think the religion is able to transmit supernatural power to override the bad side of human nature?

But religion itself denies that it deserves such respect should it be a man-made religion. It would not be good enough then no matter how much good it does. What people say makes no sense if they mean you cannot condemn a labelling system or a label because some bearing that label do bad.

There are hidden assumptions when people say that those who carry or are given a religious label

If people really think terrorists are not Christians or Muslims then why do they not discriminate against them and give them the religious rights they give Christians and Muslims? The imprisoned terrorist who wants a Koran on the basis that he is a Muslim will be given one. Christian terrorists in jail will still have their tax-funded chaplain.

By religion some mean the faith system and by religion others mean the people who identify as the religion. They mean the label first and foremost. A religion is not the same thing as the religious label. To try to exonerate people from enabling terrorism or of being tainted by the actions of a few just because of what label you grant them is terrible. It is an insulting reason.

If you join a religion that condones or commands evil or lies or violence then no matter how wonderful you are you have tainted yourself and let the religion taint you. Get a genuine religion of peace if there is one! You don't have to stay! Many who are considered to be in a religion merely have the label but are not in their hearts really members. If you take the label

Religion is a label itself. Am I talking about the Catholic, Mormon or Protestant or whatever label? No.

People are murdered all the time by those who detest the religion they are labelled as being part of. Christianity and Islam have the terrible distinction of killing their own! Catholics were killed for not being Catholic enough. Muslims are being killed for being in the "wrong" form of Islam.

It does not matter what anybody identifies as. I can identify as Mormon but nobody in their right mind would take me seriously. It is up to the facts to identify you not you or anybody else. The religious label endangers truth. Do not give politics or society the privilege of labelling you. They have no right. That is where the religious label comes from - them first and foremost.

Religion leads to violence. If religion is good at that then the religious label is expert. People who do not believe in religion can still end up suffering religious persecution at the hands of a religion just because they are nominally members of a religion it does not like. Religion kills countless thousands but the religious label kills even more! Yes religion is a source of war. But being religious and carrying or getting a religious label are not the same thing. The distress and war over religious labels is far worse than anything caused by religion. Religion however is to blame for the poison of the label.

It is not up to any theorist to decide what the word religion refers to. You see how religious people feel and believe and act and think and then define religion. Thus the argument, "religion is always good and its only the abuse of religion that is bad" is nonsense. It creates a theory instead of letting what is happening define what religion is.

Many people are labelled as a result of what religion they are born into. We need to remember that religion itself labels its people. Labels are about reinforcing and encouraging stereotypes at least up to a point. Labels get troublesome for they can lead to a person being regarded as Mormon despite being sure that the Mormon religion is man-made and not from God. If faith does not make you a member of a religion then what does? Many rebel Catholics raise the question, "How Catholic are they? Are they just pretending to belong to the Church?" Without labels, good members of an organisation cannot be tarred with the same brush as the bad.

A label speaks of how the public or a part of it sees you. If you are going to discriminate against people or hate them you firstly must give them a label. That dehumanises them and triggers the human tendency to demonise or hate all over what some may have done or allegedly done. There is a risk of dehumanising even with a legitimate label. But many labels are just words or almost just words and are thus dehumanising by default. The label that is just a word is about judging the people to whom the label is applied. It turns them into a word or it tries to.

A label that ignores what a person actually believes is dehumanising. If you are called Catholic for being baptised Catholic despite the fact that though you have not formally left the Church you are Protestant in belief that denies the important of belief to religion. It is more insulting if you don't identify with the Catholic label any more.

A label that turns a religion into a social community regardless of how the people dismiss the beliefs or certain beliefs of the religion or its practices is definitely trying to create a barrier.

A label is applied to you by a person who never considers how you deserve the label. Those who call Johnny a Catholic often do not know or care what a Catholic is in the theological sense or in any meaningful sense. Too many labels are mere words.

A man-made religion has no intrinsic right to consider anybody to be a member of it. It is perfectly just and sensible for a person who is labelled a Mormon and who has been raised Mormon to disown that label even if the Church won't disfellowship and de-register him. It is up to you to decide what you are, not others. Even if labels are valid, that is your right. But we will see that labels are rarely valid or correct and serve abusive and exploitive purposes. There are people who label you without letting you label yourself and who do not respect the label you take for yourself - for example, people who convert from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism may still be called Roman Catholic by bigots who refuse to take their new label seriously or respect it. People like that have an agenda even if they don't realise it.

If you want to take a religious label then do it as long as you follow the rules of religion and reason that are needed for you to warrant the label and as long as you don't see yourself as being all about the label. There is more to you than being Catholic or whatever. And it will be a lot. Don't demean yourself with a Catholic label if you are 2% Catholic and otherwise non-religious. You are meant to do all things as a reflection of your Catholic faith. Even boiling an egg is seen as a good work and an expression of faith. If you turn atheist you will still be doing this good work but seeing it as expression of human dignity not a religious ethos. Don't demean your egg-boiling by bringing faith, especially one concocted by man, into it.

Do remember though that it is not nice to identify yourself in terms of opposition to other religions or other people. Why do you have to be identified in terms of Catholic beliefs? That means you are being defined also in terms of what you do not believe. To be Catholic means you deny that Muhammad was more important than Jesus. Why are you identifying yourself in terms of Catholicism when you would not do it in the following terms: "I define myself by my interest in Dickens. My love of chocolate on a Sunday after dinner is part of my identity. I do not believe in Protestantism and that non-belief is part of me." You could go on forever.

What you have to do to get the label

If you want to say being Catholic, for example, is your identity then you have to turn all you do into an offering to God and eat breath and sleep the religion. You have to be approached all the time as a Catholic and not as a human being.

Catholicism asks that all your thoughts and words and deeds be sanctified - that is done in the spirit of the teaching of the Church.

Why not treat religious people as people and not as a religion?

The religious believers usually claim that all they do whether religious or secular must be done in a spirit of devotion to the faith. For the Muslim or Catholic, cleaning the windows is a religious act though it does not look religious. Work is believed to be sacred. If believers teach such things we make them angry and hostile if we say we must not treat them as defined totally or primarily by their faith. Religion is not just about doctrine and a community but about a religious way of life.

It may be necessary to challenge religious faith. But before you do so, take care to encourage the listeners to see their family and friends as human, not as defined by a religion. Too often, a challenge to religious faith is stifled by listeners who feel their parents and grandparents are being insulted when the harm done by the religion is mentioned. Clear that up first. The priests and clergy do nothing to discourage the notion that to have a problem with a religion is to have a problem with the loved ones of the person you are talking to whose relations and loved ones were in the religion.

Representative

A religion that does not have an objective standard for what members are to believe about matters of faith and morals is not a religion. If you are in a religion, it is not up to you to decide what that religion should teach. You have to try and believe. There is no need for religion if you can pick and choose. You represent the religion and its teaching whether you like it or not. A bad or confused representative is still a representative. That is why a kindly person or a person who is nearly atheist but who identifies with a religion is not to be let off the hook. If the religion is bad the person needs encouragement to leave the religion. It is about helping the person and opposing the religion. It is encouraging the person to leave because you respect her or him totally but not the religion.

Finally

You are more than a label. Labels are the chief weapon religion uses. My label is not as true of me today as yesterday. Just be yourself and forget religion and its labelling. People are labeled but people are people not labels. Being in a group does not change the fact that you are an individual and a special one at that. Labels cause division, they block understanding, they prolong division, they become an excuse for separation. People are peoples not skin colours or religions or groups. A label should only apply if you can prove that the label is true and legitimate and valid.