Christian: Beware Labels **[1]**

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The world seems to be becoming an angrier place. As tensions flare in the U.S.A., other countries become infected as people internalise what is happening there; a kind of life-and-death struggle for the soul of the Western world.

This is, of course, not so, and whether the U.S.A. goes off in a "good" or a "bad" direction, the course of human history has shown us that nothing is permanent and that whatever the outcome, that too, will eventually change.

But despite what happens across the Atlantic, my intention in this article is to warn the reader not to get caught up in this anger.

Socialist vs capitalist. Pro-life vs pro-choice. Traditional marriage vs marriage equality. Death penalty, or not. Wherever we turn, we find these polar opposites. Our world makes sense if we can draw a series of distinct dividing lines, with neat dichotomies straddling it. Pick your side, and argue on the Internet about it.

And the story that we get told, is that we must be one of the sides: sitting on the fence is a venial sin. Rather, we must be principled and follow a conviction. The centrist—who does not fall into either extreme of these divisions—is a strange aberration.

As Christians, we need to be careful of applying such labels to ourselves.

One reason is that it can encourage laziness: we don't need to examine all of the facts, all of the angles of an issue. Rather, it is far simpler to raise our voices and shout along with the crowd.

Another reason is that this kind of partisanism fosters an "us vs them" mentality. We no longer see the people on the other side as, well, people—broken, lost, sinful (like ourselves), who are created in the image of God and deserves His love and compassion. Rather, they are seen as opponents and as enemies (perhaps even oppressors): people to be despised and reviled. Soon there will be no compassion, only anger.

As Christians, who are meant to be salt and light to the world, we should be doing the opposite. Rather than "following the crowd", we should critically examine the different positions. If we come away not changing our minds, that is also good, as long as we have a better understanding for and appreciation of the other viewpoint.

For example, capitalists may favour free enterprise because it can genuinely provide a good outcome for someone who is industrious enough. Indeed, in the West the class system was greatly disrupted by enterprising individuals from lower classes who gained so much wealth that they could "compete" with the hereditary upper classes, which eventually necessitated the breaking down of

traditional social class barriers1.

Socialists, making positive arguments, point out to the poor and disenfranchised often cannot succeed in such a system. Capitalism can be, to be blunt, brutal. The sick, the elderly, the poor; they really have little, if any, opportunities to be enterprising enough to improves their lives (or, even, to merely survive). On the other hand, some will say that socialism can actually stifle enterprising individuals.

I can carry on a debate over this with myself *ad nauseam*. But I do not want to bore my readers any more than I need to, and it is not the purpose of this article. The purpose of this example, instead, is to show a few things: neither of these options are perfect, both sound good in theory, but neither will work in practise because of human nature which will always seek to exploit whatever system in which it finds itself2.

What is really important for me to express, is that often in these dichotomies, both sides contain *some good* and *something positive*. We need to recognise that and celebrate that. We need to have what is positive in the opposing argument inform our own argument, leading us to develop better ideas, theories and arguments. And if we speak with enough grace and love, then what is positive in our arguments will inspire those who listen to us.

But above all else, let your thinking and your reasoning and arguing in any matter be led by God's view of, and His love for, His creation.

- 1. This is an oversimplified example, so if there are any Marxists reading this, please don't get too riled up over it.
- 2. Today, most governments implement a mixture of capitalism and socialism. Fine tuning this balance is an ongoing task.

Categories:

- In the Media [2]

Tags:

- labels [3]
- self identification [4]
- designation [5]
- identification [6]
- dichotomies [7]
- partisanism [8]

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Links
[1] https://siyach.org/node/1169
[2] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/17
[3] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/686
[4] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/687
[5] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/688
[6] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/689
[7] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/690
[8] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/691