

EVIDENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY

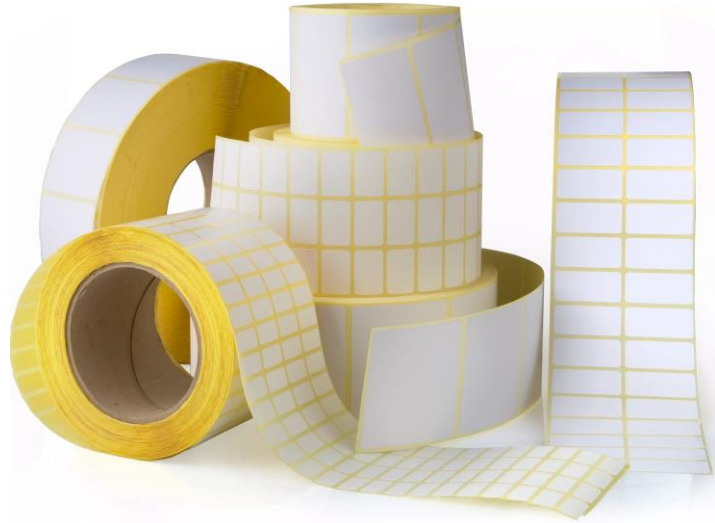
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Am I an Arminian? Careful use of Labels

This is the third a series of essays from John Oakes' third volume in *The Christian Story: Finding the Church in Church History*. The book will become available in September and can be pre-ordered at www.ipibooks.com. Some personal comments on John's teaching ministry are below the essay. Enjoy.

One of the lessons we can learn from church history is that we ought to be careful about how we label those with whom we do not agree. Calling people names is childish behavior. Yet, in the history of Christianity such childish behavior has been common. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:4 that "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." None of us like being unfairly labeled and put in a stereotyped box. Yet we do the same to others. Labeling people allows us to be intellectually lazy. It also can be a form of disrespect.

In the fifth century those who did not accept the strong predestination of Augustine were called Pelagians. Once they were given this label, they could be completely ignored. This was a great error, as it allowed the Church to veer

in an unhealthy direction. In the fourteenth century to be labeled a Lollard could be very dangerous—independent of whatever an individual actually believed. In doing so, legitimate efforts to bring in legitimate reforms to the Church were easily dismissed. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to be called an Anabaptist was to be labeled as a fanatic revolutionary. To be labeled a Jansenist might have gotten one killed. In both cases, the use of the label hindered healthy change in the mainstream church.

What stereotype labels do we use? Not all labels are bad. To call a member of the Roman Catholic Church a Catholic is fair enough. The label Christian was once one of derision, but we do not mind that label now. To call a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints a Mormon is a bit edgy, but our Mormon friends do not mind all that much. But there are some labels that we use to stereotype and dismiss too easily. We use labels such as liberal or fundamentalist. To some of us using the word evangelical or charismatic or Biblicist gives us an excuse to not listen to or learn from some with whom we have some differences. Is that person a disciple? Even this label, a legitimate biblical one, can be used as a weapon.

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In the seventeenth century one of the worst possible labels for a believer to receive was to be called an Arminian. To be an Arminian meant to reject Reformation Christianity altogether as far as many were concerned. This was a grave injustice to those so labeled. The sincerity of the one branded an Arminian did not matter. Neither did it matter that those labeled Arminian had a wide range of beliefs about the role of works in salvation. Labeled an Arminian? Discussion over. Even today, in some circles the label Arminian is used to dismiss believers. Of course, those who believe that humans have a role to play in their salvation may do the same to their opponents by dismissing them as Calvinists. It goes around and it comes around, as they say.

Am I an Arminian? Am I a Trinitarian? Personally, I do not appreciate being put into such boxes. The only box I want to be put into is the Christian box. The word Trinity carries some baggage I am not sure I am comfortable with. This is why we should use words carefully. Maybe we should drop the labels Trinitarian and Unitarian. Maybe not. How about if you just ask me what I believe? That is how I want to be treated. Applying the Golden Rule, that is how we should treat others.

Am I Arminian? Well, it depends on what you mean by the word. I certainly do not take the writings of Arminius as authoritative truth. On the other hand, I will have to say that I agree with Arminius, as opposed to Beza or Calvin, that God works with us to bring us to salvation—that his grace creates a spiritual space into which we can walk by faith if we will take Jesus as Lord and thus to be saved.

Happenings at EFC:

John Oakes will be teaching a series of lessons on the Book of Luke at the Inspire Singles Conference in Phoenix Aug 31-Sept 1. Notes, power point and audio will be posted at evidenceforchristianity.org In addition, he will be teaching a four part series on Daniel in September and October, as well as a six-part series on the Book of Acts. Be looking for all materials at the web site, or if you live in the San Diego area contact him for information so you can attend.

john.oakes@gcccd.edu Also, John is teaching a class on the Book of Hebrews with Robert Carrillo for the Los Angeles School of Ministry and Missions September 13-14. If you are interested in this class, go to <https://www.laschoolofministry.com> Lastly, John and Jan will be traveling to Israel, Amman Jordan (10/30-11/3), Beirut Lebanon (11/3-11/6) and Cairo, Egypt (11/6-11/12) for a missionary teaching trip October 22-Nov 12. If you can attend any of these meetings or want more information, contact John about these meetings.

Please consider supporting this valuable ministry by contacting Jan at joakes01@san.rr.com directly or through the donation link at the web site.