

439 Feedback – creative tension

I know I overstate things, but that's partly to provoke a reaction, and many of those reactions have been really helpful to my thinking. Thank you, my dear friends!

What do you mean by 'right-wing religion'?^[438] I wasn't sure about using 'right-wing' as it sounds too political. Maybe, 'rule-based religion' would be better? But Jesus didn't come to start a religion, anyway. The etymology of 'religion' is unclear, but to me it suggests 'rule-based' – definitely not what Jesus came to initiate or promote.

I said that, as in the first century, *'we need to organise our churches, so we need leaders and rules, right? We can't just have every individual doing what **they** think is right, surely?'* Jesus focused on relationships, but *'that's very difficult – it's too vague. It's much easier to run churches if we err on the side of being rule-based'*.^[438] We need rules, but the tension is how many rules, about what issues and who decides?

Another friend was nervous of 'right-wing' because of the political connotations, but there are similar factors at work in politics, as in churches. To run a country, you do need rules, but some groups tend to err on the side of more rules while others prefer to get people to hopefully work cooperatively. The danger, as I see it, is polarisation: what 'they' suggest is wrong, almost by definition. Wouldn't it be better, instead of seeing it all as 'we're right and you're wrong!', we could hold a creative tension and work together? But I'm politically naive, I know.

In the past, I've had polarising comments along the lines of: 'So you're saying that we can do anything we like, as long as we love each other!' This time, it was expressed more graciously: *Jesus is full of grace and truth,*^{John 1:14,17} *and for me this is perfectly illustrated in the story of the woman taken in adultery – Go, and sin no more.*^{Jn 8:11}

As someone who errs on the side of being more liberal, I've had John 8 quoted at me several times, but I do know that sin is to be avoided at all costs. Why? *It damages relationships.* But who decides what is a sin and how do we/they know?

Well, some sin is really obvious and doesn't need any discussion, but my friend, while acknowledging that we don't know the lady's backstory, continued: *For me (and we know we disagree on this) sexual sin can be adultery, fornication and same-sex sex and, of course, all those relations one is not allowed to have sex with... and bigamy.*

All those are obviously sinful, because they destroy relationships, right? Not so! As my Christian gay friends would affirm, in the context of a loving lifelong relationship, sexual intimacy actually **strengthens** the bond between them (as it does in marriage).

My friend also mentioned Islam, saying that, like Christianity, it is a proselytising faith. For my homework (this final week of term!), 'Should Christians proselytise?'