

The Radical Middle

I see myself as part of the radical middle of the theological right to left spectrum.

I'm part of God's work of helping the left and right learn from each other rather than subvert each other. I want to help them appreciate each other rather than separate.

I affirm the wisdom of both sides, such as the certainty of the powerful, personal love of Christ on the right and the confidence in God's justice for society from the left. I appreciate the heartfelt expression of faith from the right and the thoughtful search for knowledge of God on the left.

I challenge the heresies of both sides, such as the bibliolatry of the right and the literalphobia of the left. I challenge the simplistic stereotyping of each side. Some on the right hear someone state a belief different than their own and judge that someone to be an atheistic humanist. Some on the left hear someone state a belief different than their own and judge him or her to be a closed minded fundamentalist. Both are shallow logic and simplistic stereotyping.

There are some who cannot be objective because they are so enmeshed in the assumptions of the Enlightenment they cannot have a mind open to other assumptions. These become closed minded liberals. There are some who cannot be objective because they are so enmeshed in the assumptions of the Reformation they cannot have a mind open to other assumptions. These become closed minded conservatives. Both the Enlightenment and the Reformation are historical reactions to the bankrupt assumptions of the European middle ages. Modernist conservatives and liberals need to see that we now live in a post-modern era. People don't expect rules (from the right) or scientific knowledge (from the left) to save us anymore. Now we see highly educated people looking to external authority, and we see culturally traditional people looking for more tolerance than fundamentalism can give. Post-moderns.

The scientific method, respected by moderns as a means for finding truth, has lost some of its respect among post moderns. Science told us we could measure intelligence by the shape of the head, then said that doesn't work. Science was used to justify ethnic cleansing by Nazis. Science produced weapons of mass destruction but can't find them. Science told us Pluto is a planet, then changed its mind. Science is still respected as a means to find truth, but not a final authority. It has lost some of its status in post-moderns as a source of faith.

So, we guard against closed mindedness from both right and left. When we prejudge, jump to conclusions, stereotype, or settle for simplistic logic, we damage our witness. Why would thinking people want to be a Christian if Christians do this to each other?

I want people to know the love of Christ. I will work against the blocks to sharing it, blocks from both the right and the left. I want to help people find a strong faith in Jesus Christ, both those who can benefit from more certainty and those who can benefit from less.

Just as any living thing needs to be both conservative and liberal, so the Body of Christ needs both theological conservatives and theological liberals. Separation leads to death. Cooperation, respect and willingness to learn from each other leads to life, including reproduction.

There is a principle of divide and multiply that we learned from church growth experts. Denominations that merge usually shrink. But there also is the principle of separate and sabotage that also is happening among Christians. The radical middle works to find ways to both hold to a unique identity (exclusive) and interact with those who are different (inclusive). In fact, only those who are comfortable with their boundaries are confident enough to interact with others. We can find the difference between diversity and perversity. And then we can cooperate where we agree without facilitating what we believe is unhealthy about the other person's position or action.

The radical middle has the tools to do this, which the radical left or right does not.

An example of a radical middle position on Biblical authority One liberal assumption is that the Bible has little authority due to the abundance of contradictory statements. The stated version is "you can prove whatever you want from the Bible". It is a reaction to the abuse of proof-texting by giving up on an over-all authoritative word from the Bible.

My rejoinder: people attempt to prove all sorts of contradictory opinions by using Bible verses, but that doesn't mean they succeed. Once people tried to prove by the Bible that slavery was God's will, now we can't. We cannot find Biblical proof that God does not expect us to care for the poor. We cannot prove one country or ethnic group is superior to another. The whole Bible is in agreement that God loves so much that God came to live with us. There is no contradiction to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Just because there are different interpretations of culturally conditioned passages in the Bible, doesn't mean its core message is not authoritative. I cannot prove whatever I want from the Bible. I can try, but under the checks and balances of Christ's Church, I will fail.