

Sunday, February 21, 2016

“Influence”

1 Corinthians 10:14-33

Contemporary Contact

One of the headlines that caught my eye this week was the one that read **SLIDE** *“Donald Trump calls Pope Francis ‘disgraceful’ for questioning his faith”*. The pope made some controversial comments en route home from Mexico, hours after he prayed at the Mexico-U.S. border for migrants who died trying to reach the United States (cf. our missionaries in Nogales, Mexico). When asked about Trump’s promise to build a wall Francis said: *“A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian.”* Donald Trump responded forcefully to the pope’s comments by saying a religious leader questioning a person’s faith is “disgraceful” and that “No leader, especially a religious leader, has the right to question another man’s religion or faith.”¹

Biblical Contact

It is not my intention to give a political commentary. I simply want to point out how certain opinions and practices often do become litmus tests (explain) of whether or not someone’s behaviour reflects their beliefs or not (e.g. Pontius Puddle Cartoon: *“There are no atheists in foxholes”*—*“and few Christians behind the steering wheel of a car...Move it or die Bozo”*). One of the hot cultural topics believers were wrestling with in Paul’s day was the issue he describes in 1 Corinthians 8¹ as “food sacrificed to idols” and whether Christians could “take and eat” or not (cf. my earlier analogy to Halloween and various Christian responses on whether Christians can “trick or treat”). This was a complicated issue, as we can see from Paul’s need to spend several chapters responding to a variety of issues connected to this particular issue. Today we look at his conclusions **Read 1 Corinthians 10**¹⁴⁻³³

Food sacrificed to idols is still a pressing concern for some Christians in various African, Latin American, and Asian cultures. Related issues include

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/18/donald-trump-pope-francis-christian-wall-mexico-border>

whether or not to participate in various rites and rituals venerating one’s ancestors or how much one can incorporate forms of worship they may have grown up with or experienced in other religions (e.g. Muslim background believers continuing Islamic patterns of prayer...ritual washing, praying prostrate on a prayer mat facing East). Yet I suspect that for most of us, the issue of food sacrificed to idols will not rank among the top ten or even top one hundred moral dilemmas in life. But I’ve compiled a list of a few that might, which I hope will help us better understand why Paul takes three chapters to address a number of principles involved in deciding how much to embrace and how much to abstain from a variety of practices common in our culture. Commentator Kenneth Bailey describes as providing a “trilogy” of responses on the issue of “identification with culture”² a basic framework or continuum of response: **SLIDE**

Paul’s Trilogy of Cultural Responses **SLIDE**

No limits		Strict limits
YES-----	-----It Depends-----	-----NEVER

SLIDE Food offered to idols? **SLIDE**

Marketplace Food (v.25) Dinner Invitations (vv.27-29) Temple Worship^{vv.14-22}

1st – Full cultural **association/incarnation** (become “all things to all people”^{9:22} in terms of *crosscultural, incarnational mission*—“so that by all possible means I might save some”)

2nd – Some cultural **allowance** (“some things to some people” in terms of association and participation)

3rd – None, total cultural **abstinence** (“nothing for anyone”—no identification is possible).

Q – In which category would you put the following?

- Participating in Halloween (e.g. “Trick or Treat”)
- Going to a movie theatre
- Watching a R Rated Movie

² Kenneth Bailey, Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes, p. 274.

- Reading Harry Potter Books³ (cf. To Kill A Mockingbird & other banned books⁴)
- Believing God used evolution (i.e. Theistic evolution)
- Going out to the bar
- Physician assisted suicide
- Participating in a Public Protest (e.g. Burnaby Mountain pipeline)
- Joining a yoga class (cf. joining the masonic lodge)
- Gambling (e.g. buying lottery tickets, gambling in a casino)
- Attending a gay wedding (i.e. a friend or relative or family member)

Q – Who thinks we’d all agree on where each “fits” on the continuum?

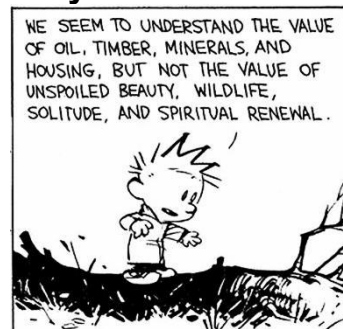
Let’s explore the various responses and especially the principles Paul gives to the “hot potato” issue in their day.

In verse 14 Paul begins with a warning cry to “Flee from idolatry” (i.e. regarding eating food offered to idols as part of pagan *temple worship*). **SLIDES = Idolatry...**

Cultural (military, technology, economy) Calvin **Cartoon**

Intellectual (ideologies...materialism),

Vocational (profit in business, winning in sport, self-expression in art)



1) What’s my Participation? (i.e. “The Myth of Neutrality”)

v.16 – “the cup of blessing^{ESV} or thanksgiving^{NIV}” is the name the Jews gave the cup at the end of a meal, because prayer of thanksgiving was said with it (“Blessed are Thou, O Lord...”). The cup of thanksgiving here refers to Jesus’ specific use of it at the last supper with his disciples, in which he identified himself and his body as the climax and fulfillment of the Passover meal. Originally an unblemished lamb’s blood was the means of Israel’s salvation. But during the last supper, the Passover became transformed into what Christians celebrate as the Lord’s Supper (aka “communion” or the “Eucharist”) with the “blood” and “body of Christ”^{v.16} taking on the focus and function previously held by the Passover lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5⁷ “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”).

³ See some of Amazon’s top 100 authors: J.K. Rowling, Bella Forest, Audrey Carlan, Nora Roberts, Steven King.

⁴ <http://www.shortlist.com/home/10-banned-books> include: Brave New World, Grapes of Wrath, The Satanic Verses

Their regular “participation” in the communion becomes the focal point of Paul’s theological reflection and practical advice in verses 16-22. Notice especially his repeated use of the word “participation” and the various examples he uses (*koinonia* = shared active and intimate involvement such as in a partnership or close friendship. It is “the living bond that unites Christians”, a “fellowship with the Father and the Son”^{1Jn.1:3,6}; F. Hauck in TDNT,449-450).

Our “participation” (*koinonia*) with Christ and the family of God makes certain other kinds of “participation” (in idol worship for example), totally incompatible (cf. 6¹⁵⁻¹⁷). (conflict of interests, contamination, guilt by association)

Q – What if I’m invited to a same-sex wedding ceremony? Is going to the marriage ceremony no big deal or is it a form of “participation”? Will not going cause a rift in our relationship and cut me off from being a positive influence?

Attendance = a form of participation and implicit support of the marriage. In the old days the support was made was made explicit (i.e. *Should anyone here present know of any reason that this couple should not be joined in holy matrimony, **speak now or forever hold your peace.***)

- *“It may be that some Christians who share our convictions about God’s design for marriage will choose to attend a same-sex ceremony. That is a matter of conscience. Others may choose to avoid the ceremony but join the reception and bring a gift. Others may send a gift but avoid the ceremony and reception altogether. Whatever we decide, we must act with a clear conscience before God in good faith.”⁵*

2) What are you aiming for: What’s ~~Permissible~~ **Beneficial & Constructive**

“Sadly, the church today seems to be increasingly polarized on the issue of permissiveness versus legalism. Clearly immoral behaviour is tolerated on the one hand, and clearly amoral behaviour is prohibited on the other. We need to educate people and to provide models of responsible choice on a case-by-case basis.”⁶

A number of people in the church at Corinth were content with asking, “Is it permissible” whereas the gospel compels us to aim much higher by asking “Is it **beneficial**...Is it **constructive**?” The first question only seeks our own good,

⁵ McDowell, Sean; Stonestreet, John. Same-Sex Marriage. (Kindle Locations 2288-2305).

⁶ Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, p. 171.

but the second and third questions seek the good of others—including young people and new believers who learn from how we respond and why.

3) **Scriptural Truths?** – “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”^{Ps.24:1}

underlines the sovereignty of God who is Lord of all (not a greenhouse god, not Lord of privatized spirituality but Lord of the marketplace). Implication = freedom from the demonic powers. Regarding demons, C.S. Lewis was surely right when he noted how, “*There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall...One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.*”⁷

- Cf. “All truth is God’s truth”⁸ (liberating principle in my studies; cf. Paul in Acts 17)

4) **Case By Case** = combination of freedom (tremendous freedom...from the judgment of others) *and* responsibility (to the impact of our actions, or non-actions, on others). Aim to glorify (honor) God.

Conclusion = recent case: *Muslim employee requests religious accommodation at work.*

- Muslims pray five times a day at prescribed times that move depending on the sun's position. This can pose challenges for Muslim workers and for their employers.⁹
 - Legal issues involved¹⁰ in terms of “reasonable accommodation”
 - Practical issues include time and space for prayer, pre-prayer washing rituals, as well as potential impacts on others (adjusting their schedules, shifting or interrupting meeting times, switching shifts, etc.).¹¹

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, p. ix.

⁸ See Steve Wilkens, *Good Ideas From Questionable Christians and Outright Pagans*.

⁹ http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_29327985/muslim-workers-fort-morgan-fired-over-prayer-dispute
<http://toprightnews.com/when-muslim-workers-stop-assembly-line-to-pray-employer-has-a-surprise-for-them/>

¹⁰ “The need for religious accommodation in the workplace most frequently arises where an individual’s religious beliefs, observances, or practices conflict with a specific task or requirement of the job or the application process...Accommodation requests often relate to work schedules, dress and grooming, or religious expression or practice while at work....The employee is obligated to explain the religious nature of the belief or practice at issue...the employer should not assume that a request is invalid...Ultimately reasonableness is a fact-specific determination.” http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/religion.html#_Toc203359518 also has helpful legal explanations and examples that could be used as class case studies.

- Religious issues? – Would granting someone’s religious accommodation request, conflict with one’s own religious commitments? When does reasonable accommodation become a form of affirmation or participation? (i.e. a Muslim praying to Allah¹²...OK in principle, employee bringing his idol in your workplace restaurant to feed it?—doubtful)

Personal Conclusions & Applications

No association = no influence, but as Christian’s we are called to be and have an influence (i.e. be “salt” and “light”) and we can only do so as we have opportunities to associate and interact with people. Some associations and interactions will be off limits because they are in opposition to our own commitment as followers of Christ (e.g. participation in pagan forms of worship).

- Permissible? (e.g. going with former neighbours to their Sikh temple...YES)
 - Beneficial? (yes, in terms of ongoing conversations & influence)
 - Constructive?

E.g. My dad in the cattle business...Winner at the cattle show buys the drinks. Permissible? Maybe, but *not* beneficial or constructive. His plan = Winner buys pizza & drinks (non-alcoholic)...Positive alternative & witness vs. a party pooper.

E.g. #2 Another example = when our kids were young...whether to participate in the alternative to Halloween party at church OR stay home and “participate” in some of the neighbourhood Halloween celebrations (carving pumpkins, taking our kids to “trick or treat” in the neighbourhood, fireworks, etc.). We partied with our neighbours.

“In general, educating children and adults to responsible behaviour and moderation in morally neutral matters proves much more successful than absolute prohibitions or indulgent permissiveness in producing mature Christians.”¹³

May God help us to be able to say, as Paul did (**read 10³³-11¹**)

¹¹ E.g. “The problem with the Muslim prayer request is that it’s not one day or annual...it’s every day and multiple times.” <http://www.primerus.com/business-law-articles/accommodating-islam-in-the-workplace-a-work-in-progress-332011.htm>

¹² Someone recently asked, “Do Muslims and Christians pray to the same God?” He asked because he could accept a Jew praying in his family business but wondered about a Muslim. I don’t think it is necessary to answer this question though there is currently a storm of controversy happening at Wheaton College related to this question. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/january/do-muslims-christians-worship-same-god-wheaton-hawkins-ems.html> Robert Priest notes that “for most evangelicals in America, our encounter with people who are Muslim is relatively recent, relatively superficial, and all-too-often inflected by American culture-war impulses.” This is a time to seek understanding and help from the missionaries and missiologists who have “long-term first-hand relationships with Muslims, and who are far more knowledgeable about the range of issues at stake.”

https://www.emsweb.org/images/occasional-bulletin/special-editions/OB_SpecialEdition_2016.pdf

¹³ Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, p. 169.