

Sunday October 6, 2013

Sugar ain't so sweet, after all

By Jim Taylor

Here we go again – the eternal cycle of charges and denials.

Remember when the first tentative voices suggested that smoking cigarettes might cause lung cancer? The tobacco industry launched a massive PR campaign – paradoxically, challenging the cancer studies while advertising “mild” cigarettes with fewer carcinogens.

The same thing happened when Rachel Carson claimed that DDT caused birth defects in baby eagles. When environmentalists blamed acid rain for killing northern lakes. When asbestos fibres were found in diseased lungs.

It's still happening. Eco-author Richard Heinberg writes, “Conventional crude oil production has been flat-to-declining for eight years now. With unconventional sources included, world petroleum production has grown somewhat... [But] the oil industry has used this meager success as a public relations tool, arguing that it can continue pulling rabbits out of hats for as long as needed, and that policy makers therefore need do nothing to prepare for a peak-oil future.”

Negative health effects

I see the same cycle repeating over sugar.

Yup, ordinary sugar.

According to the American Medical Association, consumption of sugary drinks and sodas contributes to about 180,000 obesity-related deaths around the world – In North America alone, about 30,000 deaths, one in ten persons each year.

Unlike tobacco, sugar doesn't directly cause those deaths. In small doses, sugar is good for us. But large sugar intakes make diabetes, heart diseases, and cancer much worse. The AMA calculates that obesity “increased global deaths from diabetes by 133,000, from cardiovascular disease by 44,000, and from cancer by 6,000.”

Consider how sugar consumption has increased. In 1700, the average person consumed about 4 pounds of sugar per year. By 1800, it was up to 18 pounds of sugar per year. By 1900, 90 pounds. And in 2009, a majority of Americans consumed a staggering 180 pounds of sugar -- half a pound of sugar per day!

Little wonder that the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta calculates that more than one-third of all Americans are obese.

Canadians fare only slightly better. We apparently average under 100 pounds per person per year.

Now compare sugar consumption with the incidence of diabetes. In 1893, the U.S. had three cases of diabetes for each 100,000 people. The rate now stands at 8,000 cases per 100,000 people!

Attack and counterattack

Last year, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg tried to ban supersized soft drinks -- any container over 16 fluid ounces, two cups or 475 ml. Until 2004, McDonald's used to offer 42 ounce drinks. McDonald's has since scaled down -- to a mere 32 ounces, each drink containing roughly 26 teaspoons of sugar.

The beverage industry retaliated with an aggressive ad campaign against Bloomberg's proposed ban. When New York City Council unanimously approved the new law, the industry sued. In March this year, a New York Supreme Court Justice ruled that New York lacked the constitutional authority to restrict drink sizes.

Recently, sugar has been accused of causing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children. Again, the sugar industry reacted exactly like the tobacco industry. The American Beverage Association, representing soda giants like Coca Cola and Pepsi, funded its own contrary studies, calling the accusations “more sensationalism than science.”

A cursory scan of web pages on the subject finds them falling into two groups: those that cite evidence linking sugars, particularly fructose, to ADHD, and those that dismiss the evidence as “inconclusive.”

Personal experience

Personally, experience trumps academic disagreement. Our grandson has an extreme sensitivity to sugar. A single Slurpee, Coke, or ice cream cone transforms him in minutes into a Mexican jumping bean. He literally cannot stand still, even while he insists he’s doing it.

Talking with him is like trying to chat with a proton zipping around the Large Hadron Collider.

He’s also addicted to sugar. He will steal to get it. For the short-term high it gives him.

Yes, sugar can give you a high. Sugar in your blood stream prompts a release of endorphins, which give a feeling of energy and euphoria.

But when those blood sugars drop, you crash. You feel depressed or weary. So, of course, you gobble some more sugar to perk yourself up again.

Like narcotic drugs, your body adapts. Each dose of sugar gives slightly less effect. So you need more sugar for that temporary high.

You don’t believe that sugar can be addictive? Try going cold turkey. No sugar in tea or coffee. No soft drinks, ice cream, cookies, cake. No chocolate. No desserts. Not even ketchup.

You’ll find sugar is everywhere. Even some baby formulas now contain as much sweetening as a can of Coca Cola – thus hooking children on sugar from infancy.

The good news is that, like smoking, you can undo the negative effects of excess sugar by cutting back or quitting. The bad news is that the sugar industry doesn’t intend to let you do it.

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YOUR TURN

Steve Roney responded to last week’s column about the motivations of book banners, “Jim, I have a hard time getting worked up against the idea that there should be some control over what books are available to children—i.e., in schools and public libraries, which is where this supposed ‘banning’ is taking place. Surely some books should not be there. For example, should school libraries or children’s libraries really stock *Playboy* and *Hustler* magazine? The only reasonable argument is not really against banning books; it is just about whether this or that book ought to be provided or withheld.

“Not providing a book from public funds, in a school or a library, is a far cry from censorship. Censorship is when the book is not legally available for purchase.”

I would contend that it is also censorship when a book is then removed and no longer available for purchase or reading.

Steve also questioned my assertion that banning was primarily a tactic of the political right. “Nobody is as militantly against ‘pornography’ as feminists, and they are on the left. On the other hand, the second-most common

ground on which books have recently been banned — not far behind ‘sexually explicit’ — is ‘offensive language.’ That, it seems to me, is currently very much a preserve of the left: the whole ‘politically correct’ thing -- the n-word which caused bans of Huckleberry Finn, the Washington Redskins team name, that sort of thing.”

Charles Hill was not optimistic about the future of reading, whether or not books get banned: “In my college developmental reading classes I routinely ask, on the first day, ‘How many of you have seen an adult read a book, newspaper or magazine?’ About 2 out of a class of 20 will raise their hand. These students are usually from the bottom half of the socio-economic status population, but not always. They won’t even buy their college texts; they expect a handout with right answers on it.”

Charles added, “They do, however, plan to vote.”

Cliff Boldt commented on one of the most often banned books: “Last week I finished John Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath. I can see why the land owners, police, and many elected officials wanted to ban that book. Great writing was my first impression. It was wonderful to read quality prose like that. The message seemed secondary because of the way it came out.”

Jack Driedger sent along a “groaner”: “Somebody invented a series of symbols that represented all the sounds used in spoken words. They wondered what to call this unique invention which was a kind of basic order of knowledge. Somebody came up with the idea of using the first letter of the words ‘basic order of knowledge’ and called it a B.O.O.K.”

OLD BOOKS AVAILABLE

I have a couple of boxes of old books that belonged to my father and grandfather. As near as I can tell, the oldest is a Shorter Catechism from 1863, the newest a 1994 text by John Polkinghorne. If you’re interested in any of them, please let me know and I will send you an Excel spreadsheet with the full list of books – all I ask is that you pay for shipping.

TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at jimt@quixotic.ca.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send me an e-mail message at the address above. Or you can subscribe electronically by sending a blank e-mail (no message) to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca. Similarly, you can un-subscribe at sharpedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca.

You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca

PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don’t think I’m sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton’s HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.
