

CHRISTIANS BEWARE OF UNILEVER

On February 12, Unilever, the worldwide consumer goods giant—it sells Lipton, Dove, Hellmans, and over 400 other products—announced that it was pressuring Facebook and Google to act socially responsible.

“Unilever will not invest in platforms or environments that do not protect our children or which create division in society, and promote anger or hate.” Facebook and Google immediately said they would cooperate.

On the day this story broke, CNN reported that Unilever would stop advertising on platforms that promoted racism and sexism.

However, there is more to this than meets the eye. Unilever is not the gold standard of citizenship—its interest in protecting children does not extend to the unborn. Moreover, it has a history of racist and sexist practices. Furthermore, its idea of what constitutes “division in society” is dangerous: it includes the exercise of religious liberty.

Even worse, pressuring Facebook and Google to be more restrictive is the last thing they need to do: both social media platforms have an ugly record censoring religious speech. *To read a representative sample of their rulings, click [here](#).*

The man who is driving Unilever’s agenda is Paul Polman. Born in the Netherlands, he has been at the helm of Unilever, a British-Dutch company, since 2009. An article in Forbes last year referred to him as “a CEO gone rogue.” Reporter Tom Borelli said that “Polman’s problem is his eagerness to put superficial feel good policies ahead of sound business decisions and he is not shy about touting his twisted priorities.”

What are those priorities? Suffice it to say that Polman has

emerged as one of the most influential corporate voices of left-wing politics. When asked why he spends as much time on political matters as he does running the company, he does not mince words. "To me, it is the same." This helps to explain why some are already calling him the next George Soros, the left-wing billionaire who funds virtually every radical cause.

Like so many other major figures on the left, Polman is riddled with contradictions.

Unilever's Code of Business Principles says it will "recruit, employ and promote employees on the sole basis of the qualifications and abilities needed for the work to be performed." Not true. Polman has gone out of his way to pressure American and European companies to follow his lead by recruiting refugees. He even begged the European Union to hire workers simply because they are asylum seekers.

Unilever says it does not promote political parties, but this does not mean it is politically disengaged. Quite the opposite. Its pro-abortion activities are so rabid that it has been subjected to a boycott by Life Decisions International; its contributions to Planned Parenthood are significant.

Staunchly pro-gay, Unilever is the darling of the Human Rights Campaign, the prominent homosexual rights group. This alone should raise eyebrows, but what should concern Christians most is how Unilever's passion for gay rights has positioned it against religious liberty. It sees some religious objections to the gay rights agenda as an expression of bigotry.

In Georgia, when reasonable religious liberty concerns were voiced by Christians—they refused to accede to every gay objective—Unilever sided with gay activists against them. This is why its plea to Facebook and Google to end "division in society" has such a pernicious ring to it. Are Christians who practice their faith by defending marriage, properly understood, being "divisive"?

Ben & Jerry's is perhaps the most aggressive Unilever product pushing the gay agenda. It has sold an array of "gay" ice cream, ranging from "Chubby Hubby" to "Hubby Hubby." (By the way, in 2010, it had to admit that its ice cream is not "all natural.") In Australia, Ben & Jerry's supported gay marriage by contributing to the "Vote4love" campaign. It hit a brick wall, however, when Muslims in Indonesia objected to its "Golden Gaytime" ice cream.

Unilever's gay agenda hit another snag in South Africa when it ran an advertisement suggesting that a child who came out gay was in effect putting a bullet into the heart of his father. It apologized for the ad.

To its credit, Unilever's "Code of Business Principles and Code Policies" sets the bar high for all business practices. To its discredit, its record of compliance with these objectives is poor. For example, it admonishes employees to "Take care that participation in industry or trade associations events and related contacts are not used for anti-competitive purposes."

Yet as reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, Unilever has come under fire for colluding with another company "to drive up the spreads market in South Africa." Specifically, it has been accused of driving up prices for edible oils and margarines. It is looking at fines of up to 10 percent of annual turnover.

Unilever markets itself as environment-friendly, and can be rather strident in its condemnation of those who don't share its position. Yet in 2016 it settled with 600 workers in India over mercury exposure. The settlement was in response to a 2006 lawsuit; it was launched after workers were exposed to the dangerous substance in a thermometer plant.

No corporation wants to be labeled racist, and few have denounced racism as vigorously as Unilever. Yet it has been involved in one controversy after another involving cosmetic

products that promise “lighter-looking” skin. For example, women were told that if their skin is too dark, they can improve it by purchasing Pond’s “Pinkish White” or the “Fair & Lovely” product. Unilever has had to pull some products, offering an apology to women of color. Also, Dove has had to apologize to black women for some of its marketing gimmicks.

Unilever is so aggressive that it will go to no end trying to come up with a new way to hawk its products. For example, after Lipton was exposed for testing its tea by conducting experiments on animals that critics said amounted to torture, it had to end this practice.

Human rights is one of Unilever’s much vaunted principles, and no one has been more outspoken about it than Polman. Yet it has often been on the defensive given all the charges of sexual harassment made against it. This is especially true of its African companies.

The Kenyan Kericho tea plantation has been the subject of much controversy. Allegations of sexual abuse have been made by its female workers; they have been sustained by the Center for Research on Multinational Corporations, a Dutch non-profit investigatory agency. Sexual coercion and forced pregnancy tests were among the allegations.

The Kenyan Human Rights Commission also made a probe of Unilever’s practices. It said that sexual harassment was “rampant” and reflected a corrupt corporate culture. Unilever denied the accusations. No matter, it is not just in Kenya where such charges have surfaced. Women who work in the Jordan plant have made similar accusations.

This is not the profile we would expect of a corporation that brags about its dedication to social responsibility. That many of these heinous acts have taken place under Polman’s watch does not speak well for him.

Facebook and Google already lean left and have not won the

favor of practicing Christians. For these two social media giants to be pushed further left by Unilever is something that needs to be monitored and responded to accordingly.