

## Character Evaluation not Assassination

*Obama and Wright. McCain and Keating. Palin and Muthee. To what extent is it right or wrong to judge candidates by the company they keep?*

1.....It's wrong and foolish NOT to judge candidates by the company they keep and the company they kept. A candidate's associates, past and present, are part of the whole picture on the basis of which we voters exercise the judgment determining our votes. We cannot have a *fair and right judgment* about anybody if we leave out their relationship choices.

2.....The world's wisdom traditions speak to our human responsibility in choosing our associates. Promises and warnings are scattered throughout the Bible. Walking "humbly with your God" is related to doing justice and loving mercy (Micah 6:8). "The Lord is with you when you are with him" (Second Chronicles 15:2). "Keep company with the wise and you will become wise" (Proverbs 13:20). "Bad companions ruin good character" (First Corinthians 15:33). Resist the temptation to advantage yourself by associating with the unscrupulous (James 4:7: "Resist the devil, and he will run away from you.").

3.....But "guilt by association" - condemning and rejecting someone solely on the basis of a *single association* - is foolishly narrow-minded and morally wrong. As one weapon in character assassination, it's increasingly wielded as the presidential campaign gets dirtier. But it's back-firing: the people feel it's unfair, and a deliberate diversion from addressing the massive and complex issues America is now facing and the daily, down-to-earth personal dilemmas of most Americans.

4.....It's a sad old joke: "Don't vote. It only encourages them." And it's an old statistic: Half of Americans qualified to vote don't but are parasites on the other half for the maintenance of democracy. Even if this time the percentage rises to sixty, hope for uplifting "change" is threatening by a down-draft of anxious dis-"credit," distrust, unbelief in "the system" and the future. Like "creed," "credit" means belief, trust. The credit-crunch is multiple, moral and spiritual as well as monetary. But as the rising cost of fossil fuels moves us to discover and develop alternative sources of energy, the crises in our culture may move us to *personal and societal self-examination*. If we judge ourselves, we may not be condemned (Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 6:37; Romans 2:1; First Corinthians 11:32).

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | OCTOBER 8, 2008; 4:12 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

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TO DWVANWINKLE

I considered irrelevant your comment on 1st-c. Jewish opinion. My reference was to the English-language distinction between "associating" (for some purpose) & "keeping company with" (as friend-ship).

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | OCTOBER 14, 2008 5:24 PM  
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I wonder if continuing this conversation is even helpful but I will give it a last try. You stated, "He freely ASSOCIATED with them in the course of his ministry, but he did not "keep company with" them." I challenged this noting, "In first century Palestinian Judaism, "eating with someone" is a form of keeping company with someone." I reasoned that you viewed associating with someone and "keeping company with them" to be

mutually exclusive. Therefore I do not understand your statement "...the deep company / associate distinction did not exist for 1st-c. Palestinian Jewish table-fellowship. But I repeat: "Wrongly, you said that Jesus 'kept company with sinners and prostitutes'":

This led me to wonder if perhaps a better definition of "associate" might be helpful.

I agree that we should not judge someone by a single association. Furthermore, I don't think we should judge a person by any associations.

It did not bother me that you did not refer to Jesus by name.

I don't believe that I judged you; but I did disagree with your idea.

Peace,  
Rip

POSTED BY: DWVANWINKLE1 | OCTOBER 13, 2008 9:09 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO DWVANWINKLE

1

Your asking me to define "association" underlines my statement that you did not give my entry "a serious reading." In my entry's first paragraph, I fused "the company...", "associates," and "relationship choices."

2

Not "every reader"; but since you asserted that my entry neglected Jesus (whom I referred to by two Gospel citations), I referred ONLY you to my archive from contra-indications.

3

Yes: the deep company / associate distinction did not exist for 1st-c. Palestinian Jewish table-fellowship. But I repeat: "Wrongly, you said that Jesus 'kept company with sinners and prostitutes'": YOU said. The "On Faith" question was about guilt by ASSOCIATION, specifically (as I capitalized in my first response to you) "A SINGLE ASSOCIATION."

4

I agree with you that "words and deeds" are a better basis for judging persons than are their associations. But that was not the "On Faith" question my entry was a response to.

I must repeat: In being so quick to judge me on not referencing Jesus BY NAME, you came under his judgment against being quick to judge. And you failed to acknowledge my referencing Jesus BY CITATIONS.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | OCTOBER 13, 2008 4:05 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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1. It is interesting that you blame the reader for what might be your lack of clarity and furthermore attribute a moral virtue or lack thereof to an interpretation of your text. It might be helpful to define what you mean by the term 'association.'

2. Do you expect every reader to read the archive of your postings instead of your essay on a topic? I made no judgment regarding your character. I merely critically interacted with your statements in one essay. But, I agree that it is foolish to reject someone based on a single association.

3. In first century Palestinian Judaism, "eating with someone" is a form of keeping company with someone. It seems to me that incarnation involves association as well as keeping company with others. I never accused Jesus of modeling his life upon those he with whom he associated.

4. I am more comfortable discerning a person's character based upon his/her words and deeds instead of the people with whom he/she associates.

Peace,  
Rip

POSTED BY: DWVANWINKLE1 | OCTOBER 13, 2008 9:50 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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TO DWVANWINKLE

1

It's sad that you didn't notice your hypocrisy. Against Jesus' commandment (to which I refer in referencing Matthew 7:1-2 and Luke 6:37), you are quick to judge me without giving me a serious reading.

2

Observant of Jesus' commandment, I wrote that it is "foolishly narrow-minded and morally wrong" to "condemn and reject somebody solely on the basis of A SINGLE ASSOCIATION." That's "character assassination." I gave readers the two supporting Gospel references I've given you here in "1" (above). (Often in my "On Faith" entries I mention Jesus by name [though I do not do so in this entry], as you could observe by clicking on my "Archive.")

3

Wrongly, you said that Jesus "kept company with sinners and prostitutes."

He freely ASSOCIATED with them in the course of his ministry, but he did not "keep company with" them. As a prison chaplain, you yourself do not say you "keep company with" the prisoners; you say you "minister to" them, which of course requires your associating with them.

4

I hope you agree with my statement that "We cannot have a fair and right judgment about anybody if we leave out their relationship choices."

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | OCTOBER 10, 2008 10:09 PM  
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Elliott states, "It's wrong and foolish NOT to judge candidates by the company they keep and the company they kept." He substantiates this with Scriptural citations which ignore the life of both the historical and the canonical Jesus.

If we were to use such a criterion, we would be forced to conclude that Jesus Christ was a horrendously immoral person since he kept company with sinners and prostitutes. Furthermore, I must consider myself to be chief among sinners. I associate with murderers, rapist and worse since I minister to prisoners at a closed custody prison and a maximum security prison.

I believe we are to be judged upon the choices we make, the habits we form and the character we create in cooperation with the grace of God.

Peace,

Rip

POSTED BY: DWVANWINKLE | OCTOBER 10, 2008 1:56 AM  
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Burning people at the stake for not believing in the SkyGod was also immoral wasn't it Doc? Once upon a time when religion ruled the world. But at the time you guys didn't see it that way and sat and watched folk scream in agony as they burned away...just for doubting the existence of some supernatural flying thingie called god.

Ah the good old days. Bet you miss them.

POSTED BY: COLINNICHOLAS | OCTOBER 9, 2008 11:40 PM  
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I hope we can see the difference between involvement in the Keating 5 scandal and S&L bailouts and Swiftboating.

There's also a difference between crediting a witch-hunter with one's political success and 'guilt by association' being taken to override what a candidate actually says.

In McCain's case, there's real questions about what he \*did\* on behalf of the Keating Five: In Palin's, there's a lot of questions, not about her associations, but her actual beliefs and policies. She's being kept out of direct questions from the media and presented as something she's apparently not. Obama's pastor problems were pure fearmongering, ...in fact something that he took some effort to discuss in detail and tell us just \*what\* he took from certain experiences, whereas the Palin end of the campaign appears to be actively trying to cover \*up\* that she \*is\* a Christianist radical who sees the world ...and a job she otherwise knows nothing about, in ways most Americans might actually find pretty alarming.

Guilt by association is a tricky thing.

In a lot of way, this is a case of 'It's OK If Republicans do it.'

But we're not actually looking at the same things, here. If Palin's actually \*claiming\* the religious extremism is what she's really accountable to, saying, 'God wants this pipeline,' then it goes beyond 'association.' Substantively.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | OCTOBER 9, 2008 2:21 PM  
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