

Cross Current



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Dishing Out Advice



These delicacies are to die for.

Around the world there are foods and beverages that are banned, either because they're potentially fatal or their preparation involves torture.

Perhaps the best known is Japanese puffer fish, sometimes called blowfish because they swallow air or water to inflate themselves when threatened. Though their flesh is a delicacy in Korea and Japan, the eyes and internal organs are extremely toxic. A full 60 per cent of humans who eat puffer fish die

from *tetrodotoxin* — a powerful agent that damages nerve tissue — but most cases of blowfish poisoning result from eating other foods contaminated by the toxin, rather than from eating the fish themselves. Though poisoning can sometimes be treated, death is usually preceded by creeping numbness and the tingling of lips and mouth.

A less exotic and slower acting poison, but a poison nonetheless, is sassafras, the dried root bark of the sassafras tree found in many parts of eastern North America. In times past, the bark was used for making tea and adding fragrance to soap. It was an early painkiller and insect repellent, but it's most popular use was in the creation of root beer, which got its taste from sassafras extract. But in 1960, U.S. authorities banned saffrole — an ingredient found in sassafras oil — because tests showed it caused liver cancer in rats. Today, root beer is flavoured artificially, not with the potential carcinogen.

Then there's Casu Marzu Maggot Cheese, which is banned in many parts of the world, including its native Sardinia, an Italian island in the Mediterranean. Translated as "rotting cheese", casu marzu is runny,



Sometimes caution is golden. Sometimes it's just plain yellow.

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white, and made by adding half-inch long larvae to Pecorino Sardo cheese. Despite health warnings, Sardinians traditionally eat the product with the maggots still in the cheese, claiming they make the product creamier. Casu marzu is eaten widely but not openly, even though the ban is not only enforced periodically.

Even more controversial is foie gras, a French appetizer which means "fatty liver". Called "the delicacy of despair" by critics, foie gras is targeted because of where it comes from. According to activists like actor Roger Moore, who works with several groups to educate the public, ducks and geese are painfully force-fed up to four pounds of food daily until they get a disease that bloats their livers up to ten times their original size. Probes into foie gras farms have led to bans in many nations and parts of the U.S.

The moral here is that what goes into us can have devastating results, for us and others, and that's a principle that also holds true in the spiritual sphere. Over and over, the Bible teaches us to internalise the positive thoughts and values that lead to right behaviour, things like "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control", the "fruits of the Spirit". They stand in clear contrast to the attitudes and attributes that lead us away from God: "impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure... hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy... and other kinds of sin." (Eph. 5:19-23)

In our daily lives, what we take in determines what we take on, take up, and take out. Emotional toxins numb us to the influence of God and eventually paralyse our hearts until we become spiritually dead. Often their effects strike us quickly, and sometimes they take years to wreak their damage. Car-sin-ogens — damaging thoughts and attitudes — work like a deadly disease, replicating out of control until they overwhelm the good within us.

Whether it's the bitter root of envy and jealousy, or the more obvious maggots of sheer malice and materialism, no one is spared. The foie gras of faithlessness, these harmful attitudes usually originate in the exploitation of the weak and vulnerable. We would do well to avoid the lot, because God won't stomach them.