A Russian beef with Apple

By Steven Porter
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The Century *recently welcomed a new online-editorial intern: Steven Porter, a recent graduate of Indiana Wesleyan University. Below is his first post for us; we look forward to more. —Ed.*

Some Orthodox Christians in Russia have taken issue with Apple's logo recently, seeing an anti-Christian symbol for humanity's original sin in the image of a bitten fruit.

It's hard to believe that Apple execs conspired with their graphic designers to offend Christians, but these Russian conservatives got me thinking. If we did assign significance to the Apple logo, what might it mean?

With consumers snatching up more than 5 million units of the iPhone 5 within three days of its release this fall, perhaps that bitten apple should be seen as the venerated icon of a consumerist cult. Optimistic fans might prefer to associate the image with business success, given Apple's record-breaking stock prices—in a bearish market, no less.

In 2005, Holden Frith claimed that the logo actually pays homage to Alan Turing, a pioneer in computer technology who was jailed and injected with hormonal treatments to correct his homosexual orientation. In 1954, Turing committed suicide by biting into a cyanide-laced apple. But according to Apple's leadership, the Turing origin is mere myth. As Frith recounts, in 2009 the man who drew the logo called the story "a wonderful urban legend."

Others have imposed a variety of meanings onto the Apple silhouette. Pun-lovers compare the logo's bite to digital bytes; others see a nod to Newtonian physics. Some religious folks cite the same passage as the aforementioned Russians but see a symbol for knowledge, as in fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In short, people have offered many explanations for what they see as the obvious significance of Apple's logo. This is to be expected, since any symbol—or "signifier"

for you semantics aficionados—has a fluid link to the meaning signified. But if these interpretations are all up for debate, then why bother discussing such niche exegeses as the one put forward by conservative Russian Orthodox?

Because their interpretation is scheduled to collide with public policy.

Lately there's been international concern that Russian politicians care more about shielding the pious from perceived insult than they do about preserving individual liberty. The online Russian newspaper [Kommersant reported](#) that recent parliamentary proposals, if enacted, could prescribe fines in excess of $10,000 and sentences of up to five years imprisonment for double entendre "offenders"—those who'd violate the new law by offending the religious. This could spell trouble for Apple.

President Vladimir Putin [is expected to support the legislation](#), following the Orthodox Church's support for his re-election earlier this year. Furthermore, Russian officials suggested in 2011 that the U.N. Human Rights Council develop [what Gillian Kane calls](#) "a resolution that would allow 'traditional values' to trump human rights."

But let's set aside the legislative debate for now and instead consider the perspective of those who take offense to Apple's marketing. In order to find the Apple logo insulting, one must sincerely believe that the image not only depicts but glorifies the most infamous act of human rebellion. Doing so requires a fairly narcissistic interpretive lens. (This aside from the fact that proponents of anti-insult regulation believe it's the state's role to defend their dogma from the heresy of skepticism.)

And I can't help but bring up the parallel to those American Christians who view their own textual analyses as infallible. Biblical literalism may be good at translating scripture into unambiguous moral claims, but it doesn't guarantee the accuracy or contemporary applicability of such claims. This creates problems when American Christians take their niche exegeses into the public square.

I read a *Charisma* article last week titled, "[Why Do the Members of the Secular Media Hate Bible-Believing Christians?](#)" A photo of Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry accompanied this question, which I read as largely rhetorical.

Productive discussion of divisive questions demands that we acknowledge the ambiguity that made such questions divisive in the first place. Only then can we introduce our religious convictions with humility—and avoid the mistakes some of

our Russian brothers and sisters are making.