



## Consumer Christianity

**The Divine Commodity**  
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In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centred on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America, where it became an enterprise. Richard Halverson in James Twitchell, *Shopping for God*.

Consumer Christianity, while promising to strengthen our souls with an entertaining faith, has left us malnourished with an anemic view of God, faith, church and mission.

- History has shown syncretism to the culture is a chronic ailment of the church.
- The answer is neither return or retreat.

There is a difference between living in a consumer society and adopting a consumer worldview. Our Christian predecessors lived within the Roman Empire, but their minds and hearts were not beholden to Caesar. Their citizenship was not to Rome. Likewise, we must learn to exist in a consumer empire but not forfeit our souls at its altar. This means addressing the issue at a level beyond mere behaviours.

- Consumerism is the dominant worldview of North Americans. As such, it is competing with the kingdom of heaven for the hearts and imaginations of God's people.

- American Christianity has largely failed since the middle of the twentieth century because Jesus' modern-day disciples do not act like Jesus – George Barna

### **Imagination:**

- We have been boxed in by a worldview that worships business models and in so doing has often substituted methods for imagination and a genuine seeking of what God might want to do.

### **Silence:**

- We have reduced God to a controllable commodity. 'A genie in a Bible' We've made God a containable, practical and manageable deity. Our faith is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. We need the power of silence to awaken a sense of holy wonder and mystery.

### **Branding of the Heart:**

- We spend more time on packaging God than experiencing the 'product'
- We approach Christianity as a brand and so spend enormous amounts of money on Christian products but live no differently than other people. "Rather than adopting a biblical worldview, they have simply added a Jesus fish onto the bumper of their consumer identities. And like the products they purchase, the branded Christian's identity will always be more about the image than substance." Rather than a Christian brand put on love (58).

### **External Experiences:**

- We live in the 'experience economy'. We then reduce worship to experience and make it about us. We create the experiences a consumeristic world craves rather than the imaginative engagements that grow people.

"We have immense difficulty practicing God's presence and keeping God's reality before our mind's eye because we have dismissed or denigrated our capacity to intuitively and imaginatively apprehend and encounter God. We have lost the power of imagination and intuition."

### **Wind in a Bottle:**

- 'I love what you do for me' attitude toward church.
- We have all swallowed the cultural punch that believes institutions are both the means and the end of God's mission in the world.
- Our ministry has to mean more than bigger building, better facilities and more people. (93)

- ‘Your God is a gumball machine’
- We have exchanged an unpredictable God for controllable principles. The plug and play approach to Christian life assumed God’s spirit resides within well-produced organizations and systems rather than people.

**The Land of Desire:**

- The endless pursuit of immediate satisfaction has made our culture increasingly immature.
- Christmas is a Christian branded celebration of consumerism.
- We are bombarded with 3500 desire-inducing ads every day.
- Take a weekly media fast.

**A Refuge:**

- In a culture that promotes choice and customization, homogenous groups are the outcome, but by surrendering personal comfort we can learn to be a united community again.
- In Consumer Christianity, our concern is not primarily whether people are transformed to reflect the countercultural values of God’s kingdom, but whether they are satisfied – often measured by attendance and giving.
- The vision of unity that transcends worldly divisions has been lost in Consumer Christianity.
- The church should be a refuge against the divisions of consumerism.

**Around The Table:**

- When we view people as products to consume we dehumanize one another and promote isolation, but genuine hospitality can heal the wounds consumerism inflicts.
- Consumerism has caused our attention to be fixated on the surface and style of our lives so that over time we have lost the ability to nourish our interior life. Without a meaningful interior life, a definable sense of self apart from possessions, we also lose the skills necessary to establish meaningful relationships.
- With the ability to relate meaningfully to others lost, the fully formed consumer is left only one path to seek fulfilment – consumption. We construct a sense of self-identity through the purchases we make and the brands we display.
- “Facebook is the digital expression of consumerism’s dehumanizing effects.” (145). We amount to a profile and what we consume. We substitute real ‘messy’ relationships for a ‘friendship’ with a profile.

“Our homes are to be hospitals – refuges of healing and radiating the light of heaven. And our dinner tables are to be operating tables – the place

where broken souls are made whole again. In our churches people should find rest for the battle for acceptance and release from the lie that they are nothing more than the goods they possess. When we lower our defences, when we remove our facades and our peepholes, and we begin to be truly present with one another – then the healing power of the gospel can begin to work.”

**Deconstruction:**

- Deconstructing our commodified view of God, and reconstructing a sense of wonder through silence.
- Deconstructing our branded identities, and reconstructing identities rooted in faith through love.
- Deconstructing our attempts at transformation through external events and reconstructing internal transformation through prayer.
- Deconstructing our devotion to institutions as God's vessels, and reconstructing relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Deconstructing our unceasing pursuit of pleasure, and reconstructing the redemptive power of suffering through fasting.
- Deconstructing our contentment with segregation, and reconstructing the unity of all people through the cross.
- Deconstructing the individualism pushed by consumerism, and reconstructing our love for strangers through hospitality.