



## Greater Sydney SDA Conference

# The Trouble with Paris

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### Hyperreality

Throughout the developed Western world, a corrosive epidemic is eating away at the faith lives of Christians. Contrary to popular belief, you and your friends probably won't lose your faith because of sex, drugs or doubt but for a much more insidious reason.

The thing that will eat away at your faith, make it impotent, and finally kill it off cannot be easily named. It is a framework, a formation system, an entire worldview. It tells us how to live and how to act. It speaks to our sense of identity, it shapes our personality. It tells us what to love, what to commit to, and what to have hope in. It is a virus that eats our faith from the inside out. This virus is the allure of the hyper-real world.

- The combination of a hyperconsumer culture, mass media, and rampant individualism has created a world of hyperreality. The media drenched world in which we live has overextended our expectations of life.
- In the rush to sell us things, corporations have sacrificed reality; truth telling is gone.
- The message behind hyperreality is that if we are to have lives of worth, happiness and well-being, we need to move our lives into the hyperreal world. We need to imitate the lives we see in the movies, in advertising, in lifestyle magazines, in music videos and on television – then we will be happy. The problem is that the lifestyles we see on TV are not real. We become slave to the romance of “I will be happy when...”

### The Whole of Life As Shopping: Hypersonsumerism

- Hyperconsumerism has infiltrated our culture and lives in such a way that we no longer notice it. It is now the primary operating system that we look to for a fulfilling life. If we are to define

religion as the worldview and beliefs that determine our identity, actions and hope, then hyperconsumerism is the biggest church in town. Sadly, we find Christianity relegated to just another consumer choice, another lifestyle option.

“We now live in a time when consumer Christianity has become the accepted norm, and all-out engagement with and in Jesus' kingdom among us is regarded as just one option people may take if it suits them – but probably as somewhat ‘overdoing it.” Dallas Willard

- Malls and movie theaters resemble churches. Celebrities resemble saints. Shopping becomes a sacrament, and gossip magazines become scripture. Even conversion takes on a new form in the hyperconsumer world. In the hyperreal world, we believe that by changing our surfaces we are undergoing conversion.

### **Me as Brand**

- Middle Ages – monastic movement where young people got up early to take vows of self-denial and engage in spiritual disciplines. This idea seems odd in a modern age.
- However our gyms are full early in the morning and people are out jogging. We still get up early and commit ourselves to self-improvement. The only difference is that we have moved from internal to external.

### **It's All About You**

- Our culture is based on worship of the individual. It is almost unthinkable to us as Western people that in other parts of the world people place their families or communities above their own desires and wants. We are so ingrained with individualism that we cannot imagine any other way to live.
- Whenever individualism reigns supreme, community is easily sacrificed for personal preferences.
- Too quickly we splinter churches, friendships, families and groups rather than struggle for way to bridge differences, reconnect, forgive, reconcile and heal. Individualism fosters an impatience with people and institutions; we can always join another church, find new friends, or get another job.

### **Adulthood**

- Hyperconsumer culture is turning into a massive youth culture, a society in which being young is an attitude, not an age.

## Reality

- We are more depressed than ever. Despite material comfort we are no happier.
- Extra income is really valuable when it lifts people away from sheer physical poverty. Beyond this extra income is correlated with unhappiness.
- We are entrusting the task of making our lives happy into the hands of a corporate culture that has a vested interest in keeping us unhappy.
  
- No matter how affluent or comfortable our lives become, we will always be looking ahead for something better.
- The unhappier we are, the more we will buy. The hyperreal culture severely harms your chances of having a happy and fulfilling life.
  
- **Comparison Anxiety**
- **Choice Anxiety**
- **Quarter-Life Crisis**
  
- The hyperreal culture tells us that the good life is at our fingertips – all we need is to be wealthy enough to access it. Ironically, our struggle to become wealthy can become one of the main factors in diminishing our happiness. The more we work, the more we become detached from those we love, who in turn provide us with love, intimacy and acceptance.

## Real Life

- Mundane - we expect to be entertained all the time.
- Toil and Work
- Consequences
- Pain – The consumer culture acts as a smoke screen, distracting us from the causes of our unhappiness.
- Death – Our culture hides from the fact of death. Our focus on youth helps us skip the death question.
- Our fear of death is rooted in our cultural rejection of God.

## Faith

- We are all Adam and Eve and the serpent questions us.
- Worship created things – ultimately ourselves.

## Hyperreal Christianity

- Post-Christian Trinity
- Distant God – we know little about the distant god so it does not give us an ethic to live by

- Me as God – all authority rests here
- Consumerism, as folk religion – With the distant god giving us no ethic, consumerism tells us how to live and dream.

### **Good-bye To The Plastic Jesus of Hyperreality**

- Receiving life versus consuming in order to find life
- Satisfaction versus waiting
- Dependence versus control
- Future Hope versus Mirages of the Future
- Surrendering our wills to God's future
- A future free of superficiality
- A future beyond the material
- Wisdom the Bridge to Happiness.

### **Six Keys to Living Well Within God's Reality**

- Examine your life with fearless honesty
- Invest in committed relationships – especially with God
- Enjoy a Mission Bigger Than Yourself
- Follow Jesus and Live your ordinary day in His presence
- Hook into countercultural Christian community.
- Learn to live redemptively

Let's face it. We've been ripped off by our culture's version of reality.  
Join the reality revolution.