



THE DIVINE *Butler*

Christian critiques of consumerism usually focus on the dangers of idolatry – the temptation to make material goods the center of life rather than God. This, however, misses the real threat consumerism poses. As contingent beings, we must consume resources to survive. **The problem is not consuming to live, but rather living to consume.**

We find ourselves in a culture that defines our relationships by our purchases. As the philosopher Baudrillard explains, “Consumption is a system of meaning.” We assign values to ourselves and others based on the goods we purchase. One’s identity is now constructed by the clothes you wear, the vehicle you drive, the music on your iPod. In short, you are what you consume.

Consumerism has become the framework through which we interpret everything else, including God, the gospel, and church.

Today, according to *The New York Times*, each American is exposed to 3,500 desire-inducing advertisements every day promising

that satisfaction is just one more purchase away. Rodney Clapp writes, “The consumer is schooled in insatiability. He or she is never to be satisfied – at least not for long. The consumer is tutored that people basically consist of unmet needs that can be appeased by commodified goods and experiences.”

of religion at the University of North Carolina, after five years of researching the spiritual lives of American teens, concluded that the faith of most teenagers, including those who attend evangelical churches, is MTD: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Smith explains:

“By ‘moralistic’ I mean being good

archaic Lord, who calls forth sacrifice, promises suffering in this life, and demands obedience for his glory, the one Barth described as “wholly other” is not what they have in mind. They’re thinking of the Jesus that adorns t-shirts and SUV tailgates.

The church does not exist to supply comfort, ease, and convenient

Has Christianity become a brand that we consume? Have we missed the point on what it means to live a life out of obedience and love while being a blessing to others? **Skye Jethani** discusses...

For consumers, fulfillment of desire is the highest good and final arbiter in making decisions – even deciding where to worship.

Tragically, consumerism has led us to commodify parts of God’s creation too. Sexuality, for example, is commodified through pornography and prostitution. Human life is commodified when we begin thinking a person has a right to live only when wanted.

In our society the only value something or someone has is the value I give it. It should surprise no one that in our culture God has no value apart from what he can do for me.

Christian Smith, a leading sociologist

and nice.... By ‘therapeutic’ I mean being primarily concerned with one’s own happiness in contrast to focusing on glorifying God, learning obedience, or serving others. Finally, by ‘deism’ I mean a view of God as normally distant and not involved in one’s life, except if one has a problem one needs God to solve. **In other words, God functions as the combination of a divine butler and cosmic therapist.**

Most teenagers hold this self-centered perception of God because it is the faith most American adults have as well. This god of consumerism shows no resemblance to the Consuming Fire described in Scripture. People may say they believe in Jesus, but the

services to religious consumers. And God is not a commodity that exists to make you feel better.

When we approach Christianity as consumers rather than seeing it as a comprehensive way of life, Christianity becomes just one more brand we consume along with Gap, Apple, and Starbucks to express our identity. And the demotion of Jesus Christ from Lord to label means that to live as a Christian no longer carries an expectation of obedience and good works, but rather the perpetual consumption of Christian merchandise and experiences – music, books, t-shirts, and jewellery.

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