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REVOLVE

CONSUMERISM, FAITH AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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1. Introduction

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The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Mark 13:22, NIV

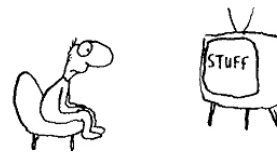
You can never get enough of what you don't really want.

Eric Holler

There is more stuff in the world than ever before.

Stuff you can touch.
Stuff you can think.
Stuff you can use and consume. Stuff you can know with all of your senses.

The growth of stuff is out of control. It is now being created by means of an unstoppable, exponential CHAIN REACTION.



Stuff has become a major threat to freedom and happiness. It destroys nature and peace. It steals time and space. It fouls beauty.

It is relentless, virulent, invasive and addictive. Stuff makes us exhausted and mad. There is too much stuff

The following common statements can be taken VERY seriously:—

"I'm stuffed."
and,

"The world is stuffed."



Leunig
used with permission

It is no insight to say with Leunig that "There is too much stuff". Indeed, 80% of Australians reckon their compatriots consume too much. That does not stop us wasting millions on goods we don't use, services we never needed and consumer products that, on the morning after, leave us unsatisfied. We still yearn for something with more depth, for a story that would give us something to live for, rather than something to buy.

Young people are particularly susceptible to the seductive abuse of consumerism, only having known a world where ads are ever-present, where brands signify acceptance or rejection and where banks fall over themselves to lend you the cash to participate in this divine ritual.

The Christian church is only just coming to terms with this rival for the hearts and minds of young people. Preoccupied with other foes, it has been blind-sided because, for the most part, the church has bought into the consumer circus holus-bolus.

This edition of Revolve seeks to sketch the contours of Australian consumerism and suggest a few ways forward for those seeking to be work with young people in a Christ-like way.

2. Why Study Consumerism?

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What does a Revolve paper on Consumerism seek to achieve? Will it be a sermon telling people not to enjoy themselves, to stop shopping?

No. What it attempts to do is show the effect of consumerism on young people in Australia and the consequences for Christians who work with young people.

The habits, attitudes and practices of consumerism have woven themselves so intricately into the life of young Australians that it is extremely difficult to see what is wrong with it. Almost every aspect of young people's lives is commercialised, press-ganged into service for the profit of corporations and their shareholders. Their fashions, hairstyles, phones, desires, insecurities, clothes, language, rebellious instincts...all these and more are used by corporations to make money.

So, what's the problem? We all have free will, and we can choose not to shop if we wish, can't we? The key problem, among others, is that consumerism is idolatry, a worldview that has colonised the hearts and minds of young people. Consumerism brings habits and practices to faith that result in faith being weak, shallow, and individualistic.

By studying the extent of the consumer mindset in Australian society, I hope that we who work with young people can recognise the damage that this idol is doing to young people, their wellbeing and their relationship to Jesus.

3. What is Consumerism?

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Consumerism is not simply 'consuming'. We all consume food, goods, products, services. Humans have always done this, and it is not a negative characteristic. In fact, it is an extremely positive one. It encourages relationship, hospitality and communication.

I. Consumerism is a way of life

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Consumerism, like all 'isms', is a *way of life*. This is a way of life based on consuming, a way of life centred on consuming, a way of life directed towards consuming. Consumers use the bulk of their energies and resources to consume all types of goods - housing, foods, clothes, services, holidays, experiences and dreams. Whether conscious or not, the consumerist's goal in life is to own or consume a set of desirable goods and services.

II. Consumerism is an identity-forming worldview

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Furthermore, consumerism is a worldview that shapes our identity. What is this worldview? At the most primitive level, it is "To have is to be". The consumerist's identity is formed by having and desiring goods and services. The goods and services they consume convey a desirable meaning for the consumer. For example, at the simplest level, certain clothes will convey a sense of being 'cool', or of wealth, or sophistication, or even a rejection on these values. "If I *have* this pair of shoes, I will *be* liked/cool/athletic/accepted/sexy/attractive/superior/counter-cultural".

III. Consumerism is a confusion of 'needs' and 'wants'

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At a more complex level, consumerists can work to achieve a "standard of living", or a collection of goods and services that they perceive is "necessary" to be a normal person. If it is perceived to be normal to own a house, 2 cars, air conditioner, entertainment system, go on an annual vacation to Bali and eat out twice a week then the consumerist will desire these consumer goods and services in order to be "normal". In this sense, the goods and services are necessary.

However, most of what we buy is not strictly necessary, because we have lost any meaningful sense of what is necessary, and of what is superfluous. Those who do not possess certain goods are perceived to be deviant or to be pitied: imagine living without a telephone or car. These goods have only been available to most people for the last 100 years (at the most), but to intentionally lack them is to invite scorn, incomprehension and derision.

IV. Consumerism is a never-ending quest

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Consumerism extends beyond simply "having" a good, service or experience. It extends to the search, the quest, the journey for those goods, services and experiences. Having is not enough - there is always another consumer product or experience to be had. There is always a more satisfying toothbrush, shoe, diet, holiday experience, electric tool. The fact that this process is never-ending means that, the actual product is not as important as the ongoing search.

Corporations are committed to encourage people to keep consuming, and manufacture desire for their products, even though the product may not be a necessity:

[Consumerism] promises something that will satisfy – perhaps related to pleasure or safety or fulfilment. The reality is, however, that those who use it to make money, rely on the fact it will not satisfy, in order to perpetuate its power over people.

Linda Harding

There is an entire industry devoted to this purpose. It is called marketing. As John Ralston Saul says:

Consumers are unreliable. The producer must constantly outguess them. This is risky and tiring...It is therefore more rational to simply decide what people should want, then tell them they need it, then sell it to them. This three-step process is called consumption. See: PROPAGANDA.

V. Hasn't consumerism always been with us?

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Haven't humans always been greedy? Haven't humans always used their ability to buy to display their superiority over others? Yes and yes.

But, before now, it has not been the case that such large swathes of humanity have been able to engage in consumerism. Consumerism requires large amounts of disposable income and a mentality that allows the spending of this income on non-necessary products.

In addition, before now, companies have not been able to advertise on a nationwide or global scale. Developments in satellite and internet technology have meant that companies can now easily spread their message to a massive audience.

V. Why is consumerism dominant?

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1. Television, the drug of a nation

One explanation is that exposure to television increases materialist desires on the part of viewers.¹ In the absence of a competing story, viewers' perception of reality begins to closely "mirror" that of television content.

"...as television viewing increases, an individual's consumption perceptions more closely reflect the 'reality' of the television world...contemporary television portrays and therefore reinforces the belief that material goods and opulence are a good thing." ²

However, this view of television viewing ignores any ability to criticise that a teenager may have. It tends to assume that teenagers' minds are so weak that they cannot think for themselves; TV simply fills up their empty brains.

The TV explanation does not explain why materialism and opulence are being portrayed on television as desirable.

2. Industry

- i. For most of human history, industry played a functional role. That is, it served human society by providing the goods and services that we needed.
- ii. However, since the Industrial Revolution, industry has become a good in itself. That is, it does not matter any more if a product serves a human need. It only matters that goods are being produced and bought.
- iii. If this is the case, then somehow people need to keep buying stuff. But how will people keep buying stuff if they already have what they need? This leads us to the next factor.

¹ The average Australian adolescent spends over 15 hours per week watching television.

² Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003

3. Marketing

We all have legitimate emotional and social needs: to belong, to have friends, to achieve, to experience happiness and pleasure, to be safe. Corporations use marketing to link these emotions with their product:

*One of the most powerful tools in the advertisers' armoury is the capacity to link margarine, soft drinks, jeans and cars with the kind of emotions most people like to feel.*³

In other words, to keep people buying stuff, companies create a need in the mind of the consumer. This is done through exploiting legitimate fears, insecurities and concerns that we all possess, and then presenting a product that will satisfy those fears, insecurities and concerns. The brutality of this method is unveiled when we realise that marketers are constantly promising satisfaction, but relying on our dissatisfaction so that we will never stop buying stuff.

4. Branding

This factor is related to marketing, but is more specific. Branding is about investing a logo with certain qualities and characteristics. If consumers can then be 'infected' with this logo and its associated qualities, then they will be more likely to buy the product.

For example, Diesel Jeans owner Renzo Rosso had this to say about the denim leg coverings he sells:

*We don't sell a product, we sell a style of life...The Diesel concept is everything. It's the way to live, it's the way to wear, it's the way to do something.*⁴

Corporations send out their brand in myriad ways. Television, radio and print advertising are only the most obvious and mundane. Concerts, political parties, product placement, billboards, mobile phone ring-tones, educational sponsorship, contributions to community projects, text messages, clothing, websites, graffiti, sponsorship of celebrities, sportspeople and political parties...all these are ways that the corporation sends out the virus of its brand into the world.

5. Individualism

This may be a "chicken or the egg" factor, but individualism is a major driver of consumerism. Our obsession with creating our own meaning and identity finds its economic partner in consumerism. Through consuming goods and services we can create an identity of our own choosing...if we have the disposable income to do so.

Therefore, consumerism is a way of creating identity that does not require deep soul-searching or self-understanding. Purchasing products replaces introspection and reflection.

6. Environmental factors

These are social and technological changes that play a role. These include:

- Easy availability of credit
- Increased opportunities to buy: shopping complexes, internet
- Debt - Generation Ys have been accustomed to a world where debt is used, rather than savings, to finance non-necessary goods and services.⁵
- Advances in communication technology (satellite, internet, mobile technology) which makes advertising more accessible to the consumer.

³ Hamilton & Dennis, 2005

⁴ Klein, 2001

⁵ Bakewell and Mitchell, 2003

4. Consumerism Demographics in Australia

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80% of Australians believe most Australians consume too much, across age and income groups. That is, Australians are extremely concerned about the consumerist approach to life of *other* Australians.

I. Income

- 93% of Australians see themselves as middle-class
- 6.4% of Australians see themselves in the bottom income bracket
- 0.7% of Australians see themselves in the top income bracket
- Nearly two-thirds of Australians say that do not have enough money to buy what they really need
- 46% of the richest 20% of Australian households believe they cannot afford everything they need.

These statistics show that Australians have a warped perception of their basic needs. When almost half of the richest households believe they cannot pay for their needs, the idea of what is 'needed' is confused with what is 'wanted'.

II. Spending

- 56% of Australians believe they spend almost all their income on *basic* necessities
- Expenditure on imported consumer goods rose by 60% between 2000 & 2004.
- Australians spend about \$10.5 billion on goods we do not use: food and drink; appliances; exercise equipment; memberships (in 2004, Australians spent about \$500m on gym memberships that were never or hardly used).
- Tweens (ages 8-14 yo) control US\$1.18 trillion per year
- In 80% of all brand choices in family spending, tweens control the final decision
- In 60% of all decisions about which car to buy, tweens control the final decision
- Spending on mobile phones rose by 183% between 1999 and 2004. ⁶

III. Debt

- Personal debt doubled between 2001 and 2004, and quadrupled between 1996 and 2004. Young people have never known a society where debt was strictly controlled.
- Average floor area of a new house increased from 170 sq m to 221 sq m between 1985 and 2000.
- In 1955, house population was 3.6 people, in 2000 it was 2.6.

IV. Branding

- An average child in the USA, Australia and UK sees between 20-40,000 commercials a year
- 60% of children spend more time watching television than in school
- Children as young as 3 recognise brand logos

⁶ ABS, 2004

5. Consumerism & Teenagers

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I. The Invasion of Commercialism

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As mentioned in the introduction, every aspect of young people's lives has been press-ganged into the service of profit. Romance, youthful rebellion, fashion statements, gossip, communication, education - all of these are fodder for corporations, who package young people's yearnings and sell it to them. Because of this, young people are prone to approaching most of life with a consumerist attitude.

The most obvious demonstration of this is a desire to be like "successful people": the rich, celebrities, and those corporations hold up as role models. In its extreme form, this can take the form of cosmetic surgery. Less harmful manifestations are seen in conformity in terms of clothing, accessories, language, hairstyle and leisure activities.

II. Decreased Wellbeing

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It is fairly clear that consumerism encourages a focus on attaining status and identity through the purchasing of goods and services. This is an "extrinsic" motivation. That is, something external to yourself is needed for satisfaction:

People for whom "extrinsic goals" such as fame, fortune and glamour are a priority in life tend to experience more anxiety and depression and lower overall wellbeing...than people oriented towards "intrinsic goals" of close relationships, personal growth and self-understanding, and contributing to the community. In short, the more materialistic people are, the poorer their quality of life.⁷

Why is this? Why shouldn't the consumption of material goods bring wellbeing? The answer is that if a person has no internal values, then their values will be determined by marketers, who are concerned not with the satisfaction of legitimate needs but with constantly dissatisfying consumers so that they will buy more products. Consumers must continually consume to meet their fears, ever reaching for new highs, new experiences and new products that will satisfy them.

Without an evolved framework of ethical values the pursuit of material acquisitions (and the status of these acquisitions) ultimately fails expectations.⁸

In addition, there are other, indirect stresses, on teenagers. Their families may experience high levels of debt and associated anxiety because of the pressure to "keep up with the Jones'". One example of this is "mortgage stress", where families feel under financial strain because of house repayments:

[Mortgage stress] is not due to mortgage rates increasing or decreasing incomes, but by families borrowing money to fund other pursuits which are seen as necessary for the "good life"...interstate or overseas holidays, a second car, expensive presents.⁹

III. An Abusive Story

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Consumerism encourages people to find belonging and meaning within a story whose elements are entirely arranged to convince us to buy a product. Such a story is thin at best, abusive at worst.

This is the most insidious effect of consumerism on young people, and one that has profound consequences for mission. We have said that consumerism is a worldview that shapes identity. Another way of saying this is that consumerism gives consumers the resources to tell a story about ourselves - this story drives our identity, and gives meaning to the events in our lives.

We all tell ourselves stories in order to give meaning to our lives. To tell these stories we need "fictive resources". As a novel has characters, locations and themes, so we need values, anecdotes, beliefs and past actions to create a story for ourselves. For Christians, these "fictive resources" primarily come from the Bible, our community of faith, the Holy Spirit and our reason. They will also come from our families, friends and the culture around us.

⁷ Eckersley et al, 2006

⁸ Hallam et al, 2006

⁹ Hamilton & Denniss, 2005

Consumerism provides fictive resources through marketing. It gives us disjointed, shallow and disconnected images, ideas and values in order to persuade us to buy something. It only gives the fictive resources that enable the consumer to buy into the story of consumerism. For example, a television ad for a fast-food company only communicates fragments of information about the fast-food experience - the price, brand and a glimpse of how happy you will be if you eat there. However, the company withholds any information that could deter a potential consumer. It does not communicate information about the environmental cost of the food, its nutritional value, how much it pays its employees, other (more destructive) industries that the company has a financial interest in or whether it has displaced local fast-food outlets.

However, consumerism only wants us to have a story in which we are happy to keep buying products. Consumerism has no interest in giving teenagers fictive resources to tell a life-story of depth and significance.¹⁰

IV. Branding & Idolatry

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What is important for Australia's youth is authentically representing themselves to their peers, and brands can provide them with the opportunity to do this.¹¹

In other words, young people use brands to create the identity that they wish to present to the world. This is accomplished through purchasing products in the fields of music, sport, fashion, entertainment and travel. When discussing branding, probably the most obvious field is clothing. I have placed 'branding' with 'idolatry' because young people's attachment to brands is a form of idol-worship.

Idolatry is a two-way street. The idol is worshipped to gain something for the worshipper; in the case of the young person, acceptance or coolness. But the idol also 'uses' the worshipper, by demanding tribute so that bad things will not happen; in the case of the young person, a commitment to purchase the brand is demanded to ward off peer rejection or being seen as 'uncool'.

Ultimately, idolatry is abusive because the worshipper must keep giving to the idol to receive what the idol can never give.

¹⁰ Collis, 1999

¹¹ The Age, 2005

6. Hidden effects of consumerism

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As mentioned above in 4, III, consumerism tells an abusive story. It only gives us information that will convince us to purchase a product. This is not only abusive to us as the consumer, but to others, and the earth.

In "Consuming Faith", Tom Beaudoin describes how he investigated how and where his favourite coffee and shoes were produced. He was able to discover a few disturbing facts, such as exploitative wages and the relocation of production to cheaper countries. However, he could not find out much:

Many companies go to extraordinary length to mislead the public about the production of their goods, or to keep consumers (and the press) in the dark about the who, what, when, where, how and why of brand production.

One of the reasons for our lack of knowledge about the products that we wear, eat and enjoy, is that we only ask certain types of questions when considering a purchase. The consumer economy only encourages us to ask a limited range of questions. In Figure 1, points (i) to (ii) are the questions we usually ask; (iii) to (v) are rarely asked. I have used the example of a bottle of milk to illustrate this.¹²

ELEMENTS OF PRODUCT	GEOGRAPHY OF BOTTLE OF MILK	QUESTIONS TO ASK
i. Consumption	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we afford the milk? • Is it good for us, or the earth? • Why do we want it or 'need' it?
ii. Distribution; Marketing	Supermarket; advertisement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the milk packaged? • To whom is the marketing targeted? Why? • How is the milk distributed?
iii. Production	Dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the working conditions just? • How is the milk bottled?
iv. Resource extraction	Cows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location the milk comes from? • Who owns the cows? • How are the bottles produced? • Is the resource extraction sustainable?
v. Capital	Bank/Corporate office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has invested capital in this business? • How was this money 'created'? • How much profit will the owners gain?

Figure 1 - Elements of a product.

Most of us do not ask questions below the thick line. It would take a fair amount of time and energy to answer these questions, which works to the advantage of corporations who do not wish these questions to be asked.

...the modest task of tracing the genealogy of one common product can open our eyes to both the complexity and obfuscation of the 'real' economic world.

Ched Myers

obfuscation
the activity of
obscuring people's
understanding

Behind the easy purchasing of a product, are the hard questions of justice and fairness, so central to the gospel. Consumerism convinces us that we need not address these questions, that our individual desires are justification enough for our purchases.

¹² Meyers, 1994

7. Consumerism & Christianity

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Your branding needs to reflect trust, it needs to sell a spirit and needs to reflect a bigger picture...Pokemon, Ninja Turtles and Harry Potter - they have all succeeded in such a way that they almost become a "mini-religion"...a belief the tweens could admire.

Marketing article

...the major threat to the viability of our faith is that of consumerism. This is a far more heinous and insidious challenge to the gospel because in so many ways it infects each and every one of us.

Alan Hirsch

The central concern about consumerism and Christianity is not that consuming goods and services is evil. It is that consumerism teaches us to approach *everything*, including faith, as an object to be consumed. The habits and attitudes of consumerism are applied to every sphere of life, including our faith.

What happens when the habits of consumerism are applied to faith?

I. Marketable faith

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The Christian media world often uses similar marketing techniques to the secular world. Buy this youth bible, WWJD wristband, Christian music CD, go to this conference, get the tapes of this speaker, run this packaged workshop at your church (eg. Drug-proof your kids; Alpha; Purpose-driven life). The underlying message is that by purchasing these products, the problems of our church will be solved.

While these products have some spiritual value, the church becomes a mirror image of the world. The content may be different (Christian lyrics vs. non-Christian lyrics) but the method of engagement is the same (buy product = improve life).

II. Opiate of the masses

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Christianity is a religion of disruption and interruption of the "way things are". Jesus is continually overturning expectations, crossing boundaries and upsetting the influential. Predictably, many people reject his message.

When the habits of consumerism are applied to Christianity, all images and stories are emptied of anything offensive, so as to make them more attractive to the consumer. Think of how many people wear a cross. Parts of the gospel that are demanding are down-played or forgotten in order to make our "product" attractive to prospective "buyers". Who has ever heard an evangelistic message calling people to "take up their cross"?

When this happens, religion loses its transforming value, and is no threat to a life of consumerism. Instead:

It supplies the veneer of meaning and conviction of which modern existence so often deprives us, without disrupting the underlying form of our lives - our obligation to consume.

Vincent Miller

III. Individualistic and privatised

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Christianity is a story, in which each element of the story strengthens the others, and only makes sense in relation to the other elements. For example, the Cross only makes sense in relation to Jesus' life, and Jesus' life only makes sense in light of the Old Testament. Consumerism encourages people to choose what *they* consider attractive and desirable. But as we have discussed, our idea of what we need is shaped by the world of multi-billion dollar marketing campaigns.

Christianity is also a *communal* story, but consumer habits work against a collective faith, because they prioritise *individual* and *private* concerns. In my everyday life, I am used to buying what I want, without thinking of others. Why should I change that attitude when it comes to faith?

IV. It's all about ME!

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One of the most alluring religious appeals of consumerism is that it offers us a new immediacy, a living alternative to what Heaven has always stood for in the Judeo-Christian tradition - the fulfilment of all our longings.

Mark Sayers

Christian Smith, an American researcher, described the approach of American teenagers to religion as "moralistic therapeutic deism." That is:

Many young people have the idea that God is there for us, rather than we being there for God... God looks after us in threatening situations and can be called on when we have particular need... young people are aware that religion contains moral expectations. On the other hand, religion is mostly about "feeling good" about life.

Phillip Hughes

In consumerism, the needs of the individual are paramount, even if those needs are false, manipulated by marketing. Christianity becomes primarily a fulfilment of the individual's need to enjoy life and experience pleasure, rather than a way of life that calls us to live for others, not ourselves.

V. Cheap & shallow

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Consumerism teaches us that we can reach across racial boundaries not by meeting someone from a different culture, but by eating Thai. It teaches us that we can rebel by wearing a Che Guevara T-Shirt.

When these habits are applied to Christianity, faith becomes cheap and shallow. We can become spiritual by reading books by spiritual masters. Theological prowess is gained by listening to some tapes of a famous speaker. Involvement in campaigns for justice is achieved through buying a wristband. Connection with others is achieved by taking part in a praise and worship service.

All of these things have value, but they are peripheral to the central tasks of discipleship: prayer, biblical reflection, living out the kingdom of God. These tasks require time and energy far beyond consumerist participation.

8. How do we do mission in a consumerist world?

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*Perhaps the greatest question
facing the emerging church
is how to integrate spiritual tourism
with the notion of redemptive community...*

*How do we create communities
that are open enough to welcome the tourist,
yet orthodox enough to remain grounded
in the triune God?*

Steve Taylor

The world of teenagers is saturated with images, symbols and messages that are all designed to seduce them into the idolatry of consumerism. Consumerism has become a religious quest: it is a search for satisfaction amongst things that can never satisfy. Despite that fact, most teenagers are sold-out to the message that consumerism broadcasts.

What does Christian work with young people look like in such an environment?

I. A selfless life

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Young people need to see an alternative to consumerism. Words are not enough, because the world of images and advertising is too seductive to be fought against using words. The most effective communication of an alternative is a selfless life.

The life of consumerism is deeply and profoundly self-centred, even when the content of consumption seems other-oriented. For example, I buy fair-trade coffee because I want to support justice for poor farmers in the Third World. However, as yet, I have not participated in any other action to ensure those farmers get a fair deal. My "political action" is limited to "buying stuff".

Because the life of consumerism is deeply self-centred, the only counter to it is a life that is self-less. A selfless life does not make sense in the world of consumerism. In order for young people to follow Jesus, rather than brands, they need to have models that they can follow.

II. Responsible consumerism

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It is obviously not possible to refuse *all* consumption in our world. However, it is possible to consume responsibly and ethically. By attempting to discover the "hidden story" of consumer products, we can begin to cut through the fog that corporations love us to be in.

III. Theological Re-Membering

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Consumerism only tells the parts of the story that are useful for making money, and this can happen to the biblical story as well. Challenging or demanding biblical passages can be left out in order to make faith more 'attractive' to those with a consumer mindset.

It is important that we find ways of "re-membering" the story of the Bible. By re-membering I mean the opposite of dismembering, which is to 'take apart.' Re-membering the Bible means reading it in such a way that each part is connected to the whole, and that challenging passages are not simply ignored.

Communication during evangelism and discipleship must not fail to connect different stories to each other, so that young people see that Christian faith is participation in a coherent story, and not about choosing attractive parts that suit their preferences.

IV. Spiritual Disciplines & Mentoring

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It is difficult for anyone, including young people, to resist the seductive call of consumerism. It is essential that young people are confident in their relationship to Jesus, rather than their loyalty to brands or styles. But, in order to sustain their relationship to Jesus, they need to engage in spiritual disciplines and be mentored.

9. Practical Steps

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Here are a few ways to start tackling the issue of consumerism. These could be used for your own learning or for use with young people. However, consumerism teaches us to dip shallowly into all waters, even those that flow against consumerism. Go deeper.

I. Product Investigation

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1. Choose your favourite product, preferably one that you buy regularly. This might be a drink, food, brand of clothing or leisure experience.
2. Investigate how the product was made and how it got to you. Use the questions in Figure 1 (above, "Hidden Effects of Consumerism) as a model.
 - Call the company for information: ask them about where the product was made, how much the workers are paid, working conditions, where the materials for the product were obtained from.
 - Be persistent: most companies will not be willing to give out this information.
3. Decide whether you will still keep buying the product, considering what you've found.

II. Consume Ethically

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1. Clothing - only buy brands that have signed the Homeworkers Code of Practice, which means they guarantee that sweatshop labour has not been used to produce the clothing - <http://www.fairwear.org.au>
2. Other products - find out about the human and environmental impact of the products you buy.

III. Educational Activities

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- "Spending Big" - <http://www.tear.org.au/resources/incite>
- "Living Simply" - http://www.tear.org.au/resources/living_simple/index.shtml
- Buy Nothing Day - designate a day for your youth group or church, and buy nothing on that day. Catch up later to discuss your experiences.
- Guest speaker - ask a speaker to talk to your group on sweatshop labour - <http://www.fairwear.org.au>
- Lenten fast - use Lent as a time to fast from a product or brand that you are particularly tied to.

10. Selected References

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