

1-1-2008

Consumer Theology: Its Causes, Effects, and Solution

R. Douglas Bailey

George Fox University, doug@saalemfirst.com

This research is a product of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Bailey, R. Douglas, "Consumer Theology: Its Causes, Effects, and Solution" (2008). *Doctor of Ministry*. Paper 178.
<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/178>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CONSUMER THEOLOGY: ITS CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND SOLUTION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
R. DOUGLAS BAILEY

NEWBERG, OREGON

JANUARY 2008

Copyright © 2008 by R. Douglas Bailey

All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Passages from the HOLY BIBLE, TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® are copyright © 2006 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

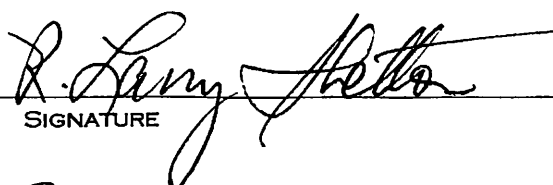
R. DOUGLAS BAILEY

DATE: MARCH 4, 2008

TITLE:

**CONSUMER THEOLOGY:
ITS CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND SOLUTION**

***WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION DEGREE***


SIGNATURE

3-4-2008
DATE


SIGNATURE

3-4-2008
DATE



**GEORGE FOX
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is the culmination of many years of study and experience and, while it bears only my name, it would not be possible without the assistance and encouragement of a host of others. I would like to thank the faculty and staff of George Fox Evangelical Seminary, especially my advisor, Dr. Larry Shelton, for his many hours of encouragement and input. My thanks also to Dr. Laura Simmons who helped edit the manuscript into its proper form.

Thanks also to the other members of cohort G. I enjoyed the hundreds of hours we spent together in class, online, and on retreat. Your friendship, help, and encouragement are greatly appreciated.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the people of the Salem First Free Methodist Church. Without your graciousness in allowing me the time to pursue this degree and project, as well as your encouragement, I could have never have completed so daunting a task.

However, my deepest thanks is reserved for my family, and especially my wife, Linda. She acted not only as the primary reader for each chapter but, more importantly, as my biggest supporter and encourager. And not only for this program, but since we met at age sixteen in 1970. I love you, Linda. Through you the Lord is helping me to be what he created me to be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF CONSUMER THEOLOGY.....	1
Personal Narrative.....	1
Description of our Consumer Society.....	4
From a Society of Consumers to a Consumer Society: A Brief History.....	6
Some Negative Effects of Consumerism.....	9
Loss of Personal Satisfaction and Happiness.....	12
Weakened Connections and Relationships.....	13
Creation of Radical Individualism and the Customer Metaphor.....	15
Description of Consumer Theology.....	17
Thesis and Project Overview.....	18
CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL MATERIALS RELATING TO CONSUMER THEOLOGY.....	21
Biblical Warnings Against Materialism and Consumerism.....	22
Consumer Theology in the Old Testament.....	27
Rejection of Consumer Theology in the Ministry of Jesus.....	35
The Atonement and Consumer Theology.....	41
Chapter Summary.....	50
CHAPTER THREE: CONSUMER THEOLOGY IN CHURCH HISTORY.....	51
Consumer Theology in the Early Church.....	51
Rise of Institutionalized Consumer Theology.....	53
Rise of Scholasticism.....	54

Scholasticism's Contribution to Medieval Consumer Theology.....	55
Reactions Against Medieval Consumer Theology.....	59
John Hus.....	60
Martin Luther.....	61
The Reformation's Role in Modern Consumer Theology.....	64
The Priesthood of all Believers.....	65
A Blessing on the Practice of Business.....	66
The Protestant Work Ethic.....	71
The Foundation of Radical Individualism.....	74
Chapter Summary.....	77
CHAPTER FOUR: CONSUMER THEOLOGY IN THE MODERN CHURCH.....	79
Causes of Modern Consumer Theology: Cultural Influence.....	80
Causes of Modern Consumer Theology: Evangelistic Techniques.....	85
Causes of Modern Consumer Theology: Church Marketing.....	87
Results of Consumer Theology: Shallow Spirituality.....	94
Results of Consumer Theology: Decrease in Evangelism.....	96
Results of Consumer Theology: Decline of Community.....	98
Results of Consumer Theology: Clergy Burnout.....	100
Chapter Summary.....	103
CHAPTER FIVE: SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS THE CORRECTIVE FOR CONSUMER THEOLOGY.....	105
Description of Spiritual Formation.....	105
Spiritual Formation is a Process.....	107

Spiritual Formation is Led by the Spirit.....	109
Spiritual Formation is the Transformation of the Inner Self.....	111
Spiritual Formation is Patterned After Jesus.....	112
Spiritual Formation Results in Holistic Integration.....	114
The Mechanics of Spiritual Formation.....	116
The Difference Between Spiritual Pathways and Disciplines.....	118
Pathways of Spiritual Formation.....	119
Disciplines of Spiritual Formation.....	121
The Importance of Community for Genuine Spiritual Formation.....	123
Essential Elements That Address Consumer Theology.....	125
Anticipated Results of an Emphasis on Spiritual Formation.....	127
Chapter Summary.....	130
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLEMENTATION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN AN ESTABLISHED CHURCH.....	131
Summary of Previous Chapters.....	131
Steps to Spiritual Formation in an Established Church.....	134
Step One: Honest Evaluation.....	135
Step Two: Preparation of the Pastor.....	138
Step Three: Building a Guiding Coalition.....	141
Step Four: Creating a Sense of Urgency.....	143
Step Five: Casting the Vision.....	145
Step Six: Implementing Change.....	147
Some Final Thoughts.....	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	151

ABSTRACT

This paper claims that consumerism has permeated our culture so completely as to affect the church as well, creating a consumer theology. The thesis of this paper is that spiritual formation, properly understood and implemented in an established church, is the corrective for the harmful effects of consumer theology.

Chapter 1 traces the rise of consumerism in America, noting its harmful effects on society. This chapter also introduces consumer theology, claiming that it is characterized by a commodification of the Holy; churches' becoming vendors of religious goods and services; a radical individualism; and a sense of entitlement among congregants.

Chapter 2 examines biblical and theological materials to show that consumer theology has been evident throughout all of God's recorded salvation history, and to demonstrate that God has resisted every human effort to turn him into a commodity to own and use.

Looking at materials dealing with church history, chapter 3 demonstrates that consumer theology, while confronted by the early church, was fully embraced by the medieval church. The claim is that, at least to some extent, the Protestant Reformation was a reaction against the consumer theology of the day.

Chapter 4 presents the causes of consumer theology in the modern church, claiming that the predominant culture, recent evangelistic techniques, and church marketing have all contributed to the rise of modern consumer theology. This chapter also describes some of the harmful effects of consumer theology in the church today.

Chapter 5 examines the claims of spiritual formation. This chapter describes the key elements of spiritual formation, noting the difference between spiritual pathways and disciplines, and presents spiritual formation as the corrective for consumer theology.

In addition to summarizing the findings of this paper, chapter 6 also presents essential steps for the implementation of an emphasis of spiritual formation in established churches.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction of Consumer Theology

Personal Narrative

I hung up the phone with a strange feeling of unease, and I didn't know exactly why. Several minutes earlier my secretary had called through the intercom and told me there was someone on line one who wished to speak with me. Upon answering, I was greeted by a cheerful male voice.

"Hello, pastor. My family and I are not very happy with the church we attend and so we're checking around. What can your church offer me and my family?"

We talked for several minutes as I described all the programs that we offered. I asked the usual questions about the ages and interests of family members and attempted to show him that we were indeed the kind of church that could meet the needs of his young and growing family. As we finished the conversation he thanked me for my time, but he also told me he was calling several other churches in the area to see what they had to offer. He did indicate that he and his family might soon come and "try us out."

While the conversation was friendly, as I said, it left me with a strange feeling. There was something vaguely familiar about the tone of the conversation. It wasn't because this was the first time I had received such a call. I had had conversations like this on several other occasions. Indeed, these types of conversations seemed to be happening with a growing frequency. There was some other reason for my unease, something hidden deep within my memory.

Then it struck me! It all came rushing back. I had used the same tone during the conversation I once used to sell cleaning supplies door-to-door. In my teenage years, unable

to find work even in the fast-food industry, I became a salesman for the Fuller Brush company. Every afternoon I would put together my demonstration cart and move from house to house, knocking on doors and excitedly explaining the superiority of the Fuller Brush line of products to any and all who would listen. As I recall, I actually made more than a little money at it.

For the last thirty years, however, I have been something else. I have been a pastor. During my education, I had been taught several words to describe the role of the pastor in the modern church. I knew that as a pastor I would be a leader, a shepherd, a counselor, and at times even a prophet. But salesman and marketer were never in the equation. Yet here I am, thirty years later, feeling forced into a role I never bargained for.

When I began my pastoral career in the late 1970s, there seemed to be one main reason people attended my church, and it certainly wasn't me! In my denomination the average pastor moved every two years, seven months. Pastors were like the old saying about the weather: if you're not happy, wait a little while; it will change. No, people didn't stay because of me; they stayed simply because it was their church. It was their denomination, their fellowship, their friends; it was their family, so they stayed.

In my experience, somewhere during the 80s and 90s that began to change. Attendance and commitment became more fluid. As it turns out, my experience was not uncommon at all. According to research, in 1958 only 4 out of 100 people surveyed had left the denomination in which they had been raised. By 1984, the figure was 33 out of 100.¹ Something had indeed changed, and it was having a dramatic impact on the church.

¹ James G. Hutton, *The Feel-Good Society: How The "Customer" Metaphor Is Undermining American Education, Religion, Media and Healthcare* (West Patterson, NJ: Pentagram Publishing, 2005), 69.

In the early years of my ministry I couldn't blow people out of the church with a stick of dynamite (a jesting fantasy I harbored for a few). Now people seem willing to leave over almost anything. I have had people leave because the music was too loud and others because it wasn't loud enough. One family left because the youth program didn't quite meet the needs of their teenager. They wound up at one of the larger churches with more staff and more polish. Another family left because of a play that had recently been performed in our sanctuary. After over a decade of participation, they moved to another church that was more "comfortable."

Not long ago I had occasion to walk through one of the larger church buildings in my community. I noticed the multiple staff, the professionally decorated entry and sanctuary. I read in their bulletin about the many and varied programs this wonderful church provided. I left wondering how I could ever hope to compete with this church. But exactly when did they become my competitor? Something has indeed changed.

Quite frankly, what has changed is that the predominant culture has thoroughly invaded the church. The appetite for consumption in the West is devouring "...not just the products of capitalism but just about everything else, including the church."² Our consumer-oriented culture has produced consumer-oriented Christians.

I come from a holiness background. My denomination called us to be constantly alert lest the evils of society should pollute our lives and churches. So we abstained from drinking and smoking. We didn't dance or go to movies. There was no way we were going to allow the fallen culture to influence us. How naïve we were. While we ceaselessly

² Craig Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz, eds., *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 135.

guarded against the social evils, we bought in and then brought in the thing that would begin to undermine the very fabric of our community: consumerism.

Description of Our Consumer Society

That we live in a consumer society is without debate. Approximately one-fifth of the world's population now lives in societies characterized by "...diets of highly processed food, desire for bigger houses, more and bigger cars, higher levels of debt, and lifestyles devoted to the accumulation of non-essential goods."³ Consumerism includes not only a lifestyle of excess consumption but also a "...set of attitudes and values, preached twenty-four hours a day, that reinforces this lifestyle."⁴

It should be pointed out that consumption in and of itself is not bad; in fact, it's necessary. All of us need food, clothing, and basic shelter, and so, according to author Rodney Clapp, we are all "...blameless and glorious consumers."⁵ He goes on to point out, however, that in a consumer culture the problem is not "...consuming to live but living to consume."⁶

In America we have turned consumption into the primary focus of our society. Factories consistently increase efficiency in order to produce more products. Marketing firms are continually developing new and better techniques to entice millions of eager consum-

³ Hillary Mayell, "As Consumerism Spreads, Earth Suffers, Study Says," *National Geographic.com*, 2004, http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/01/0111_040112_consumerism.html (accessed July 5, 2007).

⁴ Jay McDaniel, *Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 13.

⁵ Rodney Clapp, "Why the Devil Takes Visa: A Christian Response to the Triumph of Consumerism," *Christianity Today* 40 (1996): 19.

⁶ Ibid.

ers. Indeed, we have become so adept at consumption that many homes are not large enough to warehouse all that we buy, thereby creating the industry of remote storage. This in spite of the fact that the average sized home has more than doubled since the 1950s.⁷ Most American homes are so full of the evidence of rampant consumerism that Steven Miles has jokingly referred to them as "...temples to the religion of consumerism."⁸

For Jay McDaniel, however, this is no jest. He believes that the culture of consumerism has now given way to consumerism as an actual religion. Indeed, for McDaniel, it is now the predominant religion in America. He writes:

Consumerism is a religion in the sense that Confucianism is a religion. Just as Confucianism is a set of attitudes and values that once shaped so many East Asian cultures, so consumerism is a set of attitudes and values that now shape all cultures. The attitudes of Confucianism include an emphasis on the primacy of the family, the importance of respecting elders, and the value of tradition. Analogously, the attitudes of consumerism include an emphasis on the primacy of the individual, the importance of staying young, and the value of newness. Both religions give people a sense of what life is about.⁹

He goes on to note that the religion of consumerism offers salvation through "...appearance, affluence, and marketable achievement,"¹⁰ noting that when we believe ourselves to be successful and attractive to others, we feel "saved, or made whole."¹¹ According to McDaniel, the religion of consumerism even has its own creeds: "bigger is better, more is

⁷ Margot Adler, "Behind the Ever-Expanding American Dream House," *NPR.org*, 2007, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5525283> (accessed July 30, 2007).

⁸ Steven Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 1.

⁹ McDaniel, *Living from the Center*, 70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

better, new is better, you can have it all.”¹² Sallie McFague would agree, noting that “the goal of the new religion is happiness.”¹³

From a Society of Consumers to a Consumer Society: A Brief History

Whether or not consumerism has indeed risen to the level of religion in America, there is no doubt that it is pervasive, touching most areas of our lives. It would do well at this point to briefly examine the history of the rise of consumerism here in the West.

The basic seeds of modern consumerism were sown centuries ago through movements such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment. The Reformation’s contribution to the creation of the radical individualism so necessary for modern consumerism will be explored in chapter 3. For now, suffice it to say that while there have always been consumers, consumerism as we know it today is a relatively recent development. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century to be a consumer carried with it a negative connotation. In *Johnson’s Dictionary*, published in 1836, the word ‘consume’ was defined as “to waste, to destroy” and therefore a consumer was defined as “one who destroys.”¹⁴

While studying the rise of capitalism, sociologist Max Weber noted that prior to the twentieth century, traditionalism stood opposed to capitalism. He found that when peasants were offered piece work as an incentive to produce more and thereby increase their income, they most often chose instead to do only as much work as they needed to in order to meet their basic needs. This led him to conclude that “...man does not ‘by nature’ wish

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 83.

¹⁴ Samuel Johnson, “Johnson’s Dictionary” (Boston: Charles J. Hendee, 1836), 77.

to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for the purpose.”¹⁵ In other words, prior to the twentieth century, people tended to earn the money they needed and then went home. There is, in the work of Weber, a point salient to the thesis of this paper: consumers are made, not born.

It was during the early eighteenth century that, according to Steven Miles, the seeds of consumerism began to take root as fashion and not just durability became important in the goods people sought and also as people were crowded into towns and cities, thereby exposing them to more consumer goods.¹⁶

The driving event that propelled western society to embrace consumerism was the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization yielded two major developments. First was the rise of factories capable of producing products in quantities unknown before this time. The result was that at the close of the century there were more products being made than could be consumed.

The ability to overproduce gave rise to the second development that has created the consumer culture: marketing. With more products available than consumers, people had to be convinced that they somehow needed more. In addition, with the ability to create in abundance new products hitherto unknown, people had to be convinced that they now somehow needed things that had not even existed prior to this. Thus, in the early years of the 20th century, notes Clapp, “...advertising was used by Colgate to teach people who had never heard of toothpaste that they should brush their teeth daily. King Gillette, inventor of the disposable razor, coaxed men to shave daily and to do it themselves, not see

¹⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 60.

¹⁶ Miles, *Consumerism*, 6.

a barber.”¹⁷ Even the manufacturers of pancake syrup saw the potential of marketing. Up to this time syrup was used almost exclusively in the winter months. However, in 1919, the sales manager for Domino Gold Syrup announced: “Our belief is that the entire year is syrup season and the public must be educated to see this as a fact.”¹⁸ This is another example of the idea that consumers are made and not born.

If the late 19th century gave birth to consumerism, it came of age in the last half of the 20th. After World War II, increased efficiency reduced prices, allowing workers not only to provide for the basic needs of their families, but to purchase luxury items like televisions, as well.¹⁹ What occurred was not only a dramatic shift in the standard of living, but also in attitude, as epitomized in 1955 by retail analyst Victor Lebow: “Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption.... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.”²⁰

The radically shifting attitudes can be seen everywhere. In a 1966 survey, when allowed to identify multiple reasons for attending college, 82% of students indicated that one main reason they sought higher education was to find a meaningful life philosophy, while only 42% indicated a desire to increase personal wealth. By 1992, those numbers had almost exactly reversed.²¹

¹⁷ Clapp, “Why the Devil...,” 25.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Miles, *Consumerism*, 8.

²⁰ Victor Lebow, “Price Competition in 1955,” *The Journal of Retailing* 31, no. 1 (1955): 7.

²¹ David G. Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 32.

Our concept of “basic needs” has also undergone a radical shift. According to researcher Juliet Schor, people now claim to “need” air-conditioned cars and houses as well as microwaves and home computers, items unheard of only a generation ago.²² According to her research, in the years between 1975 and 1991, when asked about the requirements for “The Good Life,” the percentage of people identifying vacation homes, swimming pools , and “a lot of money” as necessary elements increased dramatically. During that same time, however, the percentage of those identifying a happy marriage, children, or an interesting job as necessary elements of the good life actually went down.²³

Another indication of the growing shift in attitude in the latter part of the last century was the mandate from President Kennedy to his Consumer Advisory Board to outline the role the government should have in the growing consumer culture. The result was a Consumer Bill of Rights.²⁴ As noble as this was, according to Dr. James Hutton, the government’s focus soon helped to make consumerism almost synonymous with patriotism.²⁵

The Negative Effects of Consumerism

While the consumer culture has managed to create the highest economic standard of living yet experienced in human history, many scientists, theologians, psychologists, and sociologists have recently begun to question its effects. Even the average consumer

²² Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 15.

²³ Ibid., 16.

²⁴ A simple Google search on the phrase “Consumer Bill of Rights” will show dozens of industries, from health care to funeral homes, that have adopted their own versions of this idea.

²⁵ Hutton, *Feel-Good Society*, 20.

seems to be having second thoughts. By the late 20th century, over 75% of Americans surveyed agreed that the country had become too materialistic.²⁶

Rampant consumerism, such as that which sustains our economy, comes at a very high price both to society and to the individual. Two consequences that will be mentioned but not fully developed in this paper pertain to the effects of the consumer culture on the environment and the world's poor. According to researchers, it is not possible to sustain our current level of consumption and still bring prosperity to underdeveloped countries. It is estimated that it would take five planets the size of earth to provide the resources for everyone to live as we do.²⁷ The simple truth is that for the standard of living in consumer cultures to remain high, the standard of living in developing countries must remain low. In studying consumerism's effects, Harvey Cox has noted that "...as we begin the twenty-first century, in Central America as well as in Africa the 'quality of life' levels today are lower than those experienced by the indigenous peoples of Central America and Africa five hundred years ago."²⁸ It is situations such as this that have led some to define consumerism as "...the gratification of individuals competing for scarce commodities."²⁹ As important as the issues of the environment and the world's poor are, it is really the social and personal effects of our consumer culture that are the main focus of this paper.

²⁶ Schor, *The Overspent American*, 113.

²⁷ Valerie Weaver-Zercher, "Enough Already: Resisting Consumer Mania," *Christian Century* 124, no. 2 (2007): 32.

²⁸ Harvey Cox, "Mammon and the Culture of the Market: A Socio-Theological Critique," in *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*, ed. Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 125.

²⁹ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 77.

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that not everyone shares in a gloomy depiction of consumerism. In fact, some absolutely sing its praises. Dr. James Twitchell, professor of English and advertising at the University of Florida, while acknowledging that the consumer culture has its share of problems, also celebrates it because "...it is always new, always without a past. Like religion, which it has displaced, it afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted."³⁰ He goes on to say that "...consumerism is not against our better judgment. It *is* our better judgment."³¹ Speaking against the idea that consumers are made and not born, he writes: "We have not just asked to go this way, we have demanded. Now most of the world is lining up, pushing and shoving, eager to elbow into the mall. Woe to the government or religion that says no."³² Libertarian commentator Llewellyn Rockwell would agree with such an upbeat assessment of our consumer culture, noting that:

The beauty of the market economy is that it gives everyone a choice. For those people who prefer outhouses to indoor plumbing, pulling their teeth to dentistry, and eating nuts from trees rather than buying a can of Planters at Wal-Mart, they too have the right to choose that way of life. But don't let them say that they are against "consumerism." To live at all requires that we buy and sell. To be against commerce is to attack life itself.³³

Most critics of consumerism agree that our consumer culture has many benefits; they simply believe that the cost of those benefits is becoming too high.

³⁰ James B. Twitchell, "In Praise of Consumerism," *reasononline*, 2000, <http://www.reason.com/news/show/27795.html> (accessed July 5, 2007).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Llewellyn H. Jr. Rockwell, "In Defense of Consumerism," *Ludwig von Mises Institute*, 2006, <http://www.mises.org/story/2178> (accessed December 8, 2007).

Loss of personal satisfaction and happiness

First among those costs is a loss of personal happiness and satisfaction. While we are promised happiness and satisfaction through the constant consumption of goods and services, our consumer society has experienced exactly the opposite. In his book *The High Price of Materialism*, researcher Tim Kasser notes that there is an inverse link between materialistic values and personal happiness and fulfillment. "In samples of adolescents, college students, and adults, with various means of measuring materialistic values and well-being, results show a clear pattern of psychological (and physical) difficulties associated with holding wealth, popularity, and image as relatively important."³⁴ Researcher David Myers agrees, writing that, according to his research, "...[O]ur becoming much better-off over the last thirty years has not been accompanied by one iota of increased happiness and life satisfaction."³⁵ An example is found in Thomas Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza who recently began selling off much of what his wealth had enabled him to buy, including the Detroit Tigers Baseball team. When questioned about the sell-off, he replied: "None of the things I've bought, and I mean none of them, have ever really made me happy."³⁶

The dissatisfaction created by consumerism comes as no surprise to some who see dissatisfaction not as the result of consumerism but a basic necessity of the consumer culture itself. They point out that the contemporary consumer can never really be satisfied be-

³⁴ Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (London: The MIT Press, 2002), 14.

³⁵ Myers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 44.

³⁶ John de Graaf, Thomas H Naylor, and David Wann, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005), 113.

cause as soon as one need is met, consumer capitalism requires the creation of another.³⁷ The result is a never-ending treadmill on which people are incurring debt and working longer hours to pay for the high-consumption lifestyle, consequently spending less time with family, friends, and community organizations. This brings up another high cost of our consumer culture: weakened or broken relationships.

Weakened connections and relationships

There was a time when people were strongly connected to their families and communities. That strong connection, however, had to be broken in order for the consumer culture to thrive. "The Market God strongly prefers individualism and mobility. It needs to be able to move people wherever production requires. It is only hampered when individuals have deep ties to families, local tradition, particular places. Therefore, It [sic] wishes to dissolve these ties."³⁸ Speaking to these weakened social connections created by our consumer society, Jay McDaniel writes: "I can remember the lyrics to many an ad for Coca Cola.... But I cannot quite remember the name of the man who lives two houses down.... When his corporation moves him to another city in several months, it will be as if he had never been my neighbor."³⁹ Consumerism teaches us that our primary attachment should be to things, to image, and to status. As a result, communities, traditions, service organizations, and even the people around us must often learn to take second place in our lives.

³⁷ Miles, *Consumerism*, 49.

³⁸ Madsen et al, *Meaning and Modernity*, 134.

³⁹ McDaniel, *Living from the Center*, 14.

Even consumerism's celebration of the abundance of choices can have a detrimental effect on the quality of our relationships. Because of the efficiency of our consumer economy, we now enjoy more choices than ever before. Barry Schwartz recounts that on a recent trip to his supermarket, he discovered 85 brands and varieties of crackers, along with 285 varieties of cookies. He discovered 13 sports drinks, 65 boxed drinks for children, and 95 options for snack chips.⁴⁰ Clearly we live in a flourishing economy.

However, Schwartz points out that recent studies indicate the more options we have, the less the eventual choice means to us. In other words, we don't value our eventual choice more because we chose it from among an array of others; we actually value it less.⁴¹ Insight as to why this is so can be gained from an interview with a young couple whose story is recorded in the book *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*. They note that in the face of so many options, once a choice has been made there seems to be a lingering doubt, like "maybe you've made the wrong choice, maybe you've missed something."⁴² Significantly, they go on to say that this attitude can't help carrying over into their most important relationships, including marriage. Having been trained by a consumer society to always be looking for the next best thing, when looking at their spouse, they can't help thinking that "...there's got to be somebody better out there."⁴³

⁴⁰ Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less (How the Culture of Abundance Robs Us of Satisfaction)* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 20.

⁴² de Graaf et al, *Affluenza*, 49.

⁴³ Ibid.

Creation of radical individualism and the customer metaphor

To the critics of consumerism, the most destructive effect of our consumer culture, and perhaps the base cause for all other harmful effects, is the elevation of the individual above all else. Simply put, "The ideology of consumerism proffers the 'rights' of the individual consumer...."⁴⁴ It is without question that there are long-term negative consequences when children are exposed to pornography, yet the Internet provides it unfettered because to restrict it would infringe upon an individual's right to free speech. Is it any wonder that when traveling to the United States to receive an honorary degree, Mother Teresa was heard to say, "This is the poorest place I've ever been"?⁴⁵

Author James Hutton points out that what our consumer culture actually has done is to create a nation of "customers," and of course, the customer is always right. Customers are entitled to a certain level of service and satisfaction. After all, customers pay the bills; they should get what they want. This radical individualism as expressed in the metaphor of customer may indeed have a place in the world of business and commerce, but observers are seeing the concept creep into the social sector as well. Schools and churches once gave people what they needed instead of what they wanted. Now, because of the customer metaphor, "...they are doing just the opposite."⁴⁶

In studying the condition of American education, Hutton concludes that "The heart of the problem is that students no longer believe they are students, but 'customers' of

⁴⁴ Miles, *Consumerism*, 11.

⁴⁵ de Graaf et al, *Affluenza*, 74.

⁴⁶ Hutton, *Feel-Good Society*, 20.

schools...” and that ...”education is no longer earned, but something that is bought.”⁴⁷

Other educators would agree, remarking that many students today bring to the classroom an “...overwhelming sense of entitlement.”⁴⁸

According to Hutton, some of the negative consequences of the customer metaphor in education are: grade inflation, the dumbing-down of standards, an increase in cheating (even in Christian schools), and an inflated sense of self. Speaking to the last consequence, Hutton notes that in 1997, the Third National Mathematical Study found that American students consistently believed they had placed at the top when compared to the rest of the world, when in fact, American students placed close to last in almost every category.⁴⁹ Hutton concludes his chapter on the use of the customer metaphor in education by saying: “In the final analysis, the customer metaphor is, at best, a contributing factor in the decline of American education. At worst, it is the core problem...”⁵⁰

It is clear then that our consumer culture has created an inflated sense of entitlement, best represented by the customer metaphor, and that this staunch individualism has weakened the social bonds that once held us together, affecting every area of our culture, including the social sectors such as education. But what of the church? What about those called to be in the world but not of the world? Has the American church been able to resist the influence of the consumer culture? It appears the answer is no: the customer metaphor has invaded the church.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 63.

Description of Consumer Theology

In their book *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium*, authors Richard Cimino and Don Lattin speak of the religious consumerism they witnessed in one young couple, saying, “They shopped for a church like they would shop for a car, looking for something practical and comfortable.”⁵¹ And why not? “We are a consumer society, and people are consumers of religious goods and services, just like other things.”⁵²

This helps to explain some of the shifts I have recently experienced. The people who attend, or might attend, the church I lead are no longer congregants; they are customers. I am no longer a pastor; I’m a marketer and CEO of a company that provides religious goods and services. Indeed, it is the premise of this paper that consumerism has so invaded the local church as to warrant its own terminology: consumer theology. Consumer theology, like the consumer society that helped to create it, fully embraces the customer metaphor, treating God and his blessings as commodities. By placing the consumer at the center of the equation, consumer theology stands directly opposed to the call of Christ: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24 NIV).

For the purposes of this paper then, and by way of summary, consumer theology is characterized by:

- The commodification of the Holy by treating God and his blessings as simply another product to be purchased and used for one’s benefit.

⁵¹ Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 10.

⁵² Hutton, *Feel-Good Society*, 71.

- A redefinition of the church as a provider of religious goods and services.
- A radical individualism's placing the needs of self over the community.
- A strong sense of entitlement as represented in the customer metaphor.

Since the church is not immune to consumerism, it is not immune to its negative effects, either. These will be explored more thoroughly in a later chapter, but suffice it to say that the negative effects of consumer theology mirror those of the consumer culture: a waste of resources, a loss of personal happiness and fulfillment, a breakdown in personal relationships, and a loss of vital community, all caused either directly or indirectly by radical individualism.

As will be seen, some, aware of the growing problem of consumer theology, have opted to reject the established church and begin new churches instead. There is much to be said for this approach. Accepting that consumer theology is a barrier to Christian community and spirituality, new churches can begin with their DNA already on guard for this cultural invader. However, most of God's assets for building his kingdom, both people and facilities, are found in established churches. Most of these established churches are already steeped in consumer theology, but they need not remain so. As has already been said, consumers are made, not born. If consumers are made, they can be un-made as well. Even those well entrenched in consumer theology can be re-formed into fully devoted Christ-followers.

Thesis and Project Overview

It is the thesis of this paper that spiritual formation, properly understood and implemented in an existing church, is the corrective for the damaging effects of consumer the-

ology so prevalent in many churches today. In the next chapter, this paper will examine biblical materials relating to the idea of consumer theology. This chapter will demonstrate that while consumer theology may be more prevalent in the modern world, all through biblical history there have been those who have attempted to turn God, and the blessings a relationship with him brings, into a commodity to be bought and sold.

Chapter 3 of this paper will show that consumer theology, while perhaps not supported by the secular culture to the extent that it is today, has been an issue throughout the history of the church. After first looking at attempts of the early church to combat consumer theology, this chapter will present materials showing that the Reformation was, in part, a reaction against the consumer theology that had been fully embraced by the medieval church, as represented by the sale of indulgences. In addition, in a somewhat ironic twist, this paper will demonstrate ways in which the Reformation helped to lay the foundation for modern consumer theology.

The fourth chapter will examine some of the negative effects of consumer theology in the church today. The focus of consumer theology is the felt needs and desires of the congregant (consumer). God becomes a commodity one uses to achieve satisfaction of one's felt needs. This approach produces a shallow spirituality in an age when many, both inside and outside of the church, long for something deeper. The witness, and thus the mission, of the church is damaged because shallow spirituality does not produce what even the secular world sees as significant character development. In addition, many smaller and even mid-sized churches decline as their members, steeped in consumer theology, become dissatisfied and leave for larger churches with more (or different) programs.

In chapter 5, this paper will examine the claims of the modern spiritual-formation movement, especially as they relate to counteracting the negative effects of consumer theology. By examining the writings of several prominent authors, this paper will describe spiritual formation as the Spirit-led, lifelong process whereby the believer is transformed into the image of Jesus so as to positively affect every area of the inner and outer life. After examining the difference between spiritual pathways and spiritual disciplines, this paper will look at the ways in which spiritual formation addresses the effects of consumer theology.

The final chapter of this paper will, by examining literature on organizational change and leadership, propose essential elements necessary for the implementation of the principles of spiritual formation in an existing church. It will be seen that any change in the spiritual formation of the church must begin in the pastor and that, because spiritual formation transcends traditions and styles, a variety of methods must be taught and used. Finally, this paper will propose that the key for spiritual formation is providing meaningful encounters with the Lord, teaching congregants to experience God in the midst of their busy lives.

CHAPTER 2

Biblical and Theological Materials Relating to Consumer Theology

Summary of Chapter One

In the previous chapter, this paper stated that the industrialized west has moved from a society of consumers to a consumer-society, one in which happiness and fulfillment are found in the pursuit and acquisition of the material, and the status that such acquisition brings. For further evidence, consider the lyrics from the popular song *Material Girl*, written by Peter Brown and Robert Rans:

Some boys kiss me, some boys hug me, I think they're O.K.
If they don't give me proper credit, I just walk away
They can beg and they can plead but they can't see the light, that's right
'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash is always Mister Right, 'cause we are
Living in a material world and I am a material girl
You know that we are living in a material world and I am a material girl.¹

In 1985, this song, recorded by Madonna, spent 17 weeks on *Billboard* magazine's top 100 list, eventually rising to number 2.² But lest the reader think that this glorification of consumption and materialism was only manifest in that last two decades of the twentieth century, consider these lyrics from the 1953 Marilyn Monroe musical, *Gentlemen Prefer Blonds*:

The French were bred to die for love they delight in fighting duels
But I prefer a man who lives and gives expensive jewels
A kiss on the hand may be quite continental, but diamonds are a girl's best friend
A kiss may be grand, but it won't pay the rental on your humble flat, or help you at the automat

¹ Alan J. Stuart, *The A to Z of Madonna*, August 19, 2000, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/alan.stuart/music/madonna/material.html> (accessed August 23, 2007).

² *The Billboard Top 100: Material Girl*, Nielsen Business Media Inc. chart listing for the week of February 9, 1985, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/eseach/chart_display.jsp?cfi=379&cfgn=Singles&cfm=The+Billboard+Hot+100&ci=3004071&cdi=6175197&cid=02%2F09%2F1985 (accessed August 26, 2007).

Men grow cold as girls grow old and we all lose our charms in the end
But, square-cut or pear-shaped, these rocks don't lose their shape
Diamonds are a girl's best friend.³

The popularity of these lyrics is just another indication of how materialistic and consumer-oriented our society has become.

It was also seen in the previous chapter that our culture's emphasis on consumption has led to several negative effects for our society and the church, including creating a consumer theology characterized by:

- The commodification of the Holy
- Turning the church into a vendor of religious goods and services
- A radical individualism that undermines the true nature of the church
- A strong sense of entitlement as represented by the customer metaphor

Chapter 2 will present biblical and theological materials showing that this emphasis on materialism and consumption, as well as the basic components of consumer theology, are actually nothing new but, rather, have been evident throughout God's salvation history. It will be shown that God, through his revelation, has consistently warned us concerning the dangers of consumerism and rejected all components of consumer theology.

Biblical Warnings against Materialism and Consumerism

It should be pointed out that God is not anti-consumption. At the conclusion of the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis, we read these words:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in

³ *Our Wedding Songs*, <http://www.ourweddingsongs.com/bouquet-toss-songs/diamonds-are-a-girls-best-friend-lyrics> (accessed August 23, 2007).

it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so (Gen. 1:28-30).

Clearly, it is God’s intention for his creatures to live, and to do that they must consume.

No consumption, no life.

Neither should it be said that God is anti-wealth. When God promised that he would deliver his people out of bondage in Egypt and lead them to their own country, it was not to a country dry and barren, but to “...a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Exod. 3:8). God, therefore, called his people to consume, and then led them into a highly productive land that could meet all their needs and more. But God also understood the danger in what he was doing. The promise of a new and productive land came with a warning:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Deut. 8:10-14).

That Israel eventually fell into the very trap of which God spoke is evident from God’s words recorded in Hosea a few centuries later: “When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me” (Hosea 13:6).

The danger, then, is the tendency to shift our focus away from the provider of what we have (a theocentric or ‘God-centered’ world view), onto the ‘things’ themselves, (a materialistic worldview), and then to take credit for accumulating them. Consider the following passage from the wisdom literature: “Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor

it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so (Gen. 1:28-30).

Clearly, it is God’s intention for his creatures to live, and to do that they must consume.

No consumption, no life.

Neither should it be said that God is anti-wealth. When God promised that he would deliver his people out of bondage in Egypt and lead them to their own country, it was not to a country dry and barren, but to “...a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Exod. 3:8). God, therefore, called his people to consume, and then led them into a highly productive land that could meet all their needs and more. But God also understood the danger in what he was doing. The promise of a new and productive land came with a warning:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Deut. 8:10-14).

That Israel eventually fell into the very trap of which God spoke is evident from God’s words recorded in Hosea a few centuries later: “When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me” (Hosea 13:6).

The danger, then, is the tendency to shift our focus away from the provider of what we have (a theocentric or ‘God-centered’ world view), onto the ‘things’ themselves, (a materialistic worldview), and then to take credit for accumulating them. Consider the following passage from the wisdom literature: “Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor

riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Prov. 30:7-9). Note the theocentric emphasis of this passage. First, it is the only prayer recorded in Proverbs.⁴ While all other proverbs are words of advice to the human race on how to live in this world, this is a request, a plea for specific help from God. Note also that the writer’s main concern is not his own comfort or lack thereof, but the honor of God. Knowing his own nature, the writer is concerned that if he has too much he will ‘forget’ God and take credit for all that he has. On the other hand, if he has too little he may resort to theft in order to obtain what he desires. Yet even at this point his main concern is not the legal consequences of such an act, but rather that by doing so he would dishonor God.

To avoid these two extremes, the writer simply asks for, as Jesus himself taught his disciples to ask in Luke 11:3, his ‘daily bread.’ Commentator David Allen Hubbard points out that the Hebrew phrase “...portrays the divine hand extending a loaf of bread...and telling him exactly what his portion is to be.”⁵ As dangerous as materialism may well be for our environment and society, an even greater danger lies in what it can do to our relationship with God as we take for granted, or worse, take credit for all we have. As Hubbard points out, “We come to know God not by speculation or dedication but by calling on Him daily for His practical help at our neediest points.”⁶

⁴ Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 259.

⁵ David Allen Hubbard, “Words of Agur: Proverbs 30:1-33,” in *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 365.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 366.

Jesus himself spoke of the tendency of material things to move us away from a theocentric worldview. In response to a request from someone in the crowd to arbitrate a dispute over an inheritance, Jesus told a parable about a productive farmer:

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:15-34).

In a consumer society, this man could be nominated for farmer of the year. He is "...a man who is in many ways exemplary. He works, plans, saves and seeks to protect his belongings. In many ways he is considered a prudent and good steward."⁷ Yet, in the parable, God himself calls the farmer a fool. The Greek word, *aphrone* (fool) is the same one used in the Septuagint in Ps. 14:1: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"⁸ In God's eyes then, the atheist and the religious self-satisfied are equally deluded and condemned.

According to Dan Harrington, "One of the recurrent figures in the wisdom tradition is the rich fool...",⁹ the one who, as Jesus said in this parable, "...stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). Jesus returns to this theme in a conversation with the person who has come to be known as the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-19, Mark 10:17-30, Luke 18:18-30). While each gospel contains a few unique details, they

⁷ Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, The Bible in Its World, ed. David Noel Freedman, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 109.

⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁹ Daniel J. Harrington, "The Rich Fool," *America* 197, no. 3 (2007): 38.

each end this encounter with Jesus' statement concerning the difficulty of the rich's entering the Kingdom, stating that a camel has a better chance to pass through a needle's eye than a rich person does of going to heaven.

In addition, in each gospel the disciples question Jesus on how this could be, with Matthew and Mark adding that the disciples were shocked (*ekplasso*). According to William Hendriksen, the tense of this verb indicates that this was no momentary astonishment; apparently, their shock was so intense that it lasted for a little while.¹⁰ Charles Spurgeon agrees, saying:

No common astonishment filled them. Much astounding truth they had already heard from their Master; but this exceeded all, and *they were exceedingly amazed*. They had previously thought that wealth was an advantage: and now they judged that if those who had riches could only be saved with surpassing difficulty, poor working men like themselves could have no hope whatever. They were ready to despair....¹¹

Jesus really only has a one-word answer for his disciples: God. He is the center, he is the focus, he is the answer. Anything that takes us away from him is wrong.

Again, Jesus is not saying that wealth is wrong, only that it can, and most often does, take our attention away from that which is really important, a theocentric life, that which our hearts really seek. As Saint Augustine has said, "...you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you."¹²

However, what if we seek God as we seek any other commodity? What if our seeking is transactional and not relational? In other words, what if we seek not to know him, but to own him; not to give our lives to him, but to obligate God in some way to give his life

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 728.

¹¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 271.

¹² Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Signet, 1963), 1.

to us? This attitude is what this paper identifies as consumer theology and, as this paper will now demonstrate, it has existed almost from the very beginning, and has been consistently rejected by God.

Consumer Theology in the Old Testament

In Exodus we read this command:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven.... Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you’” (Gen. 20:22-24).

And yet, hundreds of years later, the prophet Isaiah wrote this:

“The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings” (Is 1:11-13).

There seems to be a disconnect in these two verses. God is speaking in both, and yet it would appear that he is saying two opposite things. To understand, we must first understand the purpose of sacrifice and offering.

According to Larry Shelton, “The ancient world practiced sacrificial rituals widely, as they were used to tangibly express agreements, contracts and covenants of all kinds.”¹³ Shelton notes, however, that the main difference between the pagan sacrifices and those instituted by Yahweh is that “...in Israel the sacrifice was not primarily a means of placating God...,”¹⁴ and that, unlike many pagan sacrifices, God is not contractually bound

¹³ Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for the 21st Century* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 57.

¹⁴ Ibid.

to respond positively simply because the sacrifice was made. According to John Bright, Israel's feasts and sacrifices were for the purposes of teaching, celebration, and covenant renewal, not simply as a "...maintainer of material well-being as in the pagan religions..."¹⁵ In other words, within the sacrifices of Israel there was supposed to be no hint of either an *opus operatum*, or a *quid pro quo*. The former is a Latin phrase which means, in the context of the ritual of sacrifice, that the ritual alone was sufficient for obtaining the desired results, regardless of the attitude of the one making the offering.¹⁶ The latter term, also Latin, means "... 'what for what' or 'something for something.' The concept of getting something of value in return for giving something of value."¹⁷ Thus, in the pagan world, sacrifices took on the form of a contract. They were given at the beginning of the growing season to ensure a good harvest or offerings were made before a battle to ensure success.

In the pagan sacrificial system, as with any other transaction, you pay the price and you get what you pay for. What the offerer seeks is a commodity; the pagan temple and the priests are the vendors of the commodity. Paying the price (i.e., the sacrifice in whatever form), entitles the offerer to the commodity. This is quintessential consumer theology: the commodification of the blessings of the deity purchased through the payment of a gift or offering, and it was the basis for pagan sacrifice.

However, even while surrounded by the ideals of paganism, the concept of consumer theology was never intended to be a part of the sacrificial system instituted by God in

¹⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 172.

¹⁶ Shelton, *Cross and Covenant*, 58.

¹⁷ The 'Lectric Law Library's *Lexicon on Quid Pro Quo* (accessed August 27, 2007); available from <http://www.lectlaw.com/def2/q003.htm>.

Exodus and then elaborated upon in Leviticus. As will now be presented, even those sacrifices and offerings given to God prior to the exodus departed from their pagan counterparts.

The offerings of Cain and Abel

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:3-7).

Much has been written concerning the reason God rejected the offering of Cain (the first offering mentioned in all of scripture), and accepted Abel's. The writer to the Hebrews suggests that Cain's was rejected because it was not offered in faith.¹⁸ This paper will not explore this particular issue. This text in Genesis is mentioned for one main reason: to demonstrate that these offerings were made in response to God's blessings, not to secure them. This conclusion is made in light of the fact that the offerings were made AFTER the harvest, not before. If the offerings had been made prior to the harvest, one might assume that a *quid pro quo* did in fact exist. This was the pattern of the pagan sacrifices that would come later. The offering after the harvest, then, takes the form of a gift of thanksgiving, not a payment. This same point is found in the next sacrifice to be found in Genesis, the sacrifice of Noah.

¹⁸ See Heb. 11:4.

The sacrifice of Noah

Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it." So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another. Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. (Gen. 8:15-20).

This is the first time in all of scripture that animals are sacrificed specifically as an offering to God. True, Abel did offer to God the "...fat portions from some of the first-born of his flock" (Gen. 4:4), but there is no mention that the animals were killed for any reason other than consumption. The text concerning Abel's offering notes only that he did set aside certain portions as a gift for God.

In the case of Noah, however, animals, in fact many animals, are sacrificed as an offering to God. But again, note that these offerings were made at the conclusion of the voyage, not before it. If Noah had wanted to use these offerings as means to secure God's favor, fulfilling the pagan principles of *opus operatum* and *quid pro quo*, he would have offered them before the voyage. To secure God's protection and blessing, Noah might even have offered sacrifices during the voyage, while the rain still pounded and the land remain invisible. But it was at the end of the voyage, as a gift, not a payment, that he made his sacrifice. No *quid pro quo*; no consumer theology.

From the beginning, then, the Bible establishes offerings as gifts, not payments. Hence, in Genesis 35:14, Jacob pours out a drink offering to God in response to God's blessing, not to secure it, as he does once again in Genesis 46:1, after hearing that his son Joseph is alive and waiting for him in Egypt.

The same is also true for the offering of Jethro in Exodus 18. Upon meeting Moses after Israel's deliverance out of Egypt, we read this:

Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God (Exod. 18:9-12).

Again we see that the offering was made not to secure the blessings, but as a way of expressing a deep sense of gratitude.

At this point, special consideration should be given to the sacrifice of Abraham in the region of Moriah.¹⁹ The sacrifice of Isaac was not a requirement to secure the blessings of God, or else God would have allowed Abraham to kill the son he loved. What God required was obedience: obedience when God said to slay Isaac and obedience when God said to stop. Did the obedience of Abraham secure the blessings of God? Absolutely, but not because the obedience of Abraham had merit or intrinsic value, nor because it was a payment. The obedience of Abraham secured God's blessing simply because God set the condition of obedience for blessing. Without obedience the sacrifices mean nothing. This was the point when God rejected the sacrifices of the people in the Book of Jeremiah:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: 'Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.' But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward" (Jer. 7:21-24).

¹⁹ See Gen. 22:1-19.

The pattern then becomes: obey God, receive his blessings, offer thanksgiving through sacrifice.

But what of that special class of sacrifices found in the book of Leviticus? What of the offerings for sin and guilt? Is there not an element of consumer theology in the requirements of God for personal and national forgiveness? The scholarship of Larry Shelton says no. According to Shelton, "A proper act of sacrifice had to be more than a mere outward ritual. Before the sacrifice could achieve anything, the Law required the confession of sin from a penitent heart."²⁰

According to Shelton, the sacrifice was not currency used to buy forgiveness, but, rather, the sacrifice came to represent the penitent:

In offering the sacrifice and in identifying with it, the sinner changed his attitude toward God. As the offerer turned back to God and repented, he himself became the gift-sacrifice to God through identification with the sacrificial animal. In response to human repentance and self-offering, God accepted the animal sacrifice as a token of his reception of the offerer who had identified with it and forgave the sinner of his offenses.²¹

In other words, simply going through the motions of a sacrifice did not, in and of itself (*opus operatum*), secure or entitle the offerer to anything. Sacrifices could not be used as currency to buy the favor of God. "The sin offering resulted in forgiveness because that is how God told Israel to express its repentance."²²

As Shelton has noted, through the offering, the penitent recognized that the real problem was not the attitude of God, but his/her own. James Mays agrees, noting that a common misperception was that the offering somehow effected a change in God, as if his atti-

²⁰ Shelton, *Cross and Covenant*, 53.

²¹ Ibid., 56.

²² Ibid., 58.

tude towards the sinner was the issue.²³ If that were the case, the offering would indeed be a payment, a kind of *quid pro quo*, much like a young husband's bringing flowers home to an angry wife.

In fact, though, the sacrifices of Israel eventually did take on the character of currency and payments. The pagan ideals of *opus operatum* and *quid pro quo* did infiltrate the sacrificial system. The Israelites forgot the very core of their relationship with God, faith as expressed in obedience, and turned the sacrifices into a transaction, a way to secure, to buy, the favor of God. They turned his blessings, indeed his very presence, into a commodity to own and then tried to use sacrifices as the currency of choice. Consider this condemnation of the sacrificial system from the prophet Micah:

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:6-8).

The rhetorical question poised by the prophet is simply this: "How do I buy God off?" or, "What payment is sufficient to get him off my back?" In the eyes of Micah, "...the people seemed to act on the theory that what God wanted was more and costlier gifts, heavier payments; and that the suitable gifts to give him were slain animals; and that in the extremity of her perplexity they could even think of giving him the slain bodies of their own children. The prophets repudiated this theory of gifts."²⁴

²³ James L. Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, John Bright, and G. Ernest Wright (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 139.

²⁴ George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice*, The Library of Biblical Studies, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky, (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971), 43.

This idea of gifts as payments, of *quid pro quo*, of consumer theology, is at the heart of the prophet's rejection of the sacrificial system. "...[T]he prophets are really criticizing a system which was regarded by those who put their trust in it as a system not of establishing communion with God, but of making gifts to Yahweh in order to secure his favour."²⁵ In other words, consumer theology.

If the gift of an offering had been enough, God would not have said this through the prophet Amos:

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? (Amos 5:21-25)

God's complaint was not with the quantity or frequency of the offerings. His complaint went much deeper. They had come to rely on the sacrifices. "It is not Yahweh that the people love and trust, but the practice of sacrifice itself.... Behind this delight in sacrifice is the confident theory that by its ritual killing and eating, their solidarity with the deity is reconstituted and their welfare guaranteed."²⁶

The last statement of God to his people through Amos is most significant. He asks "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?" (Amos 5:25). Concerning this question from God to his people in the Amos text, Allen Guenther writes: "At the time of Israel's greatest intimacy with God, during the wilder-

²⁵ Ibid., 42.

²⁶ James L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, John Bright, and G. Ernest Wright (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 122.

ness years, the people were not sacrificing. Yet God accepted them.”²⁷ God blessed Israel’s obedience during the wilderness wanderings, not their sacrifices: they made none.

In this section, this paper has shown that elements of consumer theology (commodification of the Holy, treating the temple and priests as vendors of religious goods and services, and a sense of entitlement due to the payment of sacrifices) have existed almost from the beginning and that God has consistently rejected all of them. This paper will now demonstrate that the same rejection is evident in the ministry of Jesus.

Rejection of Consumer Theology in the Ministry of Jesus

Several incidents in the ministry of Jesus describe Jesus’ rejection of the consumer theology of his time. The first is found in the Gospel of John and illustrates the dangers of the customer metaphor so engrained in consumer theology. This incident takes place the day following the miraculous feeding of what the Gospel describes as approximately five thousand men. During the night following the miraculous meal, and unbeknownst to the crowds, Jesus leaves for the other side of the lake. The next morning:

Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval” (John 6:24-27).

One thing at least is clear from the comments of Jesus: he recognized that the crowds sought him not because they desired a relationship with him, but because they saw in Je-

²⁷ Allen R. Guenther, *Hosea, Amos*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, ed. Elmer A. Martens and Willard M. Swartley (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 307.

sus a solution to their immediate problem: they were hungry again. They saw Jesus only as a commodity, or at least a provider of a commodity.

James Boice points out two errors that the crowd committed as they sought Jesus, errors evident in the consumer theology of the modern church. The first is that as they sought him, their minds were on themselves. They saw Jesus not as an end, but as a means to an end. Boice continues:

I am convinced that in our day in American Christianity there is a lamentable tendency to focus on our need rather than on God himself. I am equally convinced that this is the worst possible way to actually have the need met and to achieve a healthy Christianity. ...[I]t is tragically possible to so focus on our needs that we are actually focusing on ourselves rather than on Jesus, and so never get to the solutions to our problems that Jesus wants to bring.²⁸

The second error reveals the danger of the customer metaphor: when the crowds didn't get what they wanted, they went home. In the verses following this initial encounter with the crowds, Jesus tells the crowds that there is better bread available than even the manna that sustained their ancestors in the wilderness (verses 32 and 33). In the following verses, the crowds express a desire to have that better bread "from now on." However, when Jesus reveals that he himself is the better bread that has come down from heaven, the crowds argue with him, and in verse 66 we read these words: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." Jesus was willing to give them what they really needed. The crowds, however, had something else in mind. Like any customer, when they didn't 'have it their way,' as one popular burger chain used to say, they left. Concerning the crowds, Leon Morris notes, "It was their need as they themselves saw it and not as Jesus saw it that occupied their whole attention. It is easy to make the same mistake. Most of us are so sure that we know what we need in this life that we

²⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1985), 2:465.

pursue it single-mindedly and never stop to ask whether it is this that is important, this that matters in the sight of God.”²⁹

The stark reality of consumerism, including consumer theology, is that customers are convinced they should get what they want. And when they don't get what they want in the way they want it, they just leave.

Only the Twelve were willing to stay with Jesus. When asked by the Master in verse 67 if they intended to leave as well, Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69).

This answer, theocentric as it is, does not mean, however, that the Twelve were immune to the trap of consumer theology. At one point in their journeys together, the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, approach Jesus and say in classic consumer theology fashion: “...we want you to do for us whatever we ask” (Mark 10:35). Since this request is made after several teachings from Jesus on the nature of true discipleship,³⁰ R. T. France notes that “James and John display a remarkable lack of awareness of what Jesus has just been saying about the mission of the Son of Man coupled with a personal ambition which is totally out of keeping with all that has been said since 9:33.”³¹ The disciples, or at least at this point James and John, did not understand what Jesus was really

²⁹ Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John: The Bread of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 221.

³⁰ See Mark 9:30 through 10: 34.

³¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. Donald A. Hagner and I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 414.

saying. A relationship with Jesus was still not enough for James and John. Jesus was still a means to an end, a road to glory and honor: consumer theology.

One final incident in the ministry of Jesus will demonstrate his rejection of one of the key elements of consumer theology: entitlement—the belief that we, as the customer, are entitled to what we want from God on the basis of some kind of payment, be it money, attendance, or service. Jesus says,

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, “Come along now and sit down to eat”? Would he not rather say, “Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink”? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:7-10).

To those steeped in the modern context of employer/employee relationships and consumerism, these words of Jesus are foreign, and yet William Neil believes that in this text we see “...the message that rings out loud and clear in the Bible, from the first chapter of Genesis onward. God owes us nothing; we owe God everything.”³²

While consumer theology would claim that we are customers of the Holy, or at least owed the wages of God’s blessing for our devotion, Jesus likens us to slaves, a phrase that will eventually influence the theology of Paul.³³ As slaves we are owed nothing. We are always on the negative side of the ledger of debts. We constantly and permanently owe. “Obedience does not obligate God to the disciple. God does not owe the disciple anything for faithfulness.”³⁴ I. Howard Marshall agrees, noting, “This saying can be un-

³² William Neil, *The Difficult Sayings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 83.

³³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1392.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1395.

derstood as an attack upon the Jewish attitude, especially that of the Pharisees, which argued that the performance of good works constituted a claim upon God for due reward.”³⁵ Even classic Jewish scholarship rejects the consumer theology of the Pharisees. According to the writings of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, “If you have studied much Torah, do not claim merit for yourself, because for this you were created.”³⁶

In this brief section this paper demonstrated that Jesus rejected the components of consumer theology, specifically the customer metaphor and the sense of entitlement. This paper will now examine one incident in the early church from the book of Acts. While short in duration, this incident will have major implications for the development of consumer theology in the medieval church, as will be seen in the next chapter.

During the first century and in the area of Samaria, there lived a sorcerer named Simon. According to Acts 9:9-11, prior to the arrival of the gospel of Jesus to that region, Simon had been a man of great importance, amazing the crowds with his abilities. However, according to verse 12, that all changed when Phillip came to town with the good news. According to the text, many in the area believed in Jesus and were baptized, including Simon. Now, it was Simon’s turn to follow Phillip around, “...astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw” (Acts 9:13).

The text continues:

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he

³⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque and I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 645.

³⁶ Bock, *Luke*, 1394.

offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me" (Acts 9:14-24).

It should be noted that what Simon attempted to do was not out of the ordinary in the pagan world from which he had come:

In earlier days, Simon had obtained magical formulas from other practitioners by paying them certain amounts of money.... He is not trying to bribe them or pay them an honorarium for becoming their associate. Instead, he is of the opinion that he can purchase a priesthood from Peter and John in much the same manner as he is able to obtain a priesthood in any pagan religion. In the first half of the first century, such priesthoods were often sold by auction.³⁷

However, Peter's reaction to Simon's request makes clear that the consumer theology of the pagan world has no place in the economy of Jesus Christ. "Luke wants no mistake that the attempt to buy God's gracious gift is a serious matter.... Peter's rebuke is fierce—"You and your money can go to hell!"³⁸

While the encounter with Peter may have ended poorly for Simon, this incident has given the church two things. The first is a classic description of consumer theology: a commodification of the holy (God and his blessings as only a product for purchase); treating the church, or in this case the representatives of the church, as vendors of religious goods and services; an individualistic attitude (here expressed in Simon's desire to be front and center for future bestowments of the Spirit); and a sense of entitlement (be-

³⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 304.

³⁸ William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988), 69.

ing owed the commodity because one has paid the price). In addition, according to F. F. Bruce, because of this incident a new word entered the lexicon of the church: simony, the belief that the offices and graces of God can be purchased with money.³⁹ Chapter 3 will provide evidence that a reaction against the practice of simony will play a major role for at least one reformer some 1400 years in the future.

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that there have been elements of consumer theology from the beginning and that God has consistently, first through the writers of the Old Testament and then in the incarnation, rejected them all. The remainder of this chapter will explore the claims of consumer theology in light of the atonement provided through Jesus.

The Atonement and Consumer Theology

If there is a single verse that answers all the erroneous claims of consumer theology, it could well be this: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). This verse is remarkable in what it affirms: the unworthiness of all persons; the love of God for each in spite of their unworthiness; God’s initiative in the salvation process; the death of Jesus on our behalf. What is also remarkable is what is not stated. There is really no explanation of precisely how the death of Jesus was on our behalf. There is no mention of why God decided to demonstrate his love through Jesus. The nuts and bolts of the atonement remain a mystery.

Since the beginning of the church, scholars have attempted to develop a definitive explanation of the atonement. This chapter is not intended to duplicate or even summarize

³⁹ F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned B Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 183.

their work.⁴⁰ Instead, this chapter will examine the specific characteristics of consumer theology through the lens of the cross, and, as will be seen, all the issues raised in consumer theology are answered by the cross.

Commodification of the Holy

Commodification of the Holy occurs when we as humans attempt to purchase and own the blessings, promises, or even the presence of God. As we have already seen in this chapter, this tendency has been present among God's people for a long time. How does the theology of the atonement confront this tendency? Consider the following New-Testament passages (emphasis mine):

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of everyone. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, ***which he bought with his own blood*** (Acts 20:25-28, TNIV).

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? ***You are not your own; you were bought at a price.*** Therefore honor God with your bodies.... You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings (1 Cor 6:19-20 and 7:23, TNIV).

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center before the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, ***and with your blood you purchased for God*** members of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev 5:6-10, TNIV).

⁴⁰ For a concise summary of the classical views of the atonement, see *Cross and Covenant* by Larry Shelton, chapters 9, 10, and 11.

According to these texts, if there is a commodity to be had somewhere in this transaction, it isn't God or his blessings; it is us. "However we interpret the theology of atonement, the core concept is that we are brought back into covenant relationship with God in some way by means of Christ's death on the cross."⁴¹ We are the object in the salvation process, not God or his anger. Jesus did not buy off God, nor did he placate him. God loved us before the cross and he loves us still. Somehow, the death of Jesus 'paid the price' or 'ransomed' us, so that our relationship with God could be restored.

While describing the atonement as 'paying a price' does address one issue of consumer theology, it also raises other questions. For instance, "If Jesus' death "purchased" the believer, to whom was the purchase price paid? The devil? The demonic world? It is here, at this juncture, that we encounter the limits of the metaphors of redemption.... [U]nderscored instead are the results of being purchased—namely, service to Christ—and the high cost of the deliverance that Christ's death wins."⁴²

In some mysterious way, a way beyond the scope of human metaphors, Jesus bought us with his blood. This means that he owns us, not the other way around. According to Charles Hill, "Christ's purchase set us free but it did not set us adrift. Rather, he purchased us wholly and solely 'for God.'"⁴³ Leon Morris agrees, saying, "There is a sense in which the Christian is free. He owes no allegiance to a system, to any device of men

⁴¹ Shelton, *Cross and Covenant*, 84.

⁴² Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 102.

⁴³ Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, ed., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 202.

[sic]. There is another sense in which he is not free. He has been bought by Christ and belongs to him. The very name 'Christian' is a reminder that he is 'Christ's one'.⁴⁴

Two things at least are clear in the atonement. First, one does not buy God or his blessings, but rather, on the cross, Jesus bought us, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). And second, because in some way Jesus paid a price for us, God owns us, not the other way around, "...you are not your own; you were bought at a price..." (I Cor 6:19-20).

The Church as a vendor of religious goods and services

The atonement also answers the issue of the church's acting as a vendor of religious goods and services. A vendor is one who dispenses a product, a commodity. As has just been seen, there really is no commodity that the church can dispense. We are the commodity. One does not buy God from the church. Because of the atonement, one enters the church having been bought by Jesus.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by human beings but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:4-5).

In his book, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, Stanley Grenz devotes an entire chapter to a biblical description of the church, call-

⁴⁴ Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 127.

ing it the “Pioneer Community.” Grenz names the church such because it “...is that people who are seeking to point toward the future God has in store for creation. Under the guidance of the Spirit, this people desires to live out in the present the glorious community for which God created us.”⁴⁵

To be a vendor, one must first of all be an organization. Hence, the organization known as the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), is a vendor of entertainment, the organization called Safeway, is a vendor of groceries, and Kaiser-Permanente is a vendor of health-care services.

However, the first-century church did not see itself as an organization the way many churches are viewed today. As Grenz points out, “Their choice of *ekklesia* [called-out ones] to designate who they were indicates that the New Testament believers viewed the church as neither an edifice nor an organization. They were a people—a people brought together by the Holy Spirit, a people bound to each other through Christ, hence, a people-in-relationship.”⁴⁶

The primary nature of the church, then, is not to be an organization, but rather to be a people-in-relationship: relationship with each other and with God through the atonement of Jesus. As such, it is not the church’s vocation to provide religious goods and services, but to be what Grenz calls a “community of love.” Grenz notes, “...the community of love which the church is called to be is no ordinary reality. The fellowship we share with each other is not merely that of a common experience or narrative, as important as these

⁴⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 207.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

are. Our fellowship is nothing less than our common participation in the divine communion between the Father and the Son, mediated by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷

While, according to Grenz, this was the ideal upon which the church first came into being, as will be shown in the next chapter, the church very quickly took on the form of both an organization and a vendor of religious commodities. However, for now it can be said that through the atonement, we are called into community for the sake of one another, which answers the next component of consumer theology.

Radical individualism

As will be shown in the next two chapters, the radical individualism that had its roots in the Reformation has had a chilling effect on the true nature of the church. Statements such as “You can have your own personal relationship with Jesus,” attractive as they may be, in reality create an individualism foreign to the original purpose of the church.

Because of the atonement, each individual person can be at peace with God. As Stan Grenz writes, “God’s purpose is the salvation of individuals.” But he goes on to note, “God saves us *together*, not in isolation. And he saves us *for* community, not *out* of it.”⁴⁸ In other words, while, because of the atonement, we are saved individually, as members of God’s church, each of us must set aside our own desires in favor of community. The atonement of Jesus becomes a model for each of the individually saved to follow:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in

⁴⁷ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 214.

human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:3-11).

In this text, Paul is writing to the church at Philippi. While there may be multiple reasons that Paul wrote this letter, it is clear from at least one passage that divisions, possibly severe, were threatening to harm the community. “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:2-3). Concerning the situation at Philippi, Bishop Handley Moule wrote: “St. Paul is not here, as elsewhere in his epistles, combating an error of faith; he is pleading for a life of love. He has full in view the temptations which threatened to mar the happy harmony of Christian fellowship at Philippi.”⁴⁹

Paul’s answer to the disharmony present in the church was the atonement of Jesus. He calls each person to model, in attitude, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The radical individualism of consumer theology is concerned with one’s personal rights. With the atonement as an example, these rights are set aside believing that if Jesus did it, so should we. Fred Craddock notes that “Paul was not opposed to individualism in the sense that one is be responsible for oneself.... What we know for sure, however, is that Paul regards as inappropriate to the body of Christ the selfish eye, the pompous mind, the ear hungry for compliments and the mouth that spoke none, the heart that had little room for others and

⁴⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 129.

the hand that served only the self.”⁵⁰ The atonement, then, becomes both method and model.

So far in this section this paper has demonstrated how the atonement of Jesus answers the claims of consumer theology: the commodification of the Holy (we are the commodity and the price was paid for us); the church as a vendor of religious goods and services (the church is not an organization and has no commodity to give, instead we are those called out to live in community); radical individualism (the atonement is both the method and the model, the method chosen by God to reconcile us to himself and the model we are to use in service to one another). Finally, this chapter will explore the atonement as it addresses the fourth characteristic of the consumer theology, the customer metaphor.

Sense of entitlement as seen in the metaphor of customer

If, as was stated earlier, Romans 5:8 is the quintessential verse to answer the claims of consumer theology, then the single word that can accomplish the same thing is the word ‘grace.’ Theologian Thomas Oden describes grace as God’s “...unmerited favor. To affirm that God is gracious is to affirm that God does not deal with creatures on the basis of their works, merit, or deserving, but rather out of upwelling, abundant divine compassion.”⁵¹ In terms of the atonement, grace means that we are not entitled to the benefits of the atonement of Jesus, but we get those benefits anyway.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you

⁵⁰ Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians*, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 38.

⁵¹ Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 1:126.

have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:6-9).

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:20-24).

Each of these texts describes the benefits of the atonement. Because of the atonement, we are ‘raised with Christ and seated with God,’ we have been ‘justified’ and made ‘righteous,’ all because of the atonement; and we did not earn, or deserve any of it.

This idea of grace, the idea that we are not entitled to the blessings and benefits of the atonement, is difficult for those in a consumer society to accept. Author Scott Hoezee, in his book *The Riddle of Grace: Applying Grace to the Christian Life*, asks the following:

...[W]hat effect has the capitalist way of life had on the church, its theology, and most important, its view of grace? Can people who inhale the air of democratic capitalism exhale the air of grace in Christ? Can people...who spend most of life thinking in terms of earnings and savings and self-reliance step out of that in their churches, homes, and families so as to incarnate the fundamental grace that forms the gospel’s core element?⁵²

These are sobering questions indeed, questions that will be more fully explored in other chapters. Americans, in our consumer society, may be more comfortable with the attitude found in the closing moments of Steven Spielberg’s “Saving Private Ryan.” Knowing that he is dying from wounds received in a battle in which his badly outnumbered men defeated the superior German force, knowing that he has sacrificed his life to save Ryan’s, the character played by actor Tom Hanks turns to private Ryan, the young man

⁵² Scott Hoezee, *The Riddle of Grace: Applying Grace to the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 89.

his platoon was sent to rescue, and says: “John Patrick Ryan. Earn it.” This is a touching moment at the end of an emotional film, but the antithesis of grace.

We cannot earn the atonement of Jesus. We are not customers of the Almighty. We are not entitled to any level of attention or service for God or his church. Yet we are here. We are here by grace.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown, from biblical and theological materials, that the basic elements of consumer theology are really nothing new. They were present and rejected throughout God’s recorded salvation history. It has also been demonstrated that the atonement provided by Jesus addresses each element of consumer theology: Jesus has purchased us, not the other way around; the church is a people-in-fellowship, with no commodity to dispense; the atonement is not only the method but also the model for us as we are called to assume the self-sacrificing attitude of Jesus; and finally, grace, the unmerited favor of God, is at the very core of the atonement, and grace and a sense of entitlement, as expressed in the metaphor of “customer”, are mutually exclusive.

In the next chapter this paper will examine consumer theology as it developed over the course of church history. It will also be shown that one of the correctives for the rampant consumer theology of the medieval church, the Protestant Reformation, actually helped lay the foundation for the radical consumer theology in the church today.

CHAPTER 3

Consumer Theology in Church History

Summary of Previous Chapters

As has been seen in previous chapters, we are now living in a consumer society which has affected every area of our culture, including the church, creating what this paper calls consumer theology. This paper has also examined biblical and theological materials showing that consumer theology is nothing new and has been consistently rejected by God both through his revelation in the Bible and through the incarnation and atonement of Jesus.

This chapter will briefly trace the rise of consumer theology from the early church up to the modern era. It will show that even though the early church spoke against materialism and consumerism, the characteristics of consumer theology were evident from at least the fourth century. It will also be shown that scholasticism helped to give rise to a prevailing climate of consumer theology in the medieval church and that the Reformation was, in part, a reaction against its major characteristics. And finally, this chapter will show, ironic as it may seem, how the Reformation itself laid the foundation for the consumer theology of the church of today.

Consumer Theology in the Early Church

John Chrysostom (c. 345-407) was a contemporary of both Augustine of Hippo and Ambrose of Milan. After his instruction and ordination, he became a preacher in his

hometown of Antioch.¹ As pastor, he was disturbed by the commodification of the Holy he witnessed. Oil that had been blessed by monks was packaged in souvenir bottles and sold in “pilgrimage centers.”² According to church historian Virginia Burns, Chrysostom “...several times remarks on a practice among Antiochene women and children of wearing Gospels around their neck ‘as a powerful amulet.’”³ It is no wonder that John Chrysostom is quoted as saying, “There would be no more heathen if we would be true Christians.”⁴

John Chrysostom was not the only cleric of the time to be concerned about these issues. In the year 385 C.E., a man named Shenoute became the third abbot of the White Monastery in upper Egypt.⁵ He, like Chrysostom, was disturbed by some of the attempts he witnessed to buy the blessings and protections of God. He once told of an official “who considered his amulet of fox claws entirely legitimate, insofar as it had been delivered by a ‘great monk.’”⁶ Apparently, in the eyes of the populace, because a man was a “great monk,” and therefore connected to God, whatever he blessed and sold came with the power of God as well.

¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*, (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1953), 1:99.

² Virginia Burns, ed., *Late Ancient Christianity, A People's History of Christianity*, ed. Denis R. Janz (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 261.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Latourette, *Beginnings to 1500*, 99.

⁵ Rebecca Krawiec, “Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery,” *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 2002, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/religion/9780195129434/toc.html> (accessed August 31, 2007).

⁶ Burns, *Late Ancient Christianity*, 262.

These instances can perhaps be dismissed as isolated incidents. However, in the not-so-distant future, it would not be isolated monks trying to sell the benefits of the Holy: it would be the very leaders of the church.

Rise of Institutionalized Consumer Theology

Around the year 1516, a man named Tetzel announced, with the full knowledge and blessings of the pope, that he was selling plenary indulgences that would, if purchased, relieve the time in purgatory for the purchaser or whomever the buyer decided upon. He even had an advertising motto, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs."⁷ To say that he had the full blessings of the pope is confirmed by the fact that the indulgences sold by Tetzel were called 'Saint Peter's Indulgences' with half of the profits going to build St Peter's in Rome.⁸

According to historian Steven Ozment, Tetzel "...took full advantage of the emotional potential...graphically depicting the voices of wailing dead parents in purgatory, who pleaded with their children for the release that a few alms could readily purchase."⁹ To understand how the church itself could sanction such an obvious example of consumer theology, one must first of all understand the contribution of the scholastic method to the theology of the medieval Western church.

⁷ William R. Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 119.

⁸ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 217.

⁹ Ibid.

Rise of scholasticism

From the time of Christ until approximately the fall of Rome, the church was dominated by an approach to truth known as patristic theology. While this was a mixture of the intellect and experience, “Patristic theology is profoundly experiential. One of the best expressions of this is to be found in the famous ‘Text’ of Evagrius Ponticus: ‘If you are a theologian, you pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.’”¹⁰ During the patristic period, the church fathers did bring reason and revelation together, but, according to the *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, “They leaned, however, towards the doctrine of the mystics, and, in ultimate resort, relied more on spiritual intuition than on dialectical proof for the establishment and explanation of the highest truths of philosophy.”¹¹

Beginning approximately with the sacking and fall of Rome, both the church and western civilization entered the early Middle Ages. These centuries were also called the Dark Ages because, due to the barbarian invasions and loss of a central authority, it seemed as if both technology and education took several steps backwards.¹² By the ninth century, the rise of the Carolingian empire began to bring stability and authority back to Western Europe once more. With this stability came an increased interest in the teachings

¹⁰ Nicholas Lossky, *The Patristic Approach to Theology*, 2003, <http://catholicinsensibility.wordpress.com/2007/08/20/the-patristic-approach-to-theology> (accessed August 31, 2007).

¹¹ William Turner, *Scholasticism* New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13548a.htm> (accessed August 31, 2007).

¹² *The Dark Ages*, History.com, 2005, http://www.history.com/marquee.do?content_type=Marquee_Generic&content_type_id=54711&display_order=1&marquee_id=53127 (accessed September 1, 2007).

of the Greeks in general and in Aristotle in particular. While accepting the teachings of the patristic period almost without question, the theologians of this time began to use Aristotelian logic to address other issues of the faith. This emphasis on the use of logic, instead of the mystic intuition of the Patristic period, in order to understand God and the faith, came to be known as scholasticism.¹³

Using the scholastic approach, the theologians began to use reason to establish several doctrines that would shape the church and eventually give rise to the consumer theology expressed by the indulgence salesman, Tetzl. Among the first of these doctrines was an elaboration of the doctrines of penance and purgatory.

Scholasticism's contribution to medieval consumer theology

The church had always recognized that all sins committed before becoming a Christian were forgiven upon one's commitment to Jesus: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17). The question arose, however, what to do about sins committed after baptism. From the second or third century, the church had recognized two main classes of sins: venial and mortal.¹⁴ In addition, from early on, the church believed that while venial, or trivial, sins committed after baptism could be forgiven simply through contrition and confession, mortal sins could not. These sins were so serious that they "...could only be forgiven through penance, administered through a priest..." and that penance was "...an act of reparation to God...."¹⁵ In

¹³ Latourette, *Beginnings to 1500*, 496-497.

¹⁴ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Allen Menzies, 3rd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 2:267-268.

¹⁵ Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (Baltimore: Edward Arnold, 1986), 45-46.

other words, acts of penance were temporal punishment for serious sins committed after baptism.

Moreover, from at least the time of the fourth century, the church also believed that sins committed after baptism, yet left unpaid in this life, must be paid in the next before one could enter heaven. This place of purgation, where the heaven-bound yet sinful could be purged from their sins, was named purgatory.¹⁶ Even though this doctrine had been in place for hundreds of years, according to historian Bernard Hamilton, it was the scholastic theologians who worked out the implications. Because of the seriousness of sinning after baptism, they developed rigorous penitential disciplines. However, the "...harsh penitential discipline of the medieval church proved self-defeating, because large numbers of people refused to make their confessions until they were dying and unable to perform penances."¹⁷

If this all seems strange to the modern Protestant reader, one must remember that, according to Steven Ozment, "Full, unconditional forgiveness of sin and assurance of salvation were utterly foreign concepts to medieval theology and religious practice. Effective removal of religious guilt and anxiety this side of eternity would have meant the end of medieval religious institutions, and advocates of this-worldly perfection were roundly condemned during the Middle Ages."¹⁸

Because so many were trying to avoid the system of penance set up by the church, the popes of the early eleventh century began allowing people to substitute tasks that

¹⁶ Latourette, *Beginnings to 1500*, 340.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 47.

¹⁸ Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 216.

were more agreeable. This substitution of tasks for normal penance was called an indulgence.¹⁹ One of the first popes to take advantage of this was Urban II who, in 1095, granted a plenary indulgence to all who went on the first Crusade. This meant that if a person died while on the crusade, that person's soul would not suffer any time in purgatory, even if their penance was incomplete here on earth, but instead would go straight to heaven.²⁰

A few things should be said in defense of the popes' actions. The first is that the popes, with the backing of the scholastics, believed that they had the right to grant indulgences because they inherited the "Keys of the Kingdom" given to Peter by Jesus.²¹ After promising Peter the keys, Jesus goes on to say, "...whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:20).

Another thing to be said for the popes' actions is that, at least in the beginning, indulgences were granted with good motives. As has been stated, the penitential system was hard and few were willing to endure it. This meant to the popes that many who died faced prolonged suffering in purgatory before they could enter the glories of heaven. Indulgences, therefore, were a way to ease the people's future suffering. True, as has already been seen, the sale of indulgences eventually degenerated, but initially the motives were very different, as demonstrated by Pope Eugenius III. In 1150, a count came before Eugenius asking for a divorce from his wife. In the middle of the count's charges against

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 47.

²⁰ R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1970), 137.

²¹ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 47.

his wife, the pope burst into tears and begged the count to reconsider and to take her back, saying, "To make you more ready and willing to do this, I, the successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ, to whom the keys of the kingdom have been delivered, will give your wife an inestimable dowry: provided that you are faithful to her, she will bring you immunity (indulgence) for all the sins you have so far committed, and I shall be responsible for them on the Day of Judgment."²² In the pope's actions there was nothing benefiting either the church or himself, just a man giving what he felt he could to lighten the punishment for another. In the beginning, this was the very heart of indulgences.

However, the popes quickly began to see how indulgences could benefit the church. In future crusades, other popes would grant indulgences, not just to those who died on crusade, but also to those who simply went on crusade, as well as to those who financed the journeys.²³ Popes used indulgences to encourage people to visit shrines or collections of relics. Considering the latter, one such collection of relics was said to contain over 19,013 holy artifacts. If one visited this collection on All Saints Day and paid the required fee, the popes granted indulgences that would decrease one's time in purgatory by 1,902,202 years and 270 days.²⁴ Obviously, there was a great deal of money to be made by indulgences, and by the middle of the fourteenth century the rich were even able to purchase from their confessors a plenary indulgence at the moment of death.²⁵

It should be noted that indulgences were never intended to pardon future sins and that contrition and true repentance were required for the indulgence to be effective. However,

²² Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 137.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 117.

²⁵ Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 137.

such language was usually in what today would be called the 'fine print' and, as Hamilton points out, "...few people read the text of the indulgence, they knew only what the preachers told them about it...and, like good salesmen of any age...", they didn't mention the fine print.²⁶

One reason the popes felt justified in expanding the sale of indulgences was the doctrine of the Church Treasury, or Treasury of Merits, again developed by the scholastic theologians. The scholastics reasoned that both Jesus and the saints had earned so much merit by their virtuous lives that there existed in heaven a profound excess of merit. Because the popes held the keys to the kingdom, the excess merit could be distributed in any way they felt proper. In 1343 the doctrine of the Treasury of the Church was officially sanctioned by Clement IV.²⁷

Reactions Against Medieval Consumer Theology

In this way, the sale of indulgences became consumer theology. The forgiveness of God became a commodity for purchase. The people became customers of the church, which acted as the vendor. That the buyers of indulgences felt entitled to the benefits of God can be seen in the following quotation from the Oxford Chancellor, Thomas Gascoigne. In 1450 he wrote, "Sinners say nowadays 'I care not how many or how great sins I commit before God, for I shall easily and quickly get plenary remission of any guilt and

²⁶ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 131.

²⁷ Latourette, *Beginnings to 1500*, 529-530.

penalty whatsoever by absolution and indulgence granted to me from the Pope, whose writing and grant I have bought....”²⁸

Condemnation of this brand of consumer theology began much earlier than the mid-fifteenth century. In approximately the year 1270, Berthold of Regensburg wrote, “Fie, penny-preacher...thou dost promise so much remission of sins for a mere halfpenny or penny, that thousands now trust thereto, and fondly dream to have atoned for all their sins with the halfpenny or penny, and thus go to hell.”²⁹ Other churchmen of the age, such as John Wycliffe (c. 1380), Jean Gerson (c. 1420), and Wessel Ganfort (c. 1489), also questioned and condemned the practice.³⁰

John Hus

One man who stood against the consumer theology of his day, at the cost of his own life, was John Hus. Born in Goosetown in southern Bohemia in either 1372 or 1373,³¹ he grew to become a fierce critic of the church for its practice of simony. As this paper demonstrated in the last chapter, simony takes its name from Simon, the sorcerer in Acts 8 who tried to buy the power to bestow the Holy Spirit. To Hus, simony was one of the three types of heresy, the other two being apostasy and blasphemy, and was descriptive of “...those who sell spiritual power or the gift of the Holy Spirit for money or other valu-

²⁸ *Indulgence*, LoveToKnow, October 22, 2006, <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Indulgence> (accessed September 2, 2007).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Robert W. Shaffern, “Indulgences and Sainly Devotionalisms in the Middle Ages,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 84, no. 4 (1998): 643-644.

³¹ Matthew Spinka, *John Hus' Concept of the Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 7.

ables...or express willingness to pay for what they desire.”³² Consumer theology was so prevalent during this period that it was a common practice to buy and sell the offices of the church, (i.e., priesthoods, episcopates, canonries, and parishes), as well to charge for the sacraments.³³ To Hus, “...the church of his time was ‘fatally infected’ with simony.”³⁴

Largely because of his outspoken condemnation, Hus was invited to address the council of Constance to answer charges that were against him. He left in the fall of 1414, under the impression that he had been granted a guarantee of safe return. However, less than a month after arriving in Constance, he was imprisoned, and in July of the following year, John Hus was burned alive at the stake.³⁵

Martin Luther

One man who stood against the consumer theology of his day and lived to tell about it was Martin Luther. Born in 1483 in Eisleben to peasant stock, he was raised to have deep faith in the dogma of the Catholic church. He attended the University of Erfurt and eventually prepared himself to study law.³⁶ By the time of his education, the strict logic of the scholastics had been softened by thinkers such as William of Ockham, a theologian of the early fourteenth century who rejected the rationalism of the scholastics and, instead,

³² Matthew Spinka, ed., *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, Henry P. Van Dusen, The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press Limited, 1963), 199-209.

³³ Spinka, *John Hus' Concept of the Church*, 270.

³⁴ Ibid., 308.

³⁵ Ibid., 334-382.

³⁶ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1953), 703-704.

taught that the basic tenets of Christianity should be accepted because they are taught by the church and the Bible. In other words, we accept them by faith, not reason.³⁷

In 1505, while preparing to study law, Luther encountered a thunderstorm so severe that he feared for his life. In desperation he cried out to St. Anne and vowed that if he lived, he would become a monk. He did survive the storm, and to the displeasure of his father who had high hopes for his son's career, he became a monk and studied theology instead of law.³⁸

Through his experiences as a monk and through his study of theology, Luther became convinced that much of the church dogma that was supported by the logic and reason of the scholastics was in error. When the indulgence salesman Tetzel, whom this paper has already mentioned, came to the area, Luther, now a professor at the University of Wittenberg and wishing to debate his new ideas, posted to the door of the castle church a list of 95 points condemning many of the current beliefs of the Catholic church. He rejected the power of the popes to remit penalties except those they themselves had imposed (#5), as well as the scholastics' idea of the Treasury of Heaven (#56). He rejected as well the idea that indulgences could remove guilt and punishment (#21), and condemned those who sold and bought indulgences (#27 and #32), stating that "Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters" (#36).³⁹ Luther's statement that indulgences were of no value was particularly courageous when one considers that he lived under the protection of the Elector Frederick, a man who

³⁷ Latourette, *Beginnings to 1500*, 517.

³⁸ Latourette, *Reformation to the Present*, 704-705.

³⁹ Martin Luther, "95 Theses," 1517, in *The Master Christian Library: Version 6* (Ages Software, 1997), 2-9.

claimed considerable income from the sale of indulgences and whose collection of 19,013 religious artifacts has already been mentioned.⁴⁰

What Luther wanted was debate; what he got was reformation. Due to the recent invention of the printing press, his ideas were soon in the hands of people all over Europe. And, due to the weakness of the authority of the Catholic church, even though the church condemned both Luther and his ideas, they could not touch him physically as they had John Hus. In this way, both Luther and the reformation he unintentionally helped to create survived.⁴¹

Soon, the tide was turning against the consumer theology represented in the sale of indulgences. As part of the preparation for the All Saints Day festival, the Elector Frederick used to have some of the relics in his collection paraded in the streets, an early form of marketing. However, when this parade took place in 1523, many people along the route booed. In 1524, the parade was discontinued.⁴²

It should be noted here that the Roman Catholic church still believes in and grants indulgences.⁴³ According to an article in *Christianity Today*, “The Vatican’s new *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* lists 33 (instead of 74) steps for penitent Catholics to take in an indulgence.... Catholics earn indulgences through good deeds accompanied by confession,

⁴⁰ Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 117.

⁴¹ Latourette, *Reformation to the Present*, 718.

⁴² James Bentley, *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics* (London: Constable, 1985), 177.

⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York: Image, 1995), 411. See pp 291, 400-410 for more on contemporary understandings of penance and purgatory, which are also still part of Catholic dogma.

communion and prayer.”⁴⁴ However, the article continues by noting that the church no longer sells indulgences as it once did in the Middle Ages.

It is not the purpose of this paper to present a history of the Reformation. Suffice it to say that Luther was only one of many leaders of the Protestant Reformation that broke out spontaneously across Europe. Calvin, Zwingli, Menno Simons, and many others all helped to stand against the consumer theology of the prevailing church.⁴⁵

Instead, this paper will now turn its attention to one of the more ironic consequences of the Reformation, namely, that the very Reformation that stood opposed to the consumer theology of the late medieval church actually helped lay the foundation for the consumer theology of the modern church.

The Reformation's Role in Modern Consumer Theology

In chapter 1, it was shown that the rise of productive businesses, particularly since the industrial revolution of the latter nineteenth century, has created the consumer culture in which we now live. In the middle of the twentieth century, sociologist Max Weber studied the growth of the capitalist society and noticed “...that business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labour, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of the modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant.”⁴⁶ He discovered that this held true regardless of the religious makeup of a country. Indeed, the religious makeup of a country indicated how that country would develop economically. Weber notes that “The more freedom it [the country]

⁴⁴ Jody Veenker, “Vatican Amends Indulgences Doctrine,” *Christianity Today*, November 15 1999, 28.

⁴⁵ Latourette, *Reformation to the Present*, 703-831.

⁴⁶ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 35.

has had, the more clearly the effect shown.”⁴⁷ In other words, when Weber did his research, countries that were predominantly Protestant had greater capitalistic growth than did the Roman Catholic nations.

According to his research, this disparity can be explained, at least in part, as a consequence of the Protestant Reformation. Neither Weber nor this paper claims that these consequences were intentional. Nevertheless, there were several ways that the Reformation helped to establish our consumer society and, as a result, consumer theology.

The Priesthood of All Believers

In April 1521, Martin Luther was summoned before the Diet of Worms and, when asked by the members to repudiate his own writings, Luther asked for time for reflection. The next day, standing before the Diet, “...he repeated that his conscience was captive to the word of God and that unless he were convinced by Scripture and plain reason, for he did not accept the authority of Popes and councils...he would not recant anything...He added, ‘God help me. Amen.’”⁴⁸ In other accounts of his final statement, Luther adds “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”⁴⁹

Whether or not Luther actually spoke those final words matters little. However, they do sum up the essence of his thoughts and actions. Indeed, they sum up the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Luther insisted that his beliefs and actions would be determined, not by the church, but by himself. True, he would use the Bible to direct him, but it was

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Latourette, *Reformation to the Present*, 717.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the Bible as he, Luther, interpreted it. In so doing, Luther rejected the church's traditional role as mediator between God and humanity. Each person must stand before God and answer for him or herself.

Charles Taylor writes, "One of the central points common to all Reformers was their rejection of mediation. The mediaeval church as they understood it, a corporate body in which some, more dedicated, members could win merit and salvation for others who were less so, was anathema to them."⁵⁰ As we have already seen, the medieval church acted as a mediator between Jesus and his people in several ways: the saints could earn extra merit on behalf of the common people; those merits could be dispensed with the blessings of the Pope; the priests, and only the priests, could forgive and assign the penance that would remit the full penalty of sin.

However, the Reformers believed "...that there are no intermediaries between God and the sinner save for Christ himself, and they insisted that this unique role could not be usurped without destroying the faith that claimed his name."⁵¹ As will now be seen, this rejection of earthly mediators, this belief in the priesthood of all believers, had a profound impact on the development of both consumerism and consumer theology.

A blessing on the practice of business

For over a thousand years prior to the Reformation, the church held a stance that was decidedly anti-business and commerce. In the second century, the writer of *The Shepherd*

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 215.

⁵¹ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 144.

of *Hermas* encourages his readers not to get too comfortable in this world, for we are really preparing to live in “another city.” The writer states “...you know the city in which you are to dwell, why do ye here provide lands, and make expensive preparations, and accumulate dwellings and useless buildings?”⁵² He then gives this advice: “Instead of lands, therefore, buy afflicted souls, according as each one is able, and visit widows and orphans, and do not overlook them....” The writer continues, calling the accumulation of houses and lands the “...expenditure of the heathen...” which, accordingly, is “...injurious to you who are the servants of God.”⁵³

Augustine once wrote, “Business is in itself evil, for it turns men from seeking true rest, which is God.”⁵⁴ The canon law of the early church declared, “The man who buyeth a thing in order that he may gain by selling it again unchanged and as he bought it, that man is of the buyers and sellers who are cast forth from God’s temple.”⁵⁵ Saint Jerome stated, “A man who is a merchant can seldom please God.”⁵⁶

Add to these quotations the fact that, in the medieval church, “...all taking of interest was strictly condemned and absolution could be had only by full restitution of the sums so acquired...”⁵⁷ and one can see that the medieval church was not business-friendly.

⁵² “The Pastor of Hermas,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. James Donaldson, Alexander Roberts (Ages Software, 1997), 55.

⁵³ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁴ Clapp, “Why the Devil...,” 21.

⁵⁵ *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West*, 1st ed., (Columbia University Press, 1960), 1:201.

⁵⁶ Clapp “Why the Devil...,” 21.

⁵⁷ Latourette, *Beginnings to 1500*, 557.

This attitude was due first of all because of the biblical views regarding riches mentioned in chapter 2. However, it was also due to the extreme dichotomy in the medieval church between the sacred and the secular. According to David Wells, the medieval church saw a distinction between "...the 'spiritual' (anything under the church's control) and the 'secular' (anything that was not under the church's control)."⁵⁸ Indeed, to the medieval mind, those who wished to live in a way pleasing to God chose the celibate life and became nuns, monks and priests. Those who were unwilling to strive towards such perfection in life did secular work. Consider these words from Thomas a' Kempis (1380-1471):

If you wish peace and concord with others, you must learn to break your will in many things. To live in monasteries or religious communities, to remain there without complaint, and to persevere faithfully till death is no small matter. Blessed indeed is he who there lives a good life and there ends his days in happiness. If you would persevere in seeking perfection, you must consider yourself a pilgrim, an exile on earth.⁵⁹

My child, you cannot always continue in the more fervent desire of virtue, or remain in the higher stage of contemplation, but because of humanity's sin you must sometimes descend to lower things and bear the burdens of this corruptible life...In such condition it is well for you to apply yourself to humble, outward works.⁶⁰

The priest, indeed, is the minister of God, using the word of God according to His command and appointment. God, moreover, is there – the chief Author and invisible Worker to Whom all is subject as He wills, to Whom all are obedient as He commands.⁶¹

According to Taylor, this type of thinking resulted in a "...lesser spiritual status for lay life, particularly that of productive labour and the family."⁶²

⁵⁸ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 145.

⁵⁹ Thomas a' Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 16.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 116-117.

⁶¹ Ibid., 142.

⁶² Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 217.

However, when the reformers developed the idea of the priesthood of all believers, the monopoly on the sacred held by the church was broken. This meant that clergy in the reformed churches were no closer to God than the laity and therefore the vocation of clergy was no more sacred than any other. Accordingly, all were to live for God, not just the clergy. Everything one did—worship, family, and business—was to be done for God’s glory.

According to Weber, the consequence of this belief was to transform everyday work and activities into a way to live out the will of God:

The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. This was his calling.... It and it alone is the will of God, and hence every legitimate calling has exactly the same worth in the sight of God.... That this moral justification of worldly activity was one of the most important results of the Reformation...is beyond doubt, and may even be considered a platitude.⁶³

This attitude that all can and should be done to the best of one’s ability for the glory of God can be seen in the writings of the Puritans, those followers of John Calvin who had such an impact on the founding and growth of America. The Puritan Jon Dod (c.1549-1645) wrote, “Whatsoever our calling be, we serve the Lord Christ in them...though your worke be base, yet it is not a base thing to serve such a master in it.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Joseph Hall (1574-1656) wrote, “The homeliest service that we doe in an honest calling, though it be but to plow, or digge, if done in obedience, and conscience of God’s Commandments, is crowned with an ample reward.”⁶⁵ Finally, William Perkins (1558-1602) makes

⁶³ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 81.

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 224.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

what to the medieval Catholic mind would have been a shocking comparison: “Now, if we compare worke to worke, there is a difference betwixt washing of dishes, and preaching of the word of God: but as touching to please God none at all...whatsoever is done within the lawes of God though it be wrought by the body, as wipings of shoes and such like, howsoever grosse they appeare outwardly, yet are they sanctified.”⁶⁶

The practical result was that, compared to people in the Catholic church, Protestants in business could now claim that they were fulfilling the call of God in their lives, and it is this attitude that the Puritan followers of Dod, Hall, and Perkins brought with them to the shores of the New World.

However, this attitude alone was not enough to provide the economic engine that would create consumerism and consumer theology. It would be the consequences of the theology of another reformer that would provide the justification for striving for financial success: the reformer John Calvin.

The Protestant Work Ethic

John Calvin was born in 1509, sixty miles outside of Paris. By age twenty-six he had written what some historians call “...the most important influential single book of the Protestant Reformation...,”⁶⁷ *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin explains in depth the doctrine of predestination:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation;

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Latourette, *Reformation to the Present*, 752.

and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.⁶⁸

To Calvin, it was a doctrine so important that "...no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny..."⁶⁹ In other words, to Calvin this doctrine was so clear and central that no true Christian would ever reject it. It is not the purpose of this paper to debate the doctrine of predestination, but simply to examine the role it played in the economic growth and, therefore, the consumerism of modern society.

It is natural for one, in context of this doctrine, to wonder if he/she is one of the elect for heaven. It may be natural, but, according to Calvin, it is also dangerous. He writes:

Among the temptations with which Satan assaults believers, none is greater or more perilous, than when disquieting them with doubts as to their election, he at the same time stimulates them with a depraved desire of inquiring after it out of the proper way.... By inquiring out of the proper way, I mean when puny man endeavors to penetrate to the hidden recesses of the divine wisdom, and goes back even to the remotest eternity, in order that he may understand what final determination God has made with regard to him.⁷⁰

Calvin goes on to caution that "...once this thought has taken possession of any individual, it keeps him perpetually miserable.... Therefore, as we dread shipwreck, we must avoid this rock, which is fatal to every one who strikes upon it."⁷¹

However, the cautions of John Calvin were insufficient to keep people from trying to determine who was chosen for salvation, and who was chosen to be damned. As Weber notes, "The question, Am I one of the elect? Must sooner or later have arisen for every

⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4th ed., 1581, in *The Master Christian Library: Version 6* (Ages Software, 1997), 1030-1031.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1030.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1078.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1079.

believer and have forced all other interests into the background.”⁷² While it may not be possible to prove who is among the elect, there are indicators.

According to Calvin, we confirm our adoption as God’s children by “...coming into concord and harmony with the righteousness of God...”⁷³ For Calvin this means that those chosen by God will work to increase the glory of God here on earth. From the time of their conversion, this will be their life’s ambition. Next, they will practice self-denial, despising the things of this earth in favor of the life to come. In addition, the elect strive towards good conduct in this world, work hard at whatever calling God has placed on their lives, and endeavor to make progress every day toward the perfection we will only attain in death.⁷⁴

In other words, the life of the elect is marked by good works. As Weber notes, “...however useless good works might be as a means of attaining salvation, ...they are indispensable as a sign of election. They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation.”⁷⁵ Simply put, then, the elect are known for hard work and clean living.

This set up the cycle that is at the very heart of Weber’s description of the Protestant work ethic. He writes: “When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save. The restraints which were imposed upon the con-

⁷² Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 110.

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 772.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 772-815.

⁷⁵ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 115.

sumption of wealth naturally served to increase it by making possible the productive investment of capital.”⁷⁶

In other words, in order to demonstrate that they are among the elect, people became industrious and, therefore, they became prosperous. However, due to their commitment to self-denial, they were unable to use their prosperity to enjoy luxuries. So instead, they reinvested their new capital back into their farms and businesses, becoming more prosperous still. By extension then, increasing prosperity became an indicator that you were among the elect.

While this cycle is often true, it is also dangerous. As we have already seen in chapter 2, God has consistently warned us concerning the deceptive qualities of prosperity and wealth. Even Calvin believed that only when people remained poor did they truly obey God.⁷⁷ Another reformer, of a much later period, noticed the same dangerous cycle. John Wesley wrote:

I fear, whenever riches have increased, ...the essence of religion...has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for revival for true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.⁷⁸

Therefore, in an effort to demonstrate one’s status among the elect, our country became prosperous. However, as we have seen in chapter one and as John Wesley warned, that doesn’t mean that we have become righteous.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁸ John Wesley, “The Complete Works of John Wesley,” 1872, in *The Master Christian Library: Version 6* (Ages Software, 1997), 322.

The Foundation of Radical Individualism

In his article “American Individualism Reconsidered,” C. Eric Mount Jr. states what to many is obvious: “Nothing is more American than individualism.”⁷⁹ As will be shown in the next chapter, it is this individualism, more than anything else, which has contributed to the establishment and damaging effects of consumer theology in the modern church. For the remainder of this chapter, this paper will examine how the Protestant Reformation contributed to the idea of individualism.

Medieval people did not see themselves as autonomous individuals. Rather, their self-definition was always in respect to others and their role in society. Thus, in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Alasdair MacIntyre is quoted as saying that in the medieval setting, “I confront the world as a member of this family, this household, this clan, this tribe, this city, this nation, this kingdom. There is no ‘I’ apart from these.”⁸⁰ However, this attitude changed in the Reformation. The reader is reminded of the words attributed to Luther: “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.” He did not stand as a representative of a reformation community; he stood as one man following the dictates of his own conscience as he felt it directed by God. He stood as an individual.

This sense of individualism is the logical conclusion of the Reformers’ rejection of mediation. If there is no one to mediate between God and us, save Jesus, then each of us must, in some way, stand alone. We cannot count on the church to bring us to heaven; we cannot even count on those around us. Each individual must respond on his/her own. A

⁷⁹ C. Eric Jr. Mount, “American Individualism Reconsidered,” *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 4 (1981): 363.

⁸⁰ Richard Mouw, “Alasdair Macintyre on Reformation Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 13, no. Fall (1985): 248.

person in the medieval church was "...a passenger in the ecclesial ship on its journey to God. But for Protestantism, there can be no passengers. This is because there is no ship in the Catholic sense, no common movement carrying humans to salvation. Each believer rows his or her own boat."⁸¹

This emphasis on the responsibility of each individual to decide apart from friends, family, or even church, is illustrated by John Bunyan's classic allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Early in the tale, the man who is to become Pilgrim becomes aware of his own sin and the fate of destruction that now awaits his home city and all, including his family, who live it. When he is shown by The Evangelist the way to the new city, Pilgrim doesn't hesitate, but takes straight to the path. "Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man (pilgrim) put his fingers in his ears and ran on, crying, 'Life! Life! Eternal life!'"⁸² Max Weber notes that, "...only when he himself is safe does it occur to him that it would be nice to have his family with him."⁸³

David Wells argues that "Modern individualism really arises from this, from the sense that it is the individual who must decide life's ultimate questions and that neither the state nor the church can legitimately encroach upon this preserve..."⁸⁴ In this, Wells claims too much. While it is the claim of this section that the Reformation helped shape the modern idea of individualism, one should not discount the major contributions of some of the

⁸¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 217.

⁸² John Bunyan, "The Pilgrim's Progress," 1856, in *The Master Christian Library* (Ages Software, 1996), 57.

⁸³ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 107.

⁸⁴ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 144.

other great movements throughout history, including the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and, perhaps especially, the rise of Romanticism.

However, the rise of individualism has always been one criticism the Catholic church has had concerning the Reformation. "...[A]s long as Protestantism permits itself to be guided by the spirit of the Reformers it must necessarily cultivate individualistic habits."⁸⁵ Thus, for the Catholics the Reformation was "...nothing else but an individualist revolt against an authoritative divine order."⁸⁶

This would be a fair assessment if modern individualism mirrored that of the Reformation. However, they are not twins, only distant cousins. Even though the Reformation was built on the idea that individuals must judge for themselves on religious issues, "...this did not mean ungoverned, rampant individualism. To them the Christian was bound by his allegiance to God. Protestants acknowledged authority, the authority of the word of God as recorded in the Scriptures...Their individualism was not irresponsible but submitted itself to the divine sovereignty."⁸⁷

In addition to the sovereignty and word of God, the Puritans here in America also celebrated the "...self fulfilled in community."⁸⁸ David Wells notes that, "...early Americans were not at all prototypes of their modern counterparts. They were individualists in their self-reliance, but were deeply committed to their communities...."⁸⁹ In other words, as long as there remained a deep commitment to the Word of God and to community, the

⁸⁵ Wilhelm Pauck, "The Roman Catholic Critique of Protestantism," *Theology Today* 5, no. 1 (1948): 43.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁷ Latourette, *Reformation to the Present*, 838-839.

⁸⁸ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 149.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 150.

individualism created by the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers would be kept in check.

However, as was seen in chapter 1, the bonds that held people together in community were broken in the Industrial Revolution. The result is an almost unrestrained individualism and the rampant consumerism which defines our culture and, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the consumer theology that is threatening the modern church.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that consumer theology, particularly as represented by attempts to commodify God and his blessings, has been evident from at least the fourth century. It was also demonstrated how, with the help of the logic of the scholastic theologians, consumer theology was institutionalized in the selling of indulgences, and how the Protestant Reformation was, at least in part, a reaction against the consumer theology of the medieval church.

In a somewhat ironic twist, this chapter also described how, by rejecting the mediation of the church and embracing the priesthood of all believers, the Protestant Reformation contributed to the foundation of modern consumer theology. The extreme application of the doctrine of the the priesthood of all believers led to the rejection of the dividing line between the sacred and the secular, with the result that the activities of business, so long rejected by the church and yet so necessary for consumerism, received the blessings of the church and became sanctified.

Through the Protestant work ethic, it was shown that, in an effort to prove one's election as a child of God, people became industrious and prosperous. However, because the

profits of industrious behavior could not be used for frivolous luxuries, the profits were reinvested back into people's farms and businesses, making them more prosperous still. Thus, prosperity, once condemned by the church, became a sign of God's blessing and approval.

Finally, this chapter demonstrated that the radical individualism so necessary for the creation of a consumer society and consumer theology had, at least in part, its beginnings in the Reformation. As Protestants rejected the authority of the church, proclaiming that each person must ultimately stand alone before God, they laid the foundation of individualism that has become an American icon.

In the next chapter, this paper will fast-forward to the late twentieth century in order to demonstrate the extent to which consumer theology has invaded today's church and also to examine the consequences of that invasion.

CHAPTER 4

Consumer Theology in the Modern Church

Summary of Previous Chapters and Preview of Chapter Four

In previous chapters, this paper has attempted to prove that we are now living not just in a society of consumers, but a consumer society, one in which consumerism has become a way of life. And while consumerism has benefits for our economy, it carries many negative consequences as well.

As was stated in chapter 1, consumerism has influenced many areas of modern culture, including the church. It is the premise of this paper that consumerism is so ingrained in the modern church as to warrant its own title, consumer theology. Consumer theology is characterized by a commodification of the Holy, the church acting as vendors of religious goods and services, a radical individualism, and a sense of entitlement as represented by the customer metaphor.

This paper has also demonstrated that consumer theology, while perhaps more prevalent in the modern church, is really nothing new. Using both biblical and historical materials, it has been shown that consumer theology has been present throughout God's recorded salvation history as well as the history of the New-Testament church.

This chapter will examine the extent to which consumer theology has impacted the modern church. First, this chapter will look at three causes for consumer theology in the modern church: the influence of the culture; evangelism techniques of the last few decades; and an emphasis on church marketing. Finally, this chapter will show the negative effects of consumer theology, including a shallow spirituality, a decline in evangelistic

success, the breakdown of relationships and commitments so necessary in the church, and a contribution to the high burnout rate of clergy.

Causes of Modern Consumer Theology: Cultural Influence

In a tongue-in-cheek essay, author Andy Crouch writes of his growing understanding of what it means to be a member of our consumer society. He tells how his taste was gradually refined as he sampled products from toothpaste to blue jeans, deciding for himself which he preferred. He then writes:

Naturally, my education as a consumer didn't stop when it came to religion...I soon realized that Jesus had a lot to offer me—for he, too, was concerned about my needs, preferences, and tastes, and was there to help me fulfill them.... Many times over the course of my life, as I refined my taste in churches just as I had once refined my taste in toothpaste, I had to shop for a new church.... The most successful and well-equipped churches asked very little of me.... Indeed, with their capital campaigns and their staff turnover, my churches only reinforced the central message of consumerism: there is no desire that cannot be satisfied, at least for the moment, with a purchase.¹

This light-hearted piece by Crouch touches on one of the main causes of modern consumer theology. While in the medieval church, consumer theology was encouraged by the scholastics' influence; today, consumer theology is caused in part by the church's embracing the predominant culture. Instead of standing opposed to a culture that is causing the damage described in chapter 1, the modern church has opened the front doors and made it welcome. "If most of our lives are indeed shaped by this consumer orientation, should we really be surprised if we find this way of thinking not only present in the church, but also encouraged there? Why should the church be exempt from the logic of

¹ Andy Crouch, "Consuming Passions: One Man's 'Testimony' From the First Great Mammon Awakening," *Christianity Today* 45, no. 9 (2001): 49.

the marketplace?”² While Crouch wrote his article as a parody of consumerism’s influence in the modern church, others have written seriously concerning the culture’s intrusion into areas of faith.

In their book *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, authors Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs argue that new churches, based on an “emergent” model, are needed primarily because the established church is so compromised by the consumer culture. They write, “Today, typically, individuals come to spirituality as shoppers. They consume spiritual experiences. They pursue the next spiritual experience that promises to take them to a higher spiritual plane and yield greater growth.”³ The authors go on to argue that, in response to the culture, many modern churches have adapted by embracing the consumer ethos, becoming “merchandisers of consumer spirituality” selling higher and higher spiritual peak experiences.⁴

Os Guinness would agree. Writing about the opening of the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Guinness notes that not only was it the biggest mall, it also included some unique features, including an indoor amusement park and a church which holds services on Sunday mornings between Bloomingdale’s and Sears. He disagrees with critics who feel that a church has no place in a mall. Believing that the critics have missed the point, Guinness writes, “The problem is not the presence of a church in the mall but the pres-

² Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street, *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 1997), 40.

³ Ryan K. Bolger and Eddie Gibbs, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 137.

⁴ Ibid.

ence of the mall in the church.”⁵ He notes that “Compared with the past, faith today influences culture less. Compared with the past, culture today influences faith more.”⁶

Since the culture is thoroughly consumer-oriented, the church has become so as well.

Others have noted this shift in the church’s role from influencer of culture to product of culture. Theologian Scott Hoezee writes:

In many places today we are witnessing a reversal of theological direction. In the sixteenth century the flow was mostly from the church to the culture, that is, theology and Scripture were used to evaluate, critique, or legitimate certain practices in the secular world...Now, however, the main eddies and currents seem to be flowing the other direction.”⁷

In *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, Barry Schwartz notes that churches today have become a marketplace of “comfort and tranquility,” providing consumers of religion and spirituality a plethora of choices to meet their individual tastes and desires. He continues:

This is not surprising, given the dominance of individual choice and personal satisfaction as values in our culture. Even when people join communities of faith and expect to participate in the life of those communities and embrace (at least some of) the practices of the communities, they simultaneously expect the communities to be responsive to their needs, their tastes, and their desires.⁸

Writer John Ortberg sees our consumer society summed up in the Happy Meals sold by the billions at McDonalds. He notes that kids usually want the meal for the small toy inside, which brings happiness only for a few minutes. He then states, “When you get

⁵ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 12.

⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷ Hoezee, *The Riddle of Grace*, 92.

⁸ Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*, 39-40.

older, you don't get any smarter; your Happy Meals just get more expensive."⁹ While, as this paper has shown in chapter 1, this may well describe our current culture, Ortberg also notes that "Even the church can be co-opted into just one more dispenser of Happy Meals."¹⁰

Why did the modern church not stand opposed to the culture of consumerism? Why did it so readily embrace it instead? Author Tom Sine offers three main reasons. First, because we have been raised in a growing economy, evangelicals believe that the free-market economy works well.¹¹ In other words, most of us have benefited from the economic effects of free-market consumerism. Our salaries are higher, our homes are bigger, and our toys more plentiful. 'Don't bite the hand that feeds you' is a common-sense way to live.

Second, he notes that evangelicals tend to be very selective about the cultural values that are challenged.¹² There is an entire range of cultural issues against which the church could speak but, as David Maclure observes, "Baby boomers spoke out against abortion but embraced consumerism rather quietly."¹³

Finally, Sine claims that we tend to live lives of dichotomy, "...spiritually trying to grow while our secular lives mirror the consumerism of the culture."¹⁴ George Barna

⁹ John C. Ortberg, Jr., "Happy Meal Spirituality : Why My Kids Are Convinced They Have a McDonald's-Shaped Vacuum in Their Little Souls," *Christianity Today* 37 (1993): 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹¹ Tom Sine, "Globalization, Creation of Global Culture of Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 4 (2003): 365.

¹² Ibid., 366.

¹³ David Maclure, "Wholly Available? Missionary Motivation Where Consumer Choice Reigns," *Evangel* 20, no. 3 (2002): i.

¹⁴ Sine, "Globalization...", 367.

agrees, noting that very few Christians have a biblical worldview that integrates their faith into every aspect of life.¹⁵ Indeed, his latest research indicates that the number of people with a biblical worldview capable of integrating faith and practice is actually declining.¹⁶

Not all, however, see the influence of the consumer society as a bad thing. Author John Coleman feels that the current climate of consumerism actually promotes religion, as people are free to experience and choose the faith and practices that are right for them.¹⁷ Vincent Miller, while disagreeing with the consumerism in general, notes that many who are moving from church to church are dismissed too easily. According to Miller, these “consumers” are expressing a seriousness to their search, unwilling to settle for the religion of their parents.¹⁸

Indeed, some, including George Barna in his book *Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth* and the authors of *Marketing for Congregations: Choosing to Serve People More Effectively*, encourage churches to embrace, at least partially, the customer metaphor as a way of reaching more people for Christ. More will be said about the market-driven approach later in this chapter. However, while agreeing that embracing the consumer culture may indeed produce short-term gains for the church, it is the premise of this paper that, in the long term, embracing the culture of con-

¹⁵ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church: A Blueprint for Survival* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 121-123.

¹⁶ George Barna, *The Barna Update*, The Barna Group, May 21, 2007, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=271> (accessed October 1, 2007).

¹⁷ Madsen et al, *Meaning and Modernity*, 137-138.

¹⁸ Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 90.

sumerism is detrimental to the Kingdom, producing consumer theology with all its negative side effects.

Causes of Modern Consumer Theology: Evangelistic Techniques

It is perhaps strange to consider that one emphasis designed to build the church could eventually have the opposite effect. However, evangelism, as it has been stressed in many churches over the last few decades, has done just that. Dallas Willard writes:

A fundamental mistake of the conservative side of the American church today, and much of the Western church, is that it takes as its basic goal to get as many people as possible ready to die and go to heaven. It aims to get people into heaven rather than to get heaven into people.... Now, the project thus understood and practiced is self-defeating. It implodes upon itself *because* it creates groups of people who may be ready to die, but clearly are not ready to live.... They have found ways of being “Christian” without being Christlike.¹⁹

This implosion occurs because, in many popular techniques of evangelism, God is presented not as the object of the spiritual search, but as a means to another end, thus contributing to the modern problem of consumer theology.

Evangelism is the proclamation of the good news of the Christian faith from one person to another and without it the church would die in only a few decades. A recent search of the database in the libraries of George Fox University alone revealed over 50 books dedicated to the idea of evangelism. This is indeed a popular subject.

While evangelism has been of interest to the church for some time, two works, originally published in the 1960s and 1970s, helped place evangelism front and center in many churches: *The Four Spiritual Laws*, by Bill Bright; and *Evangelism Explosion*, by D. James Kennedy. The use of these two tools has undoubtedly helped thousands upon

¹⁹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 238-239.

thousands to respond positively to the message of Jesus Christ. However, both tools have also contributed to the consumer theology of the modern church by presenting God as a means to an end, as a solution to a problem, and therefore, as a useful commodity.

The first of the four laws presented in Bill Bright's booklet states, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."²⁰ While this statement is both marvelous and true, it also places the potential convert squarely in the center of the transaction. The goal for the potential convert is not to find God, but rather that "wonderful plan." The means to that end is by believing certain truths about Jesus. By accepting the truths of the other three laws and then praying a prayer, the goal of the encounter, God's wonderful plan for life, is now accessible.

In the gospel presentation taught in Kennedy's book, the issue is not a "wonderful plan" for one's life, but eternal life. The question used to open each encounter between evangelist and potential convert is, "Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die tonight you would go to heaven?"²¹ The rest of the presentation lays out a logical pathway in order to obtain such surety of eternal life. Certainly there is nothing inherently wrong with asking such a question. However, to do so at the beginning of an evangelistic encounter implies that the real goal, as Dallas Willard noted, is to go to heaven. Again, God and Jesus are presented only as means to an end, they exist primarily to provide the real goal, eternal life.

²⁰ Bill Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (Peachtree City, GA: LifeConnections, 1965), 2.

²¹ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 4th ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1996), 75-87.

As has already been stated, both tools, *The Four Spiritual Laws* and *Evangelism Explosion*, have been used for years and have undoubtedly been responsible for the conversion of many. However, having begun the Christian journey seeing God as a means to another end only serves to reinforce the basic elements of consumer theology.

Causes of Modern Consumer Theology: Church Marketing

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, books began being published recommending that churches adopt marketing strategies, patterned after those found in the consumer-oriented culture, as appropriate methods for attaining church growth. Published in 1988, the book *Marketing Your Church: What They Never Told You About Church Growth*, by George Barna, is typical of the advice given to would-be church marketers. In his book, Barna gives four reasons that churches should adopt a marketing orientation. First, “The church is a business.... Our goal as a church, like any secular business, is to turn a profit. For us, however, profit means saving souls and nurturing believers.”²²

Next, Barna states that marketing is essential for any business and that “...we have to recognize the advantages of marketing and adapt them to the ways of the church....”²³ His third reason for stressing church marketing is that, according to his research, only one out of ten churches were able to articulate an adequate “marketing philosophy.”²⁴ Finally,

²² George Barna, *Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 26.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 27.

according to Barna, the condition of the church in the late 80s was so disturbing that alternate methods had to be tried.²⁵

Other writers of the era agreed, pointing to the successful growth of consumer-oriented churches such as Willow Creek and Saddleback. Churches were encouraged to take a needs-based approach to ministry, carefully assessing the felt needs of those they were trying to reach and then designing programs to meet those needs.²⁶ As Barna wrote, “Think of your church not as a religious meeting place, but as a service agency, an entity that exists to satisfy people’s needs...not the needs that we claim people have, but the needs that the people themselves recognize and express.”²⁷ In other words, adopting a marketing orientation meant viewing the unchurched as customers. Like any other business in our consumer culture, the way to grow is to assess the needs and desires of one’s potential customers and design products and services that will meet those needs. Proponents of church marketing acknowledge that the felt needs of those they are trying to reach may not be, from the point of view of the gospel, their real need, but as Richard Reising points out in *Church Marketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth*, “Unless we can connect with people on the level they feel they need, we cannot introduce them to their real needs.”²⁸ However, while aggressive marketing may help increase the attendance of a local church, it also contributes to consumer theology in several ways.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Philip Kotler, Norman Shawchuck, Gustave Rath, and Bruce Wrenn, *Marketing for Congregations: Choosing to Serve People More Effectively* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 34-86.

²⁷ Barna, *Marketing the Church*, 88.

²⁸ Richard L. Reising, *ChurchMarketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 29.

First, it should be noted that there is a difference between marketing techniques and a marketing orientation. Marketing techniques such as advertising and promotion can be useful in building the Kingdom and were even used to some extent by Jesus in his ministry.²⁹ The marketing orientation, however, is more than just a collection of techniques; it is a philosophy, a worldview that must, in order to be effective, touch every area of the church. Barna describes it this way:

...[T]hink of marketing as the activities that allow you, as a church, to identify and understand people's needs, to identify your resources and capabilities, and to engage in a course of action that will enable you to use your resources and capabilities to satisfy the needs of the people to whom you wish to minister. Marketing is the process by which you seek to apply your product to the desires of the target population.³⁰

At first glance this description may seem to be nothing more than an attempt to focus all the energies and resources of a church into fulfilling its mission and, granted, one should assume that Barna's motive is to do just that. However, this marketing orientation carries with it several assumptions that contribute to modern consumer theology and its negative consequences.

First, a marketing orientation does not just contribute to the customer metaphor of consumer theology; it must embrace it. It is the "felt" needs of the customer that must be met. As church consultant Richard Southern states, "We need a new paradigm shift in the way church is done, one that puts the needs of potential customers ahead of the institution."³¹ While it is a good thing to be people-centered and not program-centered, as Kenyon and Street point out, "If the church's goal is to meet felt needs, then the danger

²⁹ See Luke 9:52. In this passage Jesus sends an advance team to a village in Samaria to prepare the town for his coming. When he is denied access, the indignant disciples ask for permission to call down God's wrath and destroy the town.

³⁰ Barna, *Marketing the Church*, 23.

³¹ Cimino and Lattin, *Shopping for Faith*, 58.

arises that the entire enterprise will be shaped primarily by those needs that the consumer desires to have satisfied.”³² In other words, the danger is that it is not God, but the needs of the customer, that will set the agenda for the church. This runs contrary to the very nature of the church, for as Bolger and Gibbs point out, “...the gospel is primarily about God’s agenda, not ours.”³³

In addition, attracting people by treating them as customers may make it difficult, if not impossible, to convince them at some point down the line that, in reality, they are not customers of the church and never really were. They may continually demand that the church meet their ever-changing list of needs. As Kenneson and Street note, “...if you treat people like customers they will act like customers. ...[W]hat the church marketing story fails to emphasize clearly enough is that the engine driving the marketing model is not the congregation that desires a more effective way of ‘serving,’ but the consumers of religion who well know that they are in a buyer’s market.”³⁴

A marketing orientation also contributes to the radical individualism that is another component of consumer theology. Having come to the church being enticed by the promise that one’s needs will be met, it is only natural to keep one eye open to other churches that might do a better job. “It is the sense of the individual in community that we have lost. We no longer have a strong sense of solidarity towards others. Popular American religion, whether Protestant or New Age, is focused on the satisfaction of the individual.”³⁵ In an essay contained in *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit*

³² Kenneson and Street, *Selling out the Church*, 73.

³³ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 138.

³⁴ Kenneson and Street, *Selling out the Church*, 67.

³⁵ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 82.

of the Age, Nigel Scotland writes, “Because the churches are marketing their product in such an aggressive fashion, people are minded to keep looking round in case they missed out and there are better bargains and services to be had...on the other side of town.”³⁶

Scotland continues, “Consumerism in contemporary Christianity has created a rampant individualism.... Thus for many churchgoers Christianity has become primarily a life-style, an ethos, a culture or a club, rather than a faith or relationship with a Lord who demands total commitment on the part of his followers and who wants them to live in community relationships with others.”³⁷

This individualism is enhanced because a church with a marketing orientation, in an effort to meet the needs of its customer base, by nature fulfills another characteristic of consumer theology and becomes a vendor of religious goods and services. The first step in the marketing orientation is to find out what goods and services the customer needs, and then design programs to meet them.³⁸ Recall the earlier quotation from Barna calling churches to become service agencies. The church, therefore, rather than being a group of people committed to community, becomes nothing more than a collection of individuals seeking to have their individual needs catered to and met by the vendor that is the church. And as Eddie Gibbs points out, “Generating a climate in which people demand to have their needs met creates an addictive situation, with people becoming increasingly strident and unreasonable in their demands.”³⁹

³⁶ Nigel Scotland, “Shopping for a Church: Consumerism and the Churches,” in *Christ and Consumerism*, ed. Bartholomew and Moritz, 144.

³⁷ Ibid., 144-145.

³⁸ Kotler et al, *Marketing for Congregations*, 141-164.

³⁹ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 45.

This leads to the final way in which a marketing orientation contributes to consumer theology: it turns God and his church into just another commodity to consume. Bolger and Gibbs write, “Consumer churches present a relationship with Jesus as the answer to widespread feelings of angst. Thus, Jesus is turned into a product that satisfies needs.”⁴⁰ The authors of *Religion and Popular Culture in America* agree, writing, “Using market logic to create programs, services, and even products to respond to religious ‘seeking’ turns religion into a commodity. Worse still, religion becomes just one commodity in a culture of commodities, and therefore necessarily less, [sic] ‘authentic,’ ‘meaningful,’ and ‘truly religious.’”⁴¹ In other words, when a church’s orientation is customer-driven, when it begins, not with God’s agenda but the felt needs of the customer, God and his church are presented as the solution to those needs; God becomes a commodity, a means to an end rather than the end itself.

At this point, one could well ask the question, “so what?” So what if consumer theology is the logical conclusion of the combination of our culture, evangelism techniques, and aggressive marketing? Does it really matter if the job gets done and churches grow? The answer depends very much on one’s answer to another question: what is the church and what is it called by God to do?

If the church, as Barna has stated, is nothing more than a business, a service agency, placed here through the sacrifice of Jesus and led by the Holy Spirit to meet the needs and desires of people, then consumer theology is not a problem. In fact, it is the best method around. Make God the answer to the problems of life. Design services with the

⁴⁰ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 138.

⁴¹ Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds., *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 141.

customer in mind. Encourage people to move from church to church until they find one that meets their needs. And remember, the customer is always right. We, as the church, exist to meet their ever-changing needs, so we must be willing to change and adapt or risk losing our “market share.”

However, it is the presupposition of this paper that the church is not a service agency and is not primarily concerned with meeting “felt needs.” Kenneson and Street agree, noting one reason church marketing has been popular is that “...the church in the United States has largely forgotten what it means to be the church.”⁴² They continue:

We believe that the church is called to be a sign, a foretaste, and a herald of God’s present but still emerging kingdom. Because the hallmark of that kingdom is God’s reconciling work in the world, the church lives to point to, to embody, and to proclaim that reconciling work...If the church’s embodied life and witness are to be a sign, a foretaste, and a herald of this kingdom, then the church must strive diligently to embody faithfully those convictions that make visible this kingdom.⁴³

In other words, the church is not called to be a service agency meeting the felt needs of potential customers; it is called to be the evidence that God is, that he is reconciled with us through Jesus, and that his kingdom has come to earth here and now. The church goes about its mission, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, proclaiming the gospel, not “...because it is seeking personal or customer satisfaction, but because the people of God have been called to bear the embodied witness to God’s ‘upside-down’ kingdom.”⁴⁴ As will now be seen, consumer theology is hindering, rather than advancing, the true purpose of the church in several ways.

⁴² Kenneson and Street, *Selling out the Church*, 23.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 71.

Results of Consumer Theology in the Modern Church: Shallow Spirituality

To be the sign, the herald of God's emerging kingdom here on earth, God's people must live lives of authentic transformation. We must, individually and collectively, demonstrate the difference following Christ truly makes. Unfortunately, research indicates that in spite of decades of intentional evangelism and aggressive church marketing, the people of God bear an uncanny resemblance, not to the Son of God, but to the unchurched.

George Barna has spent decades studying the religious landscape. While this paper disagrees with his endorsement of the marketing orientation for effective ministry, his research concerning the church and the world should be well noted. In 1998, Barna analyzed his own research and wrote, "Most Christians...have fallen prey to the same disease as their worldly counterparts. We think and behave no differently from anyone else."⁴⁵ Eight years later, in the book *Revolution*, Barna wrote:

One of the greatest frustrations of my life has been the disconnection between what our research consistently shows about churched Christians and what the Bible calls us to be...if the local church is comprised of people who have been transformed by the grace of God through their redemption in Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit, then their lives should be noticeable and compellingly different from the norm.⁴⁶

One could well ask how this is possible considering the emphasis on discipleship, evangelism, and church growth that has taken place over the last few decades? The answer from this paper's point of view is that a consumer orientation that results in consumer theology must by necessity produce a shallow spirituality. According to Eddie Gibbs, "If converts are attracted on the basis of satisfying self-interest, it will be difficult

⁴⁵ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 7.

⁴⁶ George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 31.

to change this into the daily cross-carrying that is characteristic of authentic discipleship. People are likely to continue on the basis on which they first came.”⁴⁷

As has already been seen, both the evangelistic techniques and the marketing orientation of the last few decades place the felt needs of the customer squarely at the center of the transaction with God. “To increasing millions of Americans, God, if we even believe in a superhuman deity, exists for the pleasure of humankind. He resides in the heavenly realm solely for our utility and benefit.”⁴⁸ Compare this consumer attitude to the words of Jesus, “...If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Denial of self hardly fits into the what’s-in-it-for-me consumer mindset. As David Wells notes, “Asceticism, or self-denial in any form, has become the new immorality; self-indulgence is the new gospel.”⁴⁹

In the process of moving towards Christian maturity, it is simply impossible to “have your cake and eat it too.” Something must be surrendered; indeed, something must die. “The point isn’t to accommodate self-centeredness, but to attack it. If you don’t, then the Gospel becomes just one more commodity we seek to package.”⁵⁰ Consumer theology calls to people and claims that if they come to the church, their felt needs will be met and satisfied. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁵¹ The former approach may help increase attendance, but, as will be shown in the next chapter, only the latter will produce real life change. “[T]he church is not sup-

⁴⁷ Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 50.

⁴⁸ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 7.

⁴⁹ Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 181.

⁵⁰ Hutton, *Feel-Good Society*, 84.

⁵¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1937), 7.

posed to be a place that makes us feel comfortable with who we are, but a place where we're transformed by God's grace into something we're not."⁵²

Results of Consumer Theology in the Modern Church: Decrease in Evangelism

The shallow spirituality produced by consumer theology leads directly to another consequence, a decrease in effective evangelism. We are living in an age with a strong interest in all things spiritual. In their book *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium*, authors Richard Cimino and Don Lattin go into great detail concerning their observations and studies on the spiritual hunger in America. They describe the 1990s and the "decade of the soul," noting that in 1996 there were 322 books in print that somehow referenced the soul, "...nearly four times the number in 1990."⁵³ Other authors agree. In *Emerging Churches*, Gibbs and Bolger note that in recent times spirituality has "...surfaced to an unprecedented degree...."⁵⁴ At the close of the last century, Barna stated that Americans were "...more devoted to seeking spiritual enlightenment" than at any time in the last one hundred years.⁵⁵

This apparent hunger for spiritual truth should result in a bountiful harvest for the church for, after all, the church is the dwelling place for THE Spirit of truth. However, studies indicate that the expected harvest has yet to materialize. According to research, the percentage of people going to church each week has actually gone down slightly over

⁵² Hutton, *Feel-Good Society*, 85.

⁵³ Cimino and Lattin, *Shopping for Faith*, 28.

⁵⁴ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 22.

⁵⁵ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 5.

the last 15 years or so.⁵⁶ The nation's increasing spiritual hunger presents an opportunity for the message of the gospel, and yet "...at this moment of optimum opportunity, Christianity is having less impact on people's perspectives and behaviors than ever."⁵⁷

This interest in things spiritual but rejection of the church is found in other nations as well. In Amsterdam in the early 90s, when young people were asked if they were interested in God, 100% said yes. When asked, however, if they were interested in church, 99% said no.⁵⁸

The question could once again be asked, "How can this be?" How is it possible for the church to experience so little evangelistic success in an age of unprecedented interest in the spiritual life? The answer is that consumer theology, with its self-centered orientation, has not produced the spiritual development necessary to attract spiritual seekers. Or, to use a marketing term, the product of the church is not attractive to those seeking spiritual truth.

Dallas Willard has noted that what most people in church spend their time discussing has more to do with their own personal tastes, needs and desires than it does with the real mission of the church. He goes on to say that this creates what he calls "righteously mean Christians." According to Willard, churches spend so much time on minor issues of will and taste and so little time on proper spiritual formation, they actually push spiritual

⁵⁶ George Barna, *Church Attendance*, The Barna Group, 2005, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=10> (accessed October 3, 2007).

⁵⁷ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 5.

⁵⁸ Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Changed the World* (Emmelsbull, Germany: C & P Publishing, 1999), 2.

seekers away because "...the lives of the 'converted' testify against the reality of the 'life that is life indeed.'"⁵⁹ Barna's research would agree:

The downfall of the church has not been the content of its message but the failure to practice those truths. Christians have been their own worst enemies when it comes to showing the world what authentic, biblical Christianity looks like, and why it represents a viable alternative to materialism, existentialism, mysticism, and the other doctrines of popular culture.⁶⁰

Results of Consumer Theology in the Modern Church: Decline of Community

The apostle Paul wrote the following mandate to the church at Philippi concerning what it means to be the church:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (Phil 2:1-4).

Consumerism, and the consumer theology it creates in the church, takes this mandate for community and shatters it. It does so in several ways.

First, as has been shown, consumer theology creates customers, and customers tend to be committed only to their own needs. After all, being attracted to the church by a needs-based marketing approach, it is only natural to continue to see the church, not as a community to whom one is committed, but as a vendor, existing to meet my current need. This "my-needs-over-your-needs" orientation created by consumer theology is the antithesis of biblical community.

⁵⁹ Willard, *Renovation*, 239.

⁶⁰ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 5.

Next, consumer theology breaks down community by turning the church into a place where religious and spiritual needs of the customer are met. As Bolger and Gibbs note:

When church is understood primarily as a place rather than as a people, the physical church property becomes a place where people receive spiritual products. The service is built around the consumption of these experiences. The marketing church structures itself in such a way that visitors expect to be served. It creates consumers out of visitors. Over time, members come to believe that church represents programs and services done to them rather than participants who are all invited and expected to contribute.⁶¹

Customers expect the vendor to be committed to their needs, but a reciprocating brand loyalty only goes so far. This brings up the final way in which consumer theology weakens the biblical idea of community: when customers no longer feel they receive the required benefit from their vendor, changing vendors is an easy solution.

Consumer theology has created an environment of Christians on the move, only their movement is not towards mission, but from church to church. “More and more Americans are beginning to view churches as a ‘rest stop’ along their spiritual journey, rather than as a final destination.”⁶² This quotation from George Barna indicates the modern phenomena of what is called “sheep sharing,” the tendency of people to move from church to church in a local community. Barna goes on to give several reasons why this is occurring. Among these is the modern preference for variety, the belief that spiritual growth comes from searching the alternatives rather than from commitment to one particular faith group, and “Our repositioning of religion as a commodity that we consume, rather than one in which we invest ourselves.”⁶³

⁶¹ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 158.

⁶² Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 19.

⁶³ Ibid.

Consumer theology, because of its self-centered orientation, teaches us to always keep one eye open in case something better comes along. As one man who constantly was looking for the “hot” church as his community put it, “I’ve just got to be where the action is.”⁶⁴ This mindset is not only detrimental to the community of any particular fellowship; it can also negatively affect the community between congregations in any particular geographic area. As Kenneson and Street note:

With many local churches viewing other local churches as their competitors, due in part to the consumer mentality that church shoppers embody, many congregations feel enormous pressure to offer an ever-expanding variety of programs and services in order to attract and retain customers to their own version of the ecclesial supermarket. The result often looks less like the ‘one holy, catholic, and apostolic’ church and more like the competing interest groups that fragment American social, political, and economic life.⁶⁵

This pressure to offer more and better programs in order to attract and retain customers thoroughly steeped in consumer theology brings up the final result of consumer theology that this paper will explore: clergy burnout.

Results of Consumer Theology in the Modern Church: Clergy Burnout

According to statistics prepared by Mark Driscoll for the elder board at Mars Hill church:

- Over 1500 pastors leave the ministry each month for reasons other than retirement.
- Half of all clergy marriages will end in divorce.
- Eighty percent of pastors feel unqualified and discouraged.
- Fifty percent are so discouraged they would leave the ministry if they had another way to earn a living.
- Eighty percent of all seminary and Bible-school graduates will leave the ministry within the first five years of service in a church.

⁶⁴ Ortberg, “Happy Meal Spirituality,” 40.

⁶⁵ Kenneson and Street, *Selling out the Church*, 78-79.

- Seventy percent of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Eighty percent of pastors' spouses wish their spouse would choose another profession.
- The majority of pastor's wives surveyed said that the most destructive event that has occurred in their marriage and family was the day they entered the ministry.⁶⁶

Statistics presented by H. B. London would agree that many clergy live in crisis:

- Eighty percent of pastors believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively.
- One-third say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.
- Fifty percent feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- Ninety percent feel they're inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- Forty percent report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.⁶⁷

Something is clearly wrong with the state of the clergy today, and consumer theology, while not the only cause, it is at least a major player.

Because of consumer theology, the clergy feel stress to provide the programs and services that will attract and keep the needed customers of the church. As author Gary McIntosh notes of the pastor, "Because of his efforts to meet extrabiblical demands, he may fail to meet the biblical ones. Church members rightly expect him to be a tower of spiritual and emotional strength, but his reserves are often low because of what one pastor bluntly called a 'distorted concept of the ministry.' This is the environment that burns pastors out."⁶⁸ The problem is compounded because, as Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon point out, "...our church lives in a buyer's market. The customer is king. What

⁶⁶ Mark Driscoll, *Death by Ministry*, Mars Hill Church, 2006, http://theresurgence.com/mdblog_2006-05-24_death_by_ministry (accessed October 3, 2007).

⁶⁷ H. B. London, Jr. and Neil Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 20.

⁶⁸ Robert L. Edmondson and Gary McIntosh, *It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do About It* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 17.

the customer wants, the customer should get.”⁶⁹ They go on to note that pastors who try to mix the gospel with the market-driven economy “...one day wake up and hate themselves for it.”⁷⁰

However, again because of consumer theology, people’s commitment level to help provide the necessary programs required in our consumer culture is low. Remember, because of consumer theology, church is something that is done to the customer, rather than something to participate in. As a result, the pastor feels pushed to create and maintain the required programs with little help from those demanding the services. “Uninvolved, demanding people often unknowingly create churchwide discontent at times when the pastor is too fatigued or too fed up to challenge the disruption.”⁷¹

As a result, the pastor takes on more and more in an effort to build the church and keep the consumer-oriented flock content. A study conducted in 1934 identified five roles for the clergy: teacher, preacher, worship leader, pastor, and administrator. By 1980 the list had grown to nine, now including such elements as: leading social and political issues. By 1986 the list was fourteen, including counseling and “leading the capital campaign.”⁷² What began as a calling dedicated to the spiritual development of the church has grown to become a profession of administration and marketing. As pastors continually fail to meet the unrealistic demands of the consumers they lead, “...pastors feel like they are being nibbled to death by ducks. A little nibble here, a little nibble there, and be-

⁶⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony (A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 142.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 67.

⁷² Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 232.

fore they know it, they have lost an arm and a leg. Pastors come to hate the very people they are called to serve and hate themselves for what they have allowed people to do to them.”⁷³

According to Earl Creps, most pastors “...have an unfulfilled longing to do ministry in a way that feels more like co-laboring with Christ than being employed by Christians.”⁷⁴ However, because of consumer theology, pastors are often reduced to employee status, with little understanding of the job description, and dozens, if not hundreds or thousands of supervisors.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented materials which illustrate that consumer theology has come of age in the modern church. One reason for this coming of age is that the church, rather than standing opposed to the consumer-oriented culture created in the last part of the twentieth century, has embraced it instead. In addition, popular evangelistic techniques presented a relationship with God as a means to another end, thus contributing to the commodification of the Holy. Further, some prominent Christian leaders encouraged churches to see themselves as service agencies and fully embrace the customer metaphor. All of these factors have helped to create the current climate of consumer theology

This chapter also examined some of the negative effects of consumer theology. Because consumer theology creates a “what’s in it for me” worldview, it works against the biblical idea of dying to oneself, and therefore, results in a shallow spirituality. This in

⁷³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 126.

⁷⁴ Earl Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 93-94.

turn leads to a decrease in effective evangelism, because consumer theology prevents Christians from living out the transformed lives that many seekers long for.

In addition, the me-centered focus of consumer theology stands opposed to and prevents the authentic biblical community that is required for proper spiritual growth, turning the church instead into just another vendor of religious goods and services. As a result, consumer theology contributes to a high rate of clergy burnout, as pastors, who long to partner with God in transforming lives, are forced instead into a role of managing competing and at times contradictory expectations of the customers who attend a church.

At this point, the reader is reminded of a pivotal statement made in chapter 1: consumers are made, not born. As was noted in the first chapter, many in our society are beginning to speak out against the dangerous consequences of unbridled consumerism. Likewise, many in the church are doing the same concerning consumer theology. This paper will now turn its attention to the solution for consumer theology in the modern church: a proper understanding and implementation of the ancient task of spiritual formation.

CHAPTER 5

Spiritual Formation as the Corrective for Consumer Theology

Summary of Previous Chapters

In previous chapters, this paper demonstrated that the consumer-oriented culture in which we now live has so infiltrated the modern American church as to warrant its own title: consumer theology. Consumer theology is characterized by a commodification of the holy, the church as a vendor of religious goods and services, a radical individualism resulting in a breakdown of community, and a sense of entitlement as represented by the customer metaphor. And while certain elements of consumer theology have been present throughout all of God's salvation history, its predominance today, due to the influence of the current consumer-oriented culture and the church's accommodation of that culture, has resulted in several negative effects for the kingdom. Among these negative effects discussed in chapter 4 are: a shallow spirituality, a decline in effective evangelism, a breakdown in biblical community, and a high burnout rate for the clergy.

In this chapter this paper will attempt to prove its thesis stated at the end of chapter 1: spiritual formation, properly understood and implemented in an existing church, is the corrective for the damaging effects of consumer theology so prevalent in many churches today.

Description of Spiritual Formation

The term "spiritual formation" may be foreign to many in the church, and therefore this paper will examine some of the leading definitions of the term. Then this paper will

note some of the common elements found in each definition and description. Eventually, this paper will develop its own description, combining these essential elements with the thoughts of other authors.

To begin with, it should be noted that spiritual formation does not have to be Christian in nature. According to Robert Mulholland:

Spiritual formation is the primal reality of human existence. Every event of life is an experience of spiritual formation. Every action taken, every response made, every dynamic of relationship, every thought held, every emotion allowed: These are the miniscule arenas where, bit by bit, infinitesimal piece by infinitesimal piece, we are shaped into some kind of being.¹

In other words, we really don't have a choice about whether or not to undergo spiritual formation. Everything we experience shapes our inner being in some way or another.

Dallas Willard agrees, saying, "You have had a spiritual formation and I have had one, and it is still ongoing. It is like education: everyone gets one...."² The only real question, according to Mulholland, is "...what kind of spiritual formation are we already engaged in?"³ For the remainder of this paper, unless otherwise noted, spiritual formation will refer to Christian spiritual formation.

In his book *Soul Guide: Following Jesus as Spiritual Director*, author Bruce Demarest says that "Spiritual formation concerns the shaping of our life after the pattern of Jesus Christ. It's a process that takes place in the inner person, whereby our character is reshaped by the Spirit."⁴ Willard describes spiritual formation this way: "...spiritual forma-

¹ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word*, revised ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000), 25-26.

² Willard, *Renovation*, 45.

³ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 26.

⁴ Bruce Demarest, *Soul Guide: Following Jesus as Spiritual Director* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003), 36.

tion for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”⁵ However, Willard goes on to note that true spiritual formation is not simply for the inner peace and satisfaction of the one being formed, but rather, “...we can say at the outset that to the degree to which spiritual formation in Christ is successful, the outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression or outflow of the character and teachings of Jesus.”⁶ Mulholland, in his book *Invitation to a Journey*, writes, “Spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus for the sake of others.”⁷ While each of these descriptions and definitions is stated differently, there are common elements that make up the core of spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation is a process

Spiritual formation is not about possessing, but becoming. It is not about attaining, but, rather, growing up. In short, spiritual formation is a life-long journey. In this respect, it is quite different from the old discipleship model. Demarest describes the discipleship model as a “ministry that seeks to teach new believers essential Christian beliefs, and also to train us in practices that are normal...”⁸ The discipleship focus, argues Demarest, is telling Christians what they need to “...know, do, or become.”⁹ He continues, “Disciple-

⁵ Willard, *Renovation*, 22.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15.

⁸ Demarest, *Soul Guide*, 36.

⁹ Ibid.

ship often occurs in structured programs of limited duration, and it's assumed that we are 'discipled' when we've completed a ten-or-twelve-week program. Discipleship deals with the basics of Christian belief: Bible study methods, cultivating a devotional life, sharing one's faith, discovery of spiritual gifts, and stewardship of resources."¹⁰

Mulholland agrees with this assessment, stating that, "...much of contemporary Christian spirituality tends to view the spiritual life as a static possession."¹¹ He goes on to argue that, when viewed this way, "Discipleship is perceived as 'my' spiritual life and tends to be defined by actions that ensure its possession. Thus the endless quest for techniques, methods, programs by which we hope to 'achieve' spiritual fulfillment."¹²

Spiritual formation, on the other hand, cannot be "learned" in a classroom setting, nor can it be "achieved" at any one point in our human life, for, as Kenneth Boa writes, it is a "...lifelong response to God's gracious initiatives in the lives of those whose trust is centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ."¹³ For Mulholland, spiritual formation is an:

...[I]ncreasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberated us from crippling bondages of the prior journey and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in the road....
[S]pirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God's control of our life and being."¹⁴

In other words, discipleship can teach us the knowledge that we should say "yes" to God in all of our lives, but spiritual formation is the process whereby we learn to actually do so.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 12.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19.

¹⁴ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 12.

Spiritual formation is led by the spirit

M. Robert Mulholland writes, "...spiritual formation is the experience of being shaped by God toward wholeness."¹⁵ With this statement, he brings out another difference between the discipleship model and spiritual formation. As has already been seen, the discipleship model is most often based on attaining the correct knowledge and understanding required to be a disciple. It is, therefore, teacher-led and easily understood so as to pass on, not just the right information, but also the ability to teach it to others. It is very much a human endeavor. Human teachers decide to teach and human learners make the effort to learn.

Being shaped by God, on the other hand, cannot be so easily understood, nor can it be achieved simply through the will of humans. In her book *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Ruth Haley Barton discusses two biblical metaphors concerning our spiritual formation: the formation of the human embryo, and metamorphosis (such as is experienced by a caterpillar as it turns into a butterfly). The former she takes from Paul's statement, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..." (Gal 4:19). The latter metaphor is based on Paul's statement to the church at Rome, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:2). About these two metaphors she writes:

Both of these metaphors place the process of spiritual transformation squarely in the category that we call mystery: something outside the range of normal human activity

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

and understanding that can be grasped only through divine revelation and brought about by divine activity...whatever we think we might know about it, the decision to give ourselves to the experience of spiritual transformation brings us to the very edge of what we know and leaves us peering into the unknown.¹⁶

Other writers agree. Kenneth Boa states that spiritual formation occurs only through the “dedicating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ John Ackerman writes, “Formation doesn’t just happen by having the right theology or liturgy. Spiritual formation happens when individuals and congregations together can listen to God, obey God, and be transformed by God.”¹⁸ In other words, no human teacher, however gifted, can form us spiritually. There is no magic formula, and techniques alone will not produce genuine spiritual formation.

This is not to say that we as humans are completely passive in this endeavor. Quite the contrary, in addition to our decision to be open to spiritual formation there are pathways and disciplines that can aid the journey. These will be explored later in this chapter.

However, Dallas Willard suggests:

The instrumentalities of Christian spiritual formation...involve much more than human effort and actions under our control. Well-informed human effort certainly is indispensable...but Christlikeness of the inner being is not a human attainment. It is, finally, a gift of grace. Though we must act, the resources for spiritual formation extend far beyond the human. They come from the interactive presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who place their confidence in Christ.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 12.

¹⁷ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 19.

¹⁸ John Ackerman, *Listening to God* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2001), 18.

¹⁹ Willard, *Renovation*, 23.

Spiritual formation is the transformation of the inner self

While the goal of classic discipleship is information and knowledge that will help us conform to the Christian life, the goal of spiritual formation is nothing less than the transformation of the inner self. In his book *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, author John Ortberg begins chapter 1 with this statement: "I am disappointed with myself."²⁰ He then describes some of the reasons for his disappointment. Some of the reasons are trivial, such as his physique. Others, however, are more significant, such as his failures as a father. He then reveals the basis for all of his feelings of disappointment, "...my failure to be the person God had in mind when he created me."²¹

According to the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, humans were originally created in the image of God. However, due to the rebellion of humankind, the image of God, the *imago Dei*, was lost. To what degree the image was lost has been a topic of disagreement among theologians for centuries. However, Donald Bloesch notes that the idea of the fallen nature of humanity, properly understood, is "...integral to all Evangelical Protestantism...."²²

Discipleship may be able to teach us how we should live, but, as Ortberg notes, what most of us really want is not just to act like different people, but honestly to be different people. He writes, "The desire for transformation lies deep in every human heart. This is

²⁰ John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 11.

²¹ Ibid., 13.

²² Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1978), 90.

why people enter therapy, join health clubs, get into recovery groups, read self-help books, attend motivational seminars, and make New Year's resolutions. The possibility of transformation is the essence of hope."²³

Spiritual formation is the process, led by the Spirit, whereby God transforms the very nature of human beings. According to Mulholland, "Christian spiritual formation is coming to grips with the negative and destructive spiritual formation that has been subtly ingrained into our being...."²⁴ Ortberg argues that this transformation is the actual point of the spiritual life. He writes:

The primary goal of spiritual life is human transformation. It is not making sure people know where they're going after they die, or helping them have a richer interior life or seeing that they have lots of information about the Bible, although these can be good things. Let's put first things first. The first goal of spiritual life is the reclamation of the human race. It's morphing time.²⁵

Spiritual formation is the life-long process, led by the Spirit, whereby we morph.

Spiritual formation is patterned after Jesus

As was noted earlier, spiritual formation happens to everyone all the time. In this sense, we are all in the process of continual transformation. Christian spiritual formation, however, differs first of all because it is led by the Spirit and not by the human will. In addition, Christian spiritual formation is unique because of the eventual goal of the transformation. As was seen in the descriptions of spiritual formation from Willard, Mulhol-

²³ Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 20.

²⁴ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 26.

²⁵ Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, 21.

land, and Demarest, the goal of our transformation is nothing less than mirroring the image of Jesus.

Dallas Willard notes that “Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”²⁶ It should be noted that Willard is not suggesting that through spiritual formation we all learn to act like Christ. That approach has much more to do with the discipleship model. Instead, Willard is saying that through the Spirit-led process of spiritual formation we are transformed to become like Christ.²⁷ Mulholland agrees, saying, “We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image.”²⁸ Mulholland continues by noting that the image of Jesus is not “...something alien to humans beings, something strange that God wants to add on to our life, something imposed upon us from the outside that doesn’t really fit us...,” but rather, “...the image of Christ is the fulfillment of the deepest hungers of the human heart for wholeness. The greatest thirst of our being is for fulfillment in Christ’s image.”²⁹

This brings up another way that spiritual formation differs from the classic discipleship model. Discipleship usually takes a one-size-fits-all approach, starting each believer at the same place and running each through the same classes. Spiritual formation, on the other hand, will begin and progress differently for each, because, since the goal is being formed into the image of Jesus, spiritual formation “takes place primarily at the points of

²⁶ Willard, *Renovation*, 22.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 23.

²⁹ Ibid., 34.

our unlikeness to Christ's image."³⁰ This means issues that the Spirit reveals and starts to work on may well be different for each of us, and these issues will most certainly be internal and not external. As Mulholland notes:

Our cross is not that cantankerous person we have to deal with day by day. Our cross is not the employer we just can't get along with. Our cross is not that neighbor or work colleague who cuts across the grain in every single time of relationship.... Our cross is the point of our unlikeness to the image of Christ, where we must die to self in order to be raised by God into wholeness of life in the image of Christ right there at that point.³¹

Spiritual formation results in holistic integration

The eventual goal for this Spirit-led process of inner transformation into the image or likeness of Jesus is holistic integration. Marjorie Thompson, in her book *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, notes that, "The Spirit insists on transforming us at every level: personal, social, economic, and political. God is the Lord of our whole life."³² In other words, in order to be authentic, the inner workings of the Spirit, the transformation into the image of Christ, must result in changed behavior in every area of our life.

This is perhaps the greatest failure of the classroom-based discipleship model. In a discipleship program, we can learn how we ought to live, but only true spiritual formation can provide the transformed nature and Spirit-led power to actually do so. In speaking of this failure of the classic discipleship model, Dallas Willard writes, "What we see around us today of the 'usual' Christian life could easily make us think that spiritual transforma-

³⁰ Ibid., 37.

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005), 16.

tion is simply impossible.... Although there is much talk about 'changing lives' in Christian circles, the reality is very rare, and certainly much less common than the talk."³³

In her book *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*, theologian Sallie McFague describes her own recent journey of genuine spiritual formation. Although she was a professor of theology at Vanderbilt University for over thirty years, she now writes:

Finally, after years of talking about God (what theologians are paid to do!), I am becoming acquainted with God. This conversion has occurred quite deliberately: I engaged a spiritual director and have undertaken a daily pattern of meditation. I am doing what is called 'practicing the presence of God,' setting aside time for relating to God. To say that it has been instructive would be a gross understatement; it has been revelatory.³⁴

The practices of spiritual formation McFague mentions will be explored later in this chapter. It is the results of her spiritual formation, the integration of the inner transformation and the exterior life, that are important here. She continues, "I am slowly learning to live and think and act within the divine milieu. I sense the world (and myself) becoming ordered by that gracious Presence. I am beginning to see things within that Light and everything seems different."³⁵

In summary of this section, then, spiritual formation is the Spirit-led, lifelong process whereby the inner life of the believer is transformed into the image of Jesus so as to positively affect every area of the inner and outer life. This paper will expand upon this description in later sections, but now it will give its attention to some of the mechanics of the process, how spiritual formation occurs in the life of the believer.

³³ Willard, *Renovation*, 77-78.

³⁴ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

The Mechanics of Spiritual Formation

This paper will now turn its attention to what some might call the “mechanics” of spiritual formation. While this section is extremely important, it also carries with it a certain sense of danger. In the beginning of his book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard Foster states: “One word of caution...must be given at the outset: to know the mechanics does not mean that we are practicing the Disciplines. The Spiritual Disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life.”³⁶ In other words, simply understanding the principles of (or only going through the motions of the practices of) spiritual formation produces superficiality, not genuine inner transformation; and as Foster also notes, “Superficiality is the curse of our age.”³⁷

Other writers agree with this warning, noting that simply knowing “how to” or even feeling that we “ought to” practice the mechanics of spiritual formation will not produce genuine spiritual formation. Adele Calhoun writes, “Willpower and discipline alone can never fix your soul. Striving, pushing and trying harder will not recover your life.”³⁸ She claims that the most important element in the process of spiritual formation is not knowledge of the mechanics, but, rather, a deep desire for transformation, brought about by spending time with Jesus. She continues, “...transformation happens as you keep company with Jesus.... Wanting to work with and watch Jesus is where transformation be-

³⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, revised ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 16.

gins.”³⁹ She then adds, “The simple truth is that wanting to keep company with Jesus has a staying power that ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ seldom have.”⁴⁰

The previous paragraphs illustrate the two crucial elements that must exist if the mechanics soon to be discussed are to have their full effect. The first is desire. The mechanics, in and of themselves, have no formative powers. One can read the Bible and be completely unaffected. Another, however, can read the same passages and experience some degree of inner transformation. The difference between the two results is the attitude and desire of the reader. In writing of this difference when practicing the discipline of reading the Bible, Robert Mulholland notes, “We often are not looking for a transforming encounter with God. We are more often seeking some tidbits of information that will enhance our self-protective understanding of the Christian faith without challenging or confronting the way we live in the world.”⁴¹ If this is our attitude when reading the Bible, we will walk away with information, but not transformation. Simply going through the motions will not suffice. There must be a deep longing and desire.

However, the question could be asked, “Desire for what?” This is the element that makes all the difference. If we come to God only to experience spiritual formation, then we have once again fully embraced consumer theology by turning him into a means-to-an-end. God becomes only a tool used on our journey to self-actualization. In other words, spiritual formation cannot take place if the ultimate goal is spiritual formation. In

³⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 54.

speaking of our spiritual formation, Richard Foster writes, “The primary requirement is a longing after God.”⁴²

Therefore, the second crucial element that we must remember is that spiritual formation occurs not because of the disciplines about to be presented, but through them. Spiritual formation does not occur because we “do” things. Spiritual formation does not even occur simply because we desire it, although, as we have just seen, desire is crucial. Spiritual formation happens because we encounter and meet with the triune God. The triune God is the author of our transformation. It is not our knowledge about him, but our dynamic relationship with him that effects the inner transformation into the image of Christ. Therefore, we “do” certain things in order to facilitate an encounter with the Lord. Our spiritual formation takes place in the midst of that encounter.

The difference between spiritual pathways and disciplines

When exploring the mechanics of spiritual formation, a distinction needs to be made between pathways and disciplines. While disciplines may be easily understood, pathways of spiritual formation may be more nebulous. Disciplines are the tools used to facilitate a meaningful encounter with God. Pathways, however, are more like a preferred style. For illustrative purposes, compare spiritual formation to taking a vacation. Three different people choose to go on vacation for the purpose of personal renewal. Each will most likely employ very similar methods (disciplines) to achieve renewal: travel, sightseeing, entertainment, rest, special meals, etc. However, because each has a preferred style or pathway that best leads them to renewal, one chooses to camp in the desert, another

⁴² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 2.

chooses a resort along the seashore, and the third books a room in Manhattan. To require our visitor to the Big Apple to spend a week camping in the desert would not result in the desired renewal, for they are the type who hates to sleep on the ground. Our friend in the seaside resort agrees, wanting to experience hot showers and comfortable beds each day. However, to be cooped up amidst towering skyscrapers and massive throngs of people would, for that person, result in anxiety, not renewal. Our friend in the desert, on the other hand, just wants to get away from it all. Just as we all have preferences for vacations that will lead to renewal, so too, do we all have preferences that will lead us to the desired encounter with God. These are the pathways of spiritual formation.

Pathways of spiritual formation

Gerald May has the simplest description of the pathways. He describes three main paths: the way of the true, the way of the good, and the way of the beautiful. Those who travel the way of the true experience God primarily through mind and thought. Those on the way of the good find him in actions. Those on the way of the beautiful encounter him primarily through feelings and emotions.⁴³

Richard Foster expands this list somewhat. In his book *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, he identifies six “streams” of spiritual formation. These are: the contemplative, the holiness, the charismatic, the social justice, the evangelical, and the incarnational.⁴⁴ On closer examination, each can be placed

⁴³ Carole Crumley, Bill Dietrich, Ann Kline, and Gerald May, *Contemplative Spirituality*, The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, 2004, <http://www.shalem.org/resources/publication/articles/contemplativespirituality.html> (accessed October 22, 2007).

⁴⁴ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 4-21.

within the paradigm suggested by May. Foster's streams of the contemplative and the evangelical fit well within May's way of the true. As pathways to encounter God, both emphasize activities of the mind and understanding, the first through prayer and contemplation, the second through the study of the Bible.

The streams of holiness and social justice fit the way of the good, for each is concerned with actions. The holiness stream encounters God primarily through personal action while the social justice meets him in the actions of society. Finally, the incarnational and the charismatic streams fit well into the way of the beautiful. Each encounters God primarily through feelings. The former senses him in all of his creation, the latter through a strong personal experience.

A much more exhaustive list of the pathways of spiritual formation can be found in Kenneth Boa's *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Boa identifies twelve pathways, or what he terms "facets." He uses the term because he sees each facet as part of the larger "gem" of spirituality that is "greater than the sum of its parts."⁴⁵ Boa's twelve facets of spirituality are: relational spirituality, paradigm spirituality, disciplined spirituality, exchanged Life spirituality, motivated spirituality, devotional spirituality, holistic spirituality, process spirituality, Spirit-filled spirituality, warfare spirituality, nurturing spirituality and corporate spirituality.⁴⁶

Space does not permit even a nominal description of each of the facets. They are listed here only to demonstrate the variety of pathways available to the dedicated seeker. They are also listed to serve as a warning. A common mistake made by those on a path of spiri-

⁴⁵ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-23.

tual formation is to take a one-size-fits-all approach. As Boa states, “The most common stumbling stone is to mistake a part for the whole. Like the blind men who feel different parts of the elephant, one assumes that the spiritual life is a trunk, another takes it to be a tail, and a third concludes that is a leg.”⁴⁷ Just as one vacation leads to renewal for some and stress for others, a pathway that facilitates an encounter with God for your friend may result in frustration and defeat for you. “It can be liberating to discover that because of our unique temperaments and circumstances, we are free not to be drawn to some approaches to spirituality.... We shouldn’t be ashamed of our differences.”⁴⁸

Disciplines of spiritual formation

If spiritual pathways are our preferred style that brings us to an encounter with God, spiritual disciplines are the tools we use to facilitate that encounter. Marjorie Thompson compares the spiritual disciplines to garden tools. She writes, “The best spade and hoe in the world cannot guarantee a good crop. They only make it more likely that growth will be unobstructed.... They keep us open to the mysterious work of grace in our heart and our world. They enable us not only to receive but to respond to God’s love, which in turn yields the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.”⁴⁹

Various authors have compiled similar lists of the classic disciplines but have arranged them in differing categories. Dallas Willard describes two categories: disciplines of abstinence (solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice), and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 10-11.

disciplines of engagement (study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission).⁵⁰ Richard Foster, however, describes three categories of disciplines: the inward (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study); the outward (simplicity, solitude, submission, and service); and the corporate (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration).⁵¹ The lists and categories of disciplines are as varied as the books that describe them. Indeed, in the book *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, author Adele Ahlberg Calhoun lists no fewer than sixty-two disciplines, broken into seven categories.

The reason for the differing lists is really quite simple, for as Robert Mulholland writes, “Anything and everything we do can be a spiritual discipline if we offer it to God as a means for God to use in our lives if God so chooses.”⁵² John Ortberg agrees, writing, “...we can turn almost any activity into a ‘training exercise’ for spiritual life.”⁵³

As was noted earlier, everything we experience is forming us spiritually. However, this does not mean that everything is a spiritual discipline. This paper has also shown that even the classical spiritual disciplines, if done for the wrong reasons, will not lead us to meaningful encounters with God, and are therefore not true spiritual disciplines. Marjorie Thompson writes:

I have heard spiritual disciplines described as ‘windows onto grace.’ This lovely phrase serves also to warn us against the possible misuse of spiritual practices. As long as a discipline is like a window, transparent to God, it is a genuine means of grace. But a discipline can become opaque, reflecting only our distorted motives. For

⁵⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 158.

⁵¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, v.

⁵² Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 114.

⁵³ Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, 48.

example, we might seek nothing more than a peaceful or ecstatic experience in our practice of contemplative prayer.... Spiritual disciplines, like all good things, can be pursued for the wrong reasons. If our motives are distorted, the practice will not yield good results.⁵⁴

A true spiritual discipline, then, is any activity in which we engage for the purpose of meeting with God on his terms. Stated this way, prayer may or may not be a spiritual discipline. However, the same could be said for sweeping the driveway. Mulholland writes:

...[A] spiritual discipline is something we offer to God as a means of God's grace in our lives. It is an act of loving obedience offered to God to be used for God's purposes in our lives...'Doing' becomes 'being' when we offer our 'doing' to God and keep offering it and keep offering it as a means for God to do whatever God wants to do in and through our lives.⁵⁵

The beauty of this description is that spiritual formation need not be relegated to any one specific time or activity. Understood and practiced correctly, we can meet with God in almost any activity. Our genuine spiritual formation can occur in our prayer closet, but it can continue even in our workplace.

To add, then, to the earlier description, spiritual formation is the lifelong Spirit-led process whereby we are transformed, through intentional encounters with the triune God, into the image of Jesus in such a way as to positively affect the inner and outer life of the believer.

The Importance of Community for Genuine Spiritual Formation

One final element must be mentioned before this paper demonstrates how an emphasis on spiritual formation counteracts the negative effects of consumer theology. From the previous sections, one might well get the idea that spiritual formation is a journey that

⁵⁴ Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 11.

⁵⁵ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 114.

one can take alone. However, the published evidence suggests the opposite. Spiritual formation, to be genuine, must take place in the midst of community.

In his book *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, Robert Mulholland tells the story of how D. L. Moody explained to a recent convert the importance of each Christian remaining in fellowship with other believers. Using actions and not words, Moody took a poker and, from a nearby warming fire, moved a piece of burning coal, setting it off to one side, leaving it alone. Eventually, of course, the coal dimmed and went out. Mulholland then writes, “We can no more be conformed to the image of Christ outside of corporate spirituality than a coal can continue to burn bright outside of the fire.”⁵⁶

For genuine spiritual formation to occur, Christian community is not just encouraged but essential, for, as the illustration from Moody suggests, we each need to give and receive encouragement and support. Mulholland writes:

...[W]hen God begins to work with us at the deep levels of our incompleteness and brokenness, or bondage and sin, we need the body of Christ to support, encourage, challenge and nurture us toward wholeness. We may be able to work through some of our bondage and brokenness alone with God. But when God begins to deal with some of the deep distortions of our being, we need others.⁵⁷

Ruth Barton agrees, writing, “Our commitment to community and to spiritual friendship within that community is in itself a spiritual discipline that is of great significance to the spiritual life.”⁵⁸ She continues, however, with a word of warning:

Spiritual friendship is not primarily a social relationship that exists for the purpose of catching up over lunch.... It is not primarily a collegial relationship focused on work

⁵⁶ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 145.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁵⁸ Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 16.

matters or service projects. It is not a self-help relationship focused primarily on problem solving or accountability. It is not even primarily a Bible study group. Rather it is a relationship that is focused intentionally on our relationship with God....⁵⁹

Seen in this light, the level of community required to facilitate genuine spiritual formation goes far beyond the “potluck” mentality of most churches. For spiritual formation to take place, a church, regardless of whether that means six people in a house church or six thousand in a megachurch, must have at its center a commitment to assist each other on our chosen pathways of spiritual formation. A church must move beyond being a cafeteria-style provider of religious goods and services. The church must become, to add to Robert Mulholland’s definition, a *covenant community of people* in the process of being conformed into the image of Jesus for the sake of others. Or, as Stanley Grenz writes, “Church exists whenever believers join together with the purpose of walking with one another as God’s people, under Christ’s authority, and by the empowerment of the Spirit.”⁶⁰

Therefore, spiritual formation is the lifelong Spirit-led process, lived out in biblical community, whereby we are transformed, through intentional encounters with the triune God, into the image of Jesus in such a way as to positively affect the inner and outer life of the believer. As this paper has just shown, remove any element from this statement and genuine spiritual formation will not take place.

Essential Elements that Address Consumer Theology

It is the thesis of this paper that spiritual formation, properly understood and implemented in an existing church, is the corrective for the damaging effects of consumer the-

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 211.

ology so prevalent in many churches today. This paper will now examine how this is accomplished.

Consumer theology commodifies the Holy by turning God into a means to an end. God exists to meet our felt needs. Spiritual formation, on the other hand, rejects this commodification by placing God at the center of our existence once more. God becomes not a thing to obtain, but a person to know. God becomes the chief desire of the heart, and thereby our inner beings are transformed into the image of Christ.

Consumer theology turns the church into a vendor of religious goods and services. If God is the commodity that exists for my personal benefit, the church is the organization to best package it, advertise it, and give it away. With an emphasis on spiritual formation, however, the church becomes, not a place in which to dispense God through programs and services, but rather a sign of God's kingdom come to earth. The transformation of human lives into the loving image of Jesus testifies that God is, and that he is reconciled to humanity.

Consumer theology destroys the biblical community of the local church by creating a radical individualism that places people's needs at the center of the church's mission. As people engage the church for their own benefit, the biblical call to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil 2:3) is lost. Spiritual formation, on the other hand, restores the biblical call to community, for our transformation into the image of Jesus is partly through the spiritual discipline of community, and, is also "for the sake of others."⁶¹

Consumer theology establishes a sense of entitlement, fully embracing the metaphor of "customer." The result is a shallow spirituality unwilling to submit to the rigors of true

⁶¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 15.

discipleship. Spiritual formation, on the other hand, rejects the customer metaphor entirely, recognizing that we are God's workmanship and he is shaping us as he wills for his purposes, not ours.

Anticipated Results of an Emphasis on Spiritual Formation

In the previous chapter, we identified four negative results of consumer theology: a shallow spirituality, a decrease in effective evangelism, a decline in biblical community, and a high rate of clergy burnout. This paper will now demonstrate how an emphasis on spiritual formation corrects each negative result.

Consumer theology produces a shallow spirituality simply because its me-first orientation rarely allows one to move any deeper. My wants, my needs, my preferences must, by necessity, get in the way of God's plan. Simply put, my agenda is not God's agenda. The spirituality of spiritual formation, on the other hand, is patterned, not after the selfish-self, but after the image of Jesus. The second person of the triune God, Jesus, becomes the pattern for the inner transformation. There can be no deeper spirituality than this, and as Mulholland writes, the image of Christ is the "...ultimate reality of human wholeness, the consummation for which each heart longs."⁶²

Consumer theology must also result in a decrease of effective evangelism. The reason for this, as was seen in chapter 4, is that consumer theology creates a disconnect between what the church claims to be true and how the people of the church actually live. As Robert Lewis notes, "In an age when people are spiritually open but desperately hungering for proof, evangelical lifestyles are doing a better job of erecting roadblocks of cyni-

⁶² Ibid., 17.

cism than building bridges of influence.”⁶³ Because of the shallow spirituality of consumer theology, the church has been able to proclaim the truth, but not really able to live the truth. Lewis continues, “...to our age, truth is nothing more than talk, especially when you don’t show it. The eye, not the ear, is the decisive organ. Our postmodern world is tired of words, it wants real. Real is everything. Real is convincing.”⁶⁴

Spiritual formation, on the other hand, in order to be genuine, must result in an integration of the inner and outer lives. Its goal is not merely learning to live like Jesus, an endeavor doomed to fail because it is based only on knowledge of right and wrong and the human will to follow through, but rather the goal of spiritual formation is, through purposeful encounters with God on his terms, to experience inner transformation into the image of Jesus to such a degree that our outer life is congruent with what we say and believe. This full integration, not more church programs, is what will attract the unchurched. As Willard writes, “The way to get as many people into heaven as you can is to get heaven into as many people as you can, that is, to follow the path of genuine spiritual transformation or full-throated discipleship to Jesus Christ.”⁶⁵ Robert Lewis agrees, writing, “What the world waits to see is whether what we have is better than what they have.”⁶⁶

Consumer theology breaks down the biblical community of a local church by reversing the scriptural call to sacrifice for one another.⁶⁷ In consumer theology, the purpose of

⁶³ Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 216.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁵ Willard, *Renovation*, 239.

⁶⁶ Lewis, *Irresistible Influence*, 48.

⁶⁷ See John 15: 11-14.

the church is to meet my needs and wants. If this is not done in a manner of my liking, I can simply move to another congregation more willing to do so. With an emphasis on spiritual formation, however, the church becomes a covenantal community of people joining together for mutual support and encouragement as we individually and collectively meet with God for his sake and are thereby changed into the image of the Son. Community becomes more important than programs. What the church does for me becomes less important than the mutual commitment to remain in community together. The church becomes a people, not a place; an organism, not an organization. This means that the church is more concerned with the spiritual formation of its people than satisfying their particular tastes. Indeed, part of one's spiritual formation occurs precisely because one is willing to surrender one's tastes to the Lord in favor of remaining in community and encouraging another who sees and likes things differently. "Corporate spirituality is life in the body of Christ, not as a metaphor but the living reality of the presence of Christ in the community of faith.... It is only in the body of Christ that we are constantly challenged to allow God to be in control of the relationship we have with God."⁶⁸

Finally, consumer theology contributes to a high rate of clergy burnout, as pastors move away from their central role as spiritual leaders and directors, and instead are expected to manage organizations trying to meet the ever-changing expectations of religious customers. "What needs to happen among the clergy has nothing first of all to do with the clergy. It has to do with the church...appropriate, realistic, interesting expectations for the clergy are derived from the primary purpose of the church. When we know

⁶⁸ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 156-157.

that, clergy can stop hating themselves for not fulfilling expectations, which God may care nothing about anyway.”⁶⁹

A proper emphasis on spiritual formation, on the other hand, reverses this, and places the role of spiritual leader squarely back at the center of pastor’s ministry description.

“Almost all of what a pastor does, even the little things, especially the little things, can be opportunities to orient us toward God.”⁷⁰ Pastors are released from the spirit-draining task of trying to keep everyone happy, and instead are asked to focus once again on the invigorating task of leading and helping people in the process of transformation. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon write:

It makes all the difference in the world that pastors rightly judge what they do with appropriate criteria...In worship, in preaching, in serving the Lord’s Supper, in baptizing, the pastor receives the model whereby all other pastoral acts are to be judged, the pattern into which all other ministerial duties are to be fit, namely, orienting God’s people to God. When that happens, the pastor may expect to hear, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’⁷¹

Chapter Summary

This chapter demonstrated how spiritual formation, producing a deep spirituality based upon the image of Jesus that is attractive to the unchurched and lived out in covenantal communities where pastors are restored to their calling of spiritual leader, corrects the four major negative effects caused by consumer theology. In the final chapter, this paper will suggest ways to assist an established church in transitioning from an emphasis on consumer theology to one on spiritual formation.

⁶⁹ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 127.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

CHAPTER SIX

Implementation of Spiritual Formation in an Established Church

Summary of Previous Chapters

In chapter 1, this paper presented evidence that we are no longer living in a society of consumers, but, instead, are now living in a consumer-oriented society, a society in which people no longer consume to live but live to consume. In a consumer-oriented society the customer is not only right; the customer is king. This chapter also detailed some of the negative effects of this consumer orientation, such as a loss of both personal happiness and sense of community.

Chapter 1 also made the claim that the modern consumer orientation has infiltrated the social sectors of society, including the church. In fact, chapter 1 claimed that the modern church was so influenced by consumerism as to warrant its own title: consumer theology, characterized by: (1) a commodification of the Holy; (2) the church acting as a vendor of religious goods and services; (3) a radical individualism in contrast to the biblical call to community; (4) and a sense of personal entitlement as represented by the metaphor of customer. Chapter 1 also set forth the thesis of this paper: that spiritual formation, properly understood and implemented in an existing church, is the corrective for the damaging effects of consumer theology so prevalent in many churches today.

In chapter 2 of this paper it was shown that consumer theology is really nothing new. By looking at biblical materials, this paper gave evidence that even though God gave many clear warnings concerning the dangers of materialism and consumerism, attempts to establish consumer theology have been present throughout God's recorded salvation

history. It was also demonstrated, by looking at the Old Testament sacrificial system, the ministry of Jesus, some incidences in the early church, and the biblical understanding of the atonement, that all the characteristics of consumer theology have been consistently rejected by God.

Chapter 3 revealed that consumer theology has also been an issue throughout the history of the Christian church. Historical documents indicate that within the first few centuries of the church there were efforts to commodify God and buy his protection and blessings. It was also shown that, while early leaders of the church may have resisted consumer theology, the medieval church, through the influence of the scholastics, embraced consumer theology, especially as it was represented by the sale of indulgences. In addition, chapter 3 demonstrated that the Protestant Reformation was a reaction, at least in part, to the consumer theology of the medieval church. However, it was also seen in chapter 3 how, somewhat ironically, that the efforts of the Reformers, while reacting against the consumer theology of the day, actually helped to establish consumer theology in the modern church. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the sanctification of the practice of business, and the Protestant work ethic all combined to set the stage for modern consumerism and, therefore, for consumer theology as well.

In chapter 4 the extent to which consumer theology has infiltrated the modern church was examined. It was shown in this chapter that instead of speaking against the consumer-oriented culture, the modern church embraced it. In addition, popular evangelistic techniques that used God as a means to another end, such as eternal life or God's wonderful plan, as well as the church's adoption of secular marketing strategies, all helped to create and establish consumer theology in the modern church.

Chapter 4 also revealed the harmful effects of consumer theology in the modern church. Due to its me-first orientation, consumer theology has created a shallow spirituality. This, in turn, has led to a decline in effective evangelism as seekers are increasingly exposed to Christians whose claims are unsupported by their actions. In addition, consumer theology contributes to the breakdown of biblical community as congregants, now acting as customers of religious service agencies, put their own preferences ahead of biblical community and leave churches for others with more and/or better programs. Finally, consumer theology contributes to a high rate of clergy burnout as pastors, unable to meet the ever-changing expectations of religious customers, become disenchanted with the gap between the desire to be agents of transformation and the modern requirement to meet the felt needs of their congregation and the unchurched.

Chapter 5 of this paper explored its thesis, that a proper understanding and implementation of spiritual formation is the corrective for the harmful effects of consumer theology. Through an examination of the published materials, this paper described spiritual formation as the lifelong Spirit-led process, lived out in biblical community, whereby we are transformed, through intentional encounters with the triune God, into the image of Jesus in such a way as to positively affect the inner and outer life of the believer.

Noting the difference between spiritual pathways and spiritual disciplines, this paper then described how spiritual formation, thus defined, corrects the negative effects of modern consumer theology. Because the result of genuine spiritual formation is a transformation of the inner life into the image of Jesus in such a way as to create a holistic integration of values and behavior, the watching world is presented with an attractive solution to the spirituality it seeks. In addition, churches, regardless of size, become, not pro-

viders of religious goods and services, but covenantal communities of people joining together for mutual support and encouragement for the benefit of each other and also for the communities in which they exist. Pastors, therefore, are released from the impossible and frustrating task of leading an organization trying to meet ever-changing and often contradictory expectations, and are returned to the more satisfying task of leading the church into a God-centered orientation, resulting in the transformation of the people of the church.

Steps to Spiritual Formation in an Established Church

As was stated in chapter 1, because of the high degree to which consumer theology has influenced the modern church, some have elected to reject the established church and to create fellowships based on a new paradigm. According to Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, this is, at least in part, the motivation behind many new emergent churches. They write, “Emerging churches are determined to move from a consumer to a producer form of Church.”¹ They go on to describe the approach of a pastor of an emergent congregation in Yorba Linda, California, noting that his services are designed in such a way that the only way to get anything out of the service is through participation, not observation. Gibbs and Bolger quote the emergent pastor as saying, “At our services, we did not want to give our visitors anything to consume.”² While starting new churches with built-in defenses against consumer theology is attractive, and may in the end be the best approach, as was noted in chapter one, most of God’s assets are still invested in local established churches. In its final pages, this paper will examine published materials, both secular and

¹ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 159.

² Ibid.

Christian, dealing with organizational change. The steps laid out in the following pages are not provided as a guarantee of success, only wisdom distilled from some of the best sources available today.

Step one: honest evaluation

The hard but simple truth is that all of us, including churches, have a remarkable capacity for self-deception. Plainly stated, most of us choose to believe we are doing better than we really are. In a recent article, Sally Morgenthaler tells of a worship-driven congregation in her area that decided to find out just how effective they were in reaching the unchurched. She writes that in 2001 this church "...finally did a survey as to who they were really reaching, and they were shocked. They'd thought their congregation was at least 50 percent unchurched. The real number was 3 percent."³ A church's tendency toward self-deception is also noted by authors Gene Appel and Alan Nelson. They write that in recent surveys "...most congregations of believers think of themselves as above average."⁴ They end this particular section of their book with these words, "We must stop the denial and face the facts."⁵

The question here, of course, is what criteria should be used to assess the spiritual formation of a church? To assess the success of our ministries, we tend to use criteria that may give us a false sense of security. As one pastor with a seven-thousand member

³ Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship as Evangelism*, Rev.org, 2007 available from <http://www.rev.org/protected/Article.aspx?ID=2409> (accessed October 30, 2007).

⁴ Gene Appel and Alan Nelson, *How to Change Your Church (Without Killing It)* (Nashville: Word, 2000), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

megachurch said, “I must be doing right, or things wouldn’t be going so well.”⁶ The ability to attract a large crowd is remarkable considering the average church is less than 100. However, the size of the crowd is not necessarily an indicator that genuine spiritual formation is taking place.

For author Robert Mulholland, the indicators of genuine spiritual formation are all relational. He writes, “If you want a good litmus test of your spiritual growth, simply examine the nature and quality of your relationships with others.”⁷ He states that in our relationships, each of us should be more giving, caring, forgiving, understanding, compassionate, and patient than we were one year ago. If we are not, says Mulholland, and especially if others do not think we are, “then you need to examine carefully the nature of your spiritual life and growth.”⁸

Dallas Willard lists four characteristics of those on a positive journey of spiritual formation, people Willard calls “Children of Light.” Willard writes:

One (characteristic) is that whenever they are found to be in the wrong, they will never defend it, neither to themselves nor to others, much less to God...Another of their characteristics is that they do not feel they are missing out on something good by not sinning.... Another...is that the children of light are mainly governed by the pull of the good.... Finally...life in the path of rightness becomes easy and joyous.⁹

With all due respect to Dallas Willard, whose contributions to the study of spiritual formation cannot be overstated, his criteria are unrealistic and far more descriptive of the final destination than they are of those on the journey.

⁶ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 38.

⁷ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 42.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Willard, *Renovation*, 227.

John Ortberg takes a negative approach towards the indicators of genuine spiritual formation. He lists five questions to discover if one's spiritual formation is heading in the *wrong* direction. (1) Am I spiritually inauthentic? (2) Am I becoming judgmental or exclusive or proud? (3) Am I becoming more approachable or less? (4) Am I growing weary of pursuing spiritual growth? (5) Am I measuring my spiritual life in superficial ways?¹⁰ To assess a church's spiritual formation, the very same questions could be asked of the church as a whole.

While all these indicators undoubtedly have merit, as would also the many others that may be found in the various volumes dedicated to spiritual formation, this paper would like to suggest six other indicators. Since the inner formation is in the image of Jesus, these six indicators are based on the general behavior of Jesus. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, only representative. It is the position of this paper that those, both individuals and churches, experiencing genuine spiritual formation will experience a growing or increasing: (1) Reliance on the Spirit for life's agenda and the power to carry it out; (2) Concern for the poor and disenfranchised; (3) Willingness to suffer personal discomfort in order to build a bridge to the lost and hurting; (4) Dissatisfaction with the religious status quo; (5) Commitment to experience God in healthy community; (6) Desire to live out and share the gospel (good news).

With the previous indicators in mind, an assessment of the spiritual formation of a church would be built around two questions. First, is the church adequately training people to encounter the triune God on his terms throughout the course of the week? This question is important because spiritual formation does not happen automatically. Due to the influence of society, most people come into the church as consumers. There must be

¹⁰ Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 35-40.

an intentional, radical reorientation away from consumer theology and towards God in order for spiritual formation to take place.

Second, are the indicators of spiritual formation, the outer evidences of the inner transformation, increasingly obvious in the church as a whole and in its people individually? In other words, are both the individual people and the church as a whole less concerned with their own agendas and more concerned with God's than one year ago? Is building a bridge to the unchurched becoming more important than one's preferred style? Is a sense of complacency and satisfaction being replaced with a growing desire for fellowship with God and others? In short, are both the church and its people increasingly displaying the image of Jesus to each other and to the world?

If the honest answer to both questions is yes, then little or no adjustment needs to be made. However, for most churches today, even some of the program-based megachurches, the honest answer to both questions would be no. It is our lack of genuine transformation and holistic integration that has led us to the sad reality "...that with each generation, the American church is becoming less effective."¹¹ To change this reality means implementing a change within the church.

Step two: preparation of the pastor

Published evidence suggests that for any true organizational change to take place, the role of the leader is indispensable. As Leonard Sweet states, "Leadership is the art of the future."¹² When leading a church into a paradigm of spiritual formation, the potential for

¹¹ Appel and Nelson, *How to Change Your Church*, 3.

¹² Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 1.

effective leadership is based upon two things: what the pastor knows and, even more importantly, who the pastor is.

In order to lead the process of change, the pastor must be familiar with the current material available on the subjects that pertain to the task at hand. These subjects include not only the central issue of spiritual formation, but spiritual pathways, spiritual disciplines, leadership, and organizational change as well. A plethora of books, seminars, and educational opportunities, both classic and online, are readily available.

However, even more important than *what* the pastor knows is *who* the pastor really is. Even the secular world has discovered that it is the character of the leader that makes possible the transformation of the organization. In his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*, Jim Collins writes that according to his studies, every company that made the transition from a “good” company to a “great” one had what he calls a “level 5” leader. Simply stated, a level 5 leader is “...an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will.”¹³ In other words, the character of the leader was just as important as his/her drive. He goes on to state that level 5 leaders “...are a study in duality: modest and willful, humble and fearless.”¹⁴

If the character of the secular leader is vital to the success of a business in transition, would it not also be true for a church in transition as well? The transformation of the church begins with the transformation of the pastor. When facing the task of leading a church through a time of transition, author Earl Creps suggests that pastors ask the following, “How can I be changed so that others will find me worth following in mis-

¹³ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

sion?”¹⁵ In other words, if the pastor is not experiencing and demonstrating the growing image of Christ, why should anyone follow? To this end, there are several things a pastor can do.

First, seek out and find the path of spiritual formation that works best for you. Several books were mentioned in the last chapter that would be helpful. Next, begin to practice some of the classic disciplines and then learn to incorporate others as you become aware of them in the course of your studies. Finally, find a spiritual friend or even a spiritual director. Bruce Demarest notes that “Spiritual friendship is the most basic ministry of spiritual guidance in which two or more friends, on a relatively equal basis, support, encourage and pray for one another....”¹⁶ He goes on to note, however, that a spiritual director is “...a gifted and experienced Christian [who] helps another person grow in relationship with and obedience to God....”¹⁷ All of us are qualified to be a spiritual friend to another who is at the approximate same point in our journeys of spiritual formation. A spiritual director, on the other hand, is one who is more mature than we, and able to give guidance and counsel.

The important thing to remember is that when attempting to transition a church trapped in consumer theology towards spiritual formation, the pastor cannot afford to act as a consultant. Simply pointing out what needs to be done is not enough. The pastor must be willing to engage the pathways and disciplines of spiritual formation in such a

¹⁵ Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines*, 3.

¹⁶ Demarest, *Soul Guide*, 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

way as to become an example of inner transformation. As author Robert Quinn notes, “...we transform the organization by transforming ourselves.”¹⁸

Step three: building a guiding coalition

In his book *Leading Change*, John Kotter notes that in the face of several well-publicized corporate success stories led by larger-than-life CEOs, one might get the idea that these CEOs did it all almost single-handedly. Kotter then writes:

This is a very dangerous belief. Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. No one individual, even a monarch-like CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change projects, and anchor new approaches deep in the organization’s culture.¹⁹

For this reason, Kotter states that, in order to implement effective change, a leader must put together a team, or what he calls a “guiding coalition.”²⁰

In the church setting, ideally, the guiding coalition would be the elected or appointed leadership. The people on these boards or committees should have these positions of authority and responsibility because they possess both the gifts and the influence necessary to truly be the leaders of the church. However, sadly, this is not always the case. At times, people are placed on church leadership teams for reasons such as popularity or financial success. Attempting to bring about significant change with an inadequate guiding coalition will almost certainly end in failure.

¹⁸ Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 69.

¹⁹ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 51-52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

According to Kotter, the most important requirement for the guiding coalition is credibility. In other words, the guiding coalition must have sufficient standing in the eyes of the congregation to provide the strong leadership required for the transition. Without sufficient credibility, "...you have the equivalent of an eighteen-wheeler truck being propelled by a lawn mower engine."²¹

In order to assess the potential effectiveness of the guiding coalition, Kotter recommends asking the following four questions:

- Are enough key players on board...so that those left out cannot easily block progress?
- Are the various points of view...relevant to the task at hand adequately represented so that informed, intelligent decisions will be made?
- Does the group have enough people with good reputations...so that its pronouncements will be taken seriously...?
- Does the group include enough proven leaders to be able to drive the change process?²²

Instead of the term "guiding coalition," the authors of *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* use the term "vision community." The purpose of the vision community is essentially the same as a guiding coalition, and even though this book is written to churches and not to the business world as is Kotter's book, the requirements for an effective vision community are very similar. These requirements include: diversity, standing in the congregation, spiritual maturity, ability to

²¹ Ibid., 54.

²² Ibid., 56.

make a meaningful contribution, willingness to support the right changes, and appropriate staff representation.²³

Whether the team is called a guiding coalition, a vision community, or some other variation, its existence is essential. This means that, rather than accept the team that is required by church polity, the pastor must be willing, if necessary, to lead in the creation of another team that more fully meets the requirements of a guiding coalition or vision community. However, it should be noted that in creating this team, the pastor should not act unilaterally. "The vision community should be selected and approved in accordance with the church's constitution, bylaws, or other established procedures. This is not the time to create conflict by circumventing the rules."²⁴ In order to have the required credibility, the team must be created within the accepted procedures of the church. However it comes about and whatever it is called, what is needed is a credible group of people, aware of the existence and dangers of consumer theology, sold out to the idea of spiritual formation, and with the desire and drive to see it happen in the local church.

Step four: creating a sense of urgency

With the guiding coalition firmly in place, it would seem natural to simply formulate a plan and then announce to the congregation the new direction the church is about to undertake. This approach, however, would almost certainly be doomed to failure because it assumes that the rest of the church already understands the need to change. This is an example of what authors Gene Appel and Alan Nelson call selling the solution before you

²³ Mike Bonem, James H. Furr, and Jim Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 41-43.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

sell the problem. They write, “One of the most common errors leadership teams make in catalyzing effective change is failure to sell the problem. Our initial excitement tempts us to rush into selling a solution, for which many people are not ready. If they haven’t seen the need, they’re not prepared to meet it.”²⁵

Other writers agree. Kotter notes, “By far the biggest mistake people make when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency....”²⁶ The authors of *Leading Congregational Change* write, “Urgency is critical in the individual congregation. It creates a driving force that makes the organization willing to accept change and to challenge the conventional wisdom.”²⁷ They add, “It is no wonder that so many churches seem unwilling to change—they lack any sense of urgency.”²⁸

According to Appel and Nelson, churches tend to “...see themselves as tradition keepers and preservers of the past.”²⁹ This often occurs because of confusion between methods and mission. They also point out that “...change-weary people view churches as bastions of relief.”³⁰ In a world where change seems to be the only constant, for many it is nice to find a place that tends to stay the same year after year. For these reasons, churches often tend to resist change and embrace the status quo. This is not really a problem if the status quo is acceptable. However, when the status quo is consumer theology, change

²⁵ Appel and Nelson, *How to Change Your Church*, 55.

²⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 4.

²⁷ Bonem et al, *Leading Congregational Change*, 35.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Appel and Nelson, *How to Change Your Church*, 44.

³⁰ Ibid.

must occur. A sense of urgency, strong enough to counteract the church's tendency to resist change, must be created. Leaders must sell the problem.

Ideally, this sense of urgency would be created by consistently exposing the gap between the current reality of the church and God's ideal. As this paper has demonstrated, many, if not most, churches are infected with consumer theology with all its damaging effects. God's ideal, however, is the transformation of the inner life into the image of Jesus in such a way as to positively affect the outer life as well. Through the various avenues available (sermons, small groups, special speakers, Christian education), the leaders of the church must demonstrate the need to move away from consumer theology and towards the biblical call of spiritual formation. Without an adequate sense of urgency, a move towards spiritual formation will come across as just another church fad.

Step five: casting the vision

A sense of urgency creates within the congregation the need and energy for change. A proper vision, on the other hand, gives the congregation a clear understanding of the ultimate goal. In speaking of the importance of vision, George Barna writes, "Let's get one thing straight from the start. If you want to be a leader, vision is not an option; it is part of the standard equipment of a real leader. By definition, a leader has vision: What else would a leader lead people toward, if not to fulfill that vision?"³¹

For a church, "Vision is a clear, shared, and compelling picture of the preferred future to which God is calling the congregation."³² There are several elements in this definition

³¹ George Barna, ed., *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice, and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 69.

³² Bonem et al, *Leading Congregational Change*, 50.

that must be noted. The first is that the vision must be clear. Communicating the vision is not a time for obtuse theological terms and Christianese. Kotter agrees, writing, “...whenever jargon is used, some people will understand and feel included while most of the audience will feel confused and left out. Consequently, all widespread communication in a change effort must be jargon free.”³³ With this in mind, the term “spiritual formation” may not even appear anywhere in the vision statement of the church. The guiding coalition may develop other wording that will help the congregation understand the preferred future.

Next, the vision must be shared. The quotation from Barna in the first paragraph of this section would seem to indicate that vision is a top-down endeavor. The pastor gets the vision, calls the church to follow, and leads them all to the eventual goal. However, even Barna agrees that without sufficient buy-in to the vision from the church, the change effort will not succeed. He writes:

It is one thing to be passionate and genuine in your vision. It is another thing altogether to incite others to embrace the vision with the same zeal you possess. Visionary leaders are, to some extent, salesmen: their abilities to lead depends [sic] in part on their abilities to attract people who will invest in the ministry, and that decision hinges on people’s desires to see the vision fulfilled.³⁴

In other words, in order to achieve successful change, the congregation must be sold out to the vision and not just to the pastor. It must become “our” vision and not just “what the pastor wants.”

The vision must also paint a compelling picture. A compelling nature actually helps the congregation “own” the vision. The end result must be a decided improvement over

³³ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 91.

³⁴ Barna, *Leaders on Leadership*, 57.

the current reality. Consumer theology has created a host of difficulties for the average church; the vision should demonstrate why all the pain and struggles of transitioning towards spiritual formation will be worth it.

Finally, the vision must be a “God-thing.” This means that it should not only be driven by the call of God, but also be so large and daring as only to be achievable by his empowering Spirit. As Appel and Nelson write, “We must think in terms of supernatural expectations if we are to raise eyebrows as well as the excitement level of people we want on our teams.”³⁵

Step six: implementing change

It would be wonderful at this point to lay out a sure-fire, step-by-step process that would ensure that a transition from consumer theology towards an emphasis of spiritual formation would be successfully implemented in every church. The simple truth is that no such sure-fire action plan exists. When asked if such a process was possible, Appel and Nelson replied, “If you find one, use it. If someone tries to sell you one, run.”³⁶

The simple truth is that we all serve, and are part of, vastly different churches and one size does not fit all. Our churches differ in size, doctrine, location, and style. Some are in large cities while others minister in small rural towns. Some are steeped in history and tradition while others are relatively new and are still finding their historical voice. Some remain staunchly traditional while others are always on the new cutting edge. And while the call to spiritual formation remains the same for all, the way in which spiritual formation will be implemented and lived out will be unique to each group of believers. Only

³⁵ Appel and Nelson, *How to Change Your Church*, 141.

³⁶ Ibid., 67.

the leaders of a particular church are truly qualified to know the specific steps that need to be taken to implement the desired change.

In their book, *How to Change Your Church (Without Killing It)*, the authors encourage the guiding coalition to consider four elements that will help assist in the development of an appropriate action plan.³⁷ The first is time. They note that, when it comes to implementing change, the quicker the better. In other words, the longer it takes to implement the change, the less likely it is that the change will indeed take place. However, they also note that while some churches can handle a quick and drastic change, others would blow apart. Only the leaders of the church can really discern if the action plan should be a quick fix or a long process. The second element to consider when developing an action plan is change impact. Is the change required a minor adjustment or a major overhaul? The more major the change, the more stressful it will be on the congregation and the more time it will require.

The third element is leadership capacity. Because any change requires risk as well as giving up some familiar practices, the more effective and influential the guiding coalition is, the quicker the change, even major change, can occur. "When leaders are trusted, loved, and embraced for their vision and communication skills, change can happen a lot faster than when leaders are perceived as uncaring, incompetent, and untrustworthy."³⁸

The final element to consider when putting together the unique church action plan is congregational readiness. The readiness to accept the required changes varies for each person. The vast majority of people may be enthusiastically in favor of the proposed

³⁷ Ibid., 184-186.

³⁸ Ibid., 186.

changes, but if those few who stand to lose the most in the midst of the transition are vocal or influential, the process may be long and difficult. For this reason a simple survey of how many are in favor of the transition will be insufficient to develop an adequate action plan. “The key is not *how* many but *who* many.”³⁹ In other words, knowing who will be impacted the most and how they will most likely react is essential in developing an effective action plan.

While the action plan for implementing the necessary changes will differ for each church, the requirement for such a plan is universal. “Implementation should always start with planning, and planning should always involve the people who will be responsible for the resulting action plans.... Action plans should answer three questions: (1) what will be done? (2) When will it be accomplished? (3) Who will be responsible? A clear vision can be undermined by a fuzzy plan.”⁴⁰

Final Thoughts

As this work moves towards its final paragraphs, it should be noted that while it is the position of the paper that any church should be able to transition away from consumer theology towards a model of spiritual formation, not all of them can actually do so. There are myriad factors that determine if any given church is willing to make so drastic a transition. Effective, passionate, leadership is not always going to be successful in promoting and guiding the required change. Stated simply, some people do not want anything to change and they will, at times, do their best to sabotage any change initiatives. What is more, unfortunately, they will often succeed.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bonem et al, *Leading Congregational Change*, 81.

In the face of such a stark reality, the pastor and the guiding coalition (if one is even possible), must develop a Plan B. If the church is unwilling to move away from consumer theology, the leadership should perhaps consider a new service, or even a new church plant, one in which the focus, from the very beginning, is one on spiritual formation.

In any case, it is important to remember that those who embrace consumer theology are not the enemy. They almost assuredly embrace it because that is what both their culture and their church have taught them to embrace. In situations such as this, the pastor must prayerfully decide whether to seek another church to lead, or to stay put and work with those seeking true spiritual formation. In the case of the former, it is important that the pastor clearly share the vision for spiritual formation with the prospective new church prior to accepting any offer. Be sure that the leadership of the church is aware of your heart and desires. In the case of the latter, the transition may not occur on a church-wide level, but even one life so changed and transformed can have far-reaching and eternal consequences.

Consumer theology is a reality in the American church today. Its roots go deep as people, born and raised in a culture of consumerism and individualism, carry these ideals and corresponding expectations into a relationship with God and his church. However, as was stated in chapter 1, consumers are made, not born, and therefore, they can be unmade as well. A radical reorientation away from self and towards God is not only needed, but possible. Through the pathways and disciplines of spiritual formation, one can encounter the risen Lord Jesus in such a way as to be transformed, resulting in an integration of who we are and how we live. To properly implement an emphasis of spiritual formation is the challenge that confronts the modern church.

WORKS CITED

- Ackerman, John. *Listening to God*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2001.
- Adler, Margot. *Behind the Ever-Expanding American Dream House*. National Public Radio, 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5525283> (accessed July 30, 2007).
- a' Kempis, Thomas. *The Imitation of Christ*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
- Appel, Gene and Alan Nelson. *How to Change Your Church (without Killing It)*. Nashville: Word, 2000.
- Augustine, Saint. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Rex Warner. New York: Signet, 1963.
- Baker, Mark D. and Joel B. Green. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Barna, George. *Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988.
- _____. *The Second Coming of the Church: A Blueprint for Survival*. Nashville: Word, 1998.
- _____. *Church Attendance*. The Barna Group, 2005. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=10> (accessed October 3, 2007).
- _____. *Revolution*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005.
- _____. *The Barna Update*. Ventura, CA: The Barna Group, May 21, 2007. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=271> (accessed October 1, 2007).
- _____, ed. *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice, and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997.
- Bartholomew, Craig and Thorsten Moritz, eds. *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

Baur, Ferdinand Christian. *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 3rd ed. Vol. 2. Translated by Allen Menzies. London: Williams and Norgate, 1879.

Bentley, James. *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics*. London: Constable, 1985.

The Billboard Top 100: Material Girl. Nielsen Business Media Inc. chart listing for the week of February 9, 1985. http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/eseach/chart_display.jsp?cfi=379&cfgn=Singles&cfm=The+Billboard+Hot+100&ci=3004071&cdi=6175197&cid=02%2F09%2F1985 (accessed August 26, 2007).

Bloesch, Donald. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. Vol. 1. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1978.

Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.

Boice, James Montgomery. *Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.

_____. *The Gospel of John*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985.

Bolger, Ryan K. and Eddie Gibbs. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Bonem, Mike, James H. Furr, and Jim Herrington. *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1937.

Bright, Bill. *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* Peachtree City, GA: LifeConnections, 1965.

Bright, John. *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Bruce, F.F. *Commentary on the Book of Acts*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, edited by Ned B Stonehouse. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954.

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. 1856. In *The Master Christian Library: Ages Software*, 1996.

- Burns, Virginia, ed. *Late Ancient Christianity*. A People's History of Christianity, edited by Denis R. Janz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4th ed. 1581. In *The Master Christian Library: Version 6*: Ages Software, 1997.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Image, 1995.
- Cimino, Richard and Don Lattin. *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Clapp, Rodney. "Why the Devil Takes Visa: A Christian Response to the Triumph of Consumerism." *Christianity Today* 40 (1996): 18-33.
- Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Cox, Harvey. "Mammon and the Culture of the Market: A Socio-Theological Critique." In *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*, edited by Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, 124-135. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Craddock, Fred B. *Philippians*. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, edited by James L. Mays. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985.
- Creps, Earl. *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Crouch, Andy. "Consuming Passions: One Man's 'Testimony' From the First Great Mammon Awakening." *Christianity Today* 45, no. 9 (2001): 49.
- Crumley, Carole, Bill Dietrich, Ann Kline, and Gerald May. *Contemplative Spirituality*. Bethesda, MD: The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, 2004. <http://www.shalem.org/resources/publication/articles/contemplativespirituality.html> (accessed October 22, 2007).
- The Dark Ages*. History.com, 2005. http://www.history.com/marquee.do?content_type=Marquee_Generic&content_type_id=54711&display_order=1&marquee_id=53127 (accessed September 1, 2007).
- De Graaf, John, Thomas H. Naylor, and David Wann. *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.

- Demarest, Bruce. *Soul Guide: Following Jesus as Spiritual Director*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003.
- Driscoll, Mark. *Death by Ministry*. Mars Hill Church, 2006. http://theresurgence.com/mdblog_2006-05-24_death_by_ministry (accessed October 3, 2007).
- Edmondson, Robert L. and Gary McIntosh. *It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do About It*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998.
- Estep, William R. *Renaissance and Reformation*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986.
- Forbes, Bruce David and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Revised ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988.
- _____. *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary of the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary, edited by Donald A. Hagner and I. Howard Marshall. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Gibbs, Eddie. *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Gray, George Buchanan. *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice*. The Library of Biblical Studies, edited by Harry M. Orlinsky. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.
- Guenther, Allen R. *Hosea, Amos*. Believers Church Bible Commentary, edited by Elmer A. Martens and Willard M. Swartley. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998.
- Guinness, Os. *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Hamilton, Bernard. *Religion in the Medieval West*. Baltimore: Edward Arnold, 1986.
- Harrington, Daniel J. "The Rich Fool." *America* 197, no. 3 (2007): 38.

- Hauerwas, Stanley and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony (A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong)*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.
- Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973.
- Hill, Charles E. and Frank A. James III, eds. *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Hoezee, Scott. *The Riddle of Grace: Applying Grace to the Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Hubbard, David A. "Words of Agur: Proverbs 30:1-33." In *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs*, edited by Roy B. Zuck, 361-374. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995.
- Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*. The Bible in Its World, edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
- Hutton, James G. *The Feel-Good Society: How The "Customer" Metaphor Is Undermining American Education, Religion, Media and Healthcare*. West Patterson, NJ: Pentagram Publishing, 2005.
- Indulgence*. LoveToKnow, October 22, 2006.
<http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Indulgence> (accessed September 2, 2007).
- Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West*, 1st ed. Vol. 1. Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Johnson, Samuel. "Johnson's Dictionary." Boston: Charles J. Hendee, 1836.
- Kasser, Tim. *The High Price of Materialism*. London: The MIT Press, 2002.
- Kennedy, D. James. *Evangelism Explosion*, 4th ed. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1996.
- Kenneson, Philip D. and James L. Street. *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 1997.
- Kistemaker, Simon J. *Acts*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

- Kotler, Philip, Norman Shawchuck, Gustave Rath, and Bruce Wrenn. *Marketing for Congregations: Choosing to Serve People More Effectively*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1992.
- Kotter, John P. *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996.
- Krawiec, Rebecca. *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2002
<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/religion/9780195129434/to c.html> (accessed August 31, 2007).
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*. Vol. 1. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1953.
- _____. *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present*. Vol. 2. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1953.
- The 'Lectric Law Library's Lexicon on Quid Pro Quo. <http://www.lectlaw.com/def2/q003.htm> (accessed August 27, 2007).
- Lebow, Victor, "Price Competition in 1955." *The Journal of Retailing* 31, no. 1 (1955): 1-9
- Lewis, Robert. *The Church of Irresistible Influence*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- London, H. B. Jr. and Neil Wiseman. *Pastors at Greater Risk*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003.
- Lossky, Nicholas. *The Patristic Approach to Theology*. 2003 <http://catholicsensibility.wordpress.com/2007/08/20/the-patristic-approach-to-theology> (accessed August 31, 2007).
- Luther, Martin. "The 95 Theses." 1517. In *The Master Christian Library: Version 6*: Ages Software, 1997.
- Maclure, David. "Wholly Available? Missionary Motivation Where Consumer Choice Reigns." *Evangel* 20, no. 3 (2002): i-iv.
- Madsen, Richard, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, eds. *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *Commentary of Luke*. New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque, I. Howard Marshall. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978.

- Mayell, Hillary. "As Consumerism Spreads, Earth Suffers, Study Says." National Geographic.com, 2004. http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/01/0111_040112_consumerism.html (accessed July 5, 2007).
- Mays, James L. *Hosea: A Commentary*. The Old Testament Library, edited by Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, John Bright, and G. Ernest Wright. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.
- _____. *Micah: A Commentary*. The Old Testament Library, edited by Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, John Bright, and G. Ernest Wright. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976.
- McDaniel, Jay. *Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism*. St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.
- McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Miles, Steven. *Consumerism as a Way of Life*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Miller, Vincent J. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Morgenthaler, Sally. *Worship as Evangelism*. Rev.org, 2007.
<http://www.rev.org/protected/Article.aspx?ID=2409> (accessed October 30, 2007).
- Morris, Leon. *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983.
- _____. *Reflections on the Gospel of John: The Bread of Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987.
- Mount, C. Eric Jr. "American Individualism Reconsidered." *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 4 (1981): 362-376.
- Mouw, Richard. "Alasdair Macintyre on Reformation Ethics." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 13 (Fall 1985): 243-57.
- Mulholland, M. Robert, Jr. *Invitation to a Journey*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- _____. *Shaped by the Word*. Revised ed. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000.
- Myers, David G. *The Pursuit of Happiness*. New York: Avon Books, 1990.
- Neil, William. *The Difficult Sayings of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975.

- Oden, Thomas C. *The Living God*. Vol. 1. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Ortberg, John. *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- Ortberg, John C., Jr. "Happy Meal Spirituality : Why My Kids Are Convinced They Have a McDonald's-Shaped Vacuum in Their Little Souls." *Christianity Today* 37 (1993): 38-40.
- Our Wedding Songs*. <http://www.ourweddingsongs.com/bouquet-toss-songs/diamonds-are-a-girls-best-friend-lyrics> (accessed August 23, 2007).
- Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980.
- "The Pastor of Hermas." In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by James Donaldson, Alexander Roberts, 2: Ages Software, 1997.
- Pauck, Wilhelm. "The Roman Catholic Critique of Protestantism." *Theology Today* 5, no. 1 (1948): 34-48.
- Perdue, Leo G. *Proverbs*. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, edited by James L. Mays. Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000.
- Quinn, Robert E. *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Reising, Richard L. *ChurchMarketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006.
- Rockwell, Llewellyn H., Jr. "In Defense of Consumerism." Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006. <http://www.mises.org/story/2178> (accessed December 8, 2007).
- Schor, Juliet B. *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.
- Schwartz, Barry. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less (How the Culture of Abundance Robs Us of Satisfaction)*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2004.
- Scotland, Nigel. "Shopping for a Church: Consumerism and the Churches." In *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age*, edited by Craig Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz, 135-151. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000.

- Shaffern, Robert W. "Indulgences and Saintly Devotionalisms in the Middle Ages." *The Catholic Historical Review* 84, no. 4 (1998): 643-661.
- Shelton, Larry. *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for the 21st Century*. Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006.
- Simson, Wolfgang. *Houses That Changed the World*. Emmelsbull, Germany: C & P Publishing, 1999.
- Sine, Tom. "Globalization, Creation of Global Culture of Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 4 (2003): 353-370.
- Southern, R. W. *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1970.
- Spinka, Matthew. *John Hus' Concept of the Church*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- _____, ed. *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus*. The Library of Christian Classics, edited by John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen. London: SCM Press Limited, 1963.
- Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987.
- Stuart, Alan J. *The A to Z of Madonna*. August 19, 2000. <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/alan.stuart/music/madonna/material.html> (accessed August 23, 2007).
- Sweet, Leonard I. *Summoned to Lead*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005.
- Turner, William. *Scholasticism*. New York: New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13548a.htm> (accessed August 31, 2007).
- Twitchell, James B. "In Praise of Consumerism." *Reasononline*. August/September, 2000. <http://www.reason.com/news/show/27795.html> (accessed July 5, 2007).
- Veenker, Jody. "Vatican Amends Indulgences Doctrine." *Christianity Today*, November 15, 1999, 28.

Weaver-Zercher, Valerie. "Enough Already: Resisting Consumer Mania." *Christian Century* 124, no. 2 (2007): 28-32.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003.

Wells, David F. *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.

Wesley, John. "The Complete Works of John Wesley." 1872. In *The Master Christian Library: Version 6*, 13: Ages Software, 1997.

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988.

_____. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.

Willimon, William H. *Acts*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988.

Zuck, Roy B., ed. *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.