

THE CHURCH AND CULTURE: CONSUMERISM  
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The interest in knowing about a reality that cuts across all societies, such as consumerism, does not just stem from having an informed awareness of the issue, but more significantly from how this information challenges us to find biblical answers, which will help people, especially Christians, to enjoy quality of life as persons, families and, of course, in interaction with other people and with God.

According to pastoral experiences, one of the major problems presented by the family, originates in the management of economic issues, which can impact the married couple's relationship, their children and also their social relationships in the environment in which they participate. Since this topic will be given from a social perspective, we can take as understood that spiritual relationships will also be affected as can be seen in the testimony of many Christian people. On the other hand, if we want to investigate more, in my opinion, this issue originates not only in the realm of financial management; it starts with the motivations that come from the heart of men and women who make personal decisions.

Whether we look at consumerism, from positive or negative positions, the following question is valid: What and why do we consume? We will analyze consumerism, in the Peruvian context but with some Latin American nuances, especially the visible effects and consequences which affect society.

Three months ago, we realized the presence of a constant problem in our church, which affects spiritual life and relationships of families. The problem is bank debt, for which many live working hard to pay this off, suffering inevitable consequences such as the breaking up of their family relationships.

So we decided to tackle this problem. People in debt in the church have asked God for forgiveness for making decisions which were guided by emotion, rather than spiritual wisdom. They realized that they need a better relationship with God in order to be able to pay off these debts and have made a commitment. In fact the whole church has made a commitment, to pay off their debts this year, getting rid of their credit cards and deciding not to borrow anymore.

Many may disagree with the idea of getting rid of credit cards, because the tendency is to use them more; however, we need to keep in mind that the situation in Peru is a different scenario to many other countries. If it is possible and helpful to get rid of a credit card, then fine.

### *A BIT ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF COSUMERSIM*

Since mankind has lived in communities there has been a need to acquire or exchange products, to ensure their survival. With a need to consume things, which implies purchasing, having and using various tangible and intangible goods, people have been building social relationships, molding forms and lifestyles, in the process of creating their own culture.

As for the historical context, consumerism began its development and growth throughout the twentieth century. For Jeremy Rifkin, in the 1920s there was an overproduction in the United States of America, driven by an increase in productivity and a decrease in demand (economics) due to the existence of a high number of unemployed due to technological changes. This gave rise to the use of marketing and advertising as tools to increase, direct and control consumerism.<sup>1</sup>

We are now at a stage in the history of society, characterized by a highly fragmented and variable market, where not everyone wants to consume the same product or seasonal design, because the offer is very varied, and as never before, it plays to all tastes. Although this does not mean that society really knows what it wants, because basic needs are relative.

As the individual develops, new needs of social origin are added to these basic needs. All this presents the individual with a new need to consume, this time removed from the original need of satisfying basic needs. It is therefore important to distinguish between consumption and consumerism. Zygmunt affirms that:

A brief distinction between consumption and consumerism: consumption is an inalienable and unplanned process of social life, an essential function of biological life that is not tied either to history or to time. The central role of consumption is the link and the transaction of human relations, expressed by cycles of production, storage, distribution and excretion. Conversely, consumerism should be understood as a kind of social agreement that results from the reconversion of desires, wishes or human longings (which may be neutral with respect to the system) in the main driving force and operations of society, a force that coordinates systemic reproduction, social integration, social stratification and the formation of the human person.<sup>2</sup>

In other words consumerism is introducing unnecessary consumption leading to unnecessary purchases of products and which are quickly interchangeable with others, equally

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Rifkin (1994). *El fin del trabajo*. Paidós, 2008. Pag. 71 y ss

<sup>2</sup> Zygmunt Bauman (2007). *Vida de consumo*. Fondo de Cultura Económica. Pág. 4

unnecessary and not very durable. That is to say, we could live without them. But there is an excessive wave of consumerism; we are entering an era where we live to consume, rather than consuming to live.

### *MOTIVES AND INFLUENCES OF CONSUMERISM*

Consumerism is fueled primarily by:

#### *A. Advertising*

Advertising influences the public to spend unnecessarily. An IAB Latam study argues that in Latin America, only in the Internet, the investment in advertising was \$1,609 million in 2012. It is expected that more people will use the Internet in coming years<sup>3</sup>. Regarding the concept of advertising, Gurrea affirms: “Advertising is the communication of a message intended to influence the behavior of buyers of products or services, shared and supported by a medium which has been paid for and issued commercially. Also it aims at creating a desire to purchase something that will materialize as soon as possible”.<sup>4</sup>

We might ask how many of us have bought a product soon after being influenced by a message on the Internet or on television. Apart from how valuable the product could be, advertising has a strong influence before purchasing an item we decide to buy.

#### *B. The willingness to use and dispose of many products*

For past generations, before buying something it was important to take into account the durability of a product; but in a consumer society, preferably other factors come into play such as: being fashionable, it is "on offer, "I can pay with my card ", "it will make my life easier and more practical", and other factors that help to satisfy people's temporary desires.

So many things which are acquired very soon become disposable although they still are good, worse still; they have not finished meeting the wishes of the person. We are in a culture that quickly discards things. Obviously, it also depends on the situation and perspective one looks at things. For example, buying disposable cups and plates for a party, does not compare to

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<sup>3</sup> <http://elcomercio.pe/economia/1579275/noticia-publicidad-medios-digitales-america-latina-esta-expansion>

<sup>4</sup> Gurrea Saavedra, Álvaro (1998). *Introducción a la Publicidad*. Pág. 20-21

products like clothes or cell phones, which are more expensive and are objects which often lead to people incurring in debts.

### *C. The low quality of some products*

These products have a relatively low lifetime, which is attractive because of their low cost, but in the long-term they turn out to be more expensive and more harmful to the environment. This is a characteristic which the capitalist system uses to compete in the market. However, these products such as low quality cosmetics, beverages, foods or pharmaceuticals, often cause harmful effects to people's health. The toys and electrical equipment also are a part of this situation.

Economically, it is possible to be doubly affected. If by acquiring these low quality products, because of lack of funds, folk decide to go shopping with plastic money, paying the required interest rates, at the end of the day the sum is greater than the cost of a good quality product.

### *D. Culture and social pressure*

As we saw at the beginning, culture is constantly recreated from the exchange of social relations, in part motivated by consumption. But social pressure is also stimulated constantly through fashions and fads, which seek to standardize models, by creating needs. Even fashion is motivated by a problem of self-worth, because fashion feeds the craving to be noticed and to stand out in a group, even to be admired and envied.

*E. Some diseases are specific to people who are consumerist*, such as obesity or depression that make us believe more easily in misleading advertisements, that with this we can solve our problem consuming indiscriminately. The web page of the Psychology Center Fez Lopez says: "Shopaholics are those who do not control their urge to buy something, go into a mall and experience an adrenaline rush that makes them lose control, obtain unnecessary items, spending more than expected and after buying, have feelings of guilt or shame. They experience their shopping with a high level of stress and are unable to enjoy it "<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://link1.es/es/centro-de-psicologia-lopez-de-fez.htm>

This means that beyond the needs that the person has for the product, actually, he/she feels pleasure buying anything, without thinking about priorities or real needs.

## *CONSEQUENCES*

### *A. Damage to the ecological balance*

There are many worldwide problems related to the excessive consumption of natural resources, as well as with the production processes which for the most part, generate pollution. According to the website of the United Nations Organization (UNO), the Vice General Secretary of the UNO, Asha-Rose Migiro said that urban development, industrialization and economic growth have increased waste production alarmingly: ‘We must move away from a society that throws everything away to one that embraces waste reduction, reutilization and recycling. We need more research and more effective exchange of information on technologies for waste management among developing countries.’<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, figures of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) indicate that trash attributable to humans generated between 3% and 5% of emissions of greenhouse gases, which is equivalent to what all aviation and navigation produce.<sup>7</sup>

This tells us that appropriate measures are urgently required to help to reduce waste production and environmental contamination. This alarming situation makes us responsible for the legacy that we are leaving to future generations.

### *B. Effects in the regional economy*

The preference of unnecessary products made in another region helps to tip the imbalance of trade between regions. The logic of consumerism and its presuppositions are that if a local producer cannot sell his products, then he will have no resources to buy, so there will be those who fail to sell, etc; thus, the business cycle, which takes place through the exchange of products or services, in its turn, helps to boost the local market; while domestic consumption is strong, the local economy is developed for the benefit of the region itself.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un.org/spanish/News/story.asp?newsID=18324#.UbxEWecz3-Y>

<sup>7</sup> <http://mexico.cnn.com/planetacnn/2010/12/03/la-onu-busca-un-mejor-manejo-de-la-basura-para-frenar-el-cambio-climatico>

### *C. Social*

Excessive consumerism causes socioeconomic inequalities to become more acute. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 70,000 starving people die daily in the world and 828 million are seriously and permanently malnourished.<sup>8</sup> There are many direct and indirect consequences such as: poverty, hunger, migration, refugees, unemployment, uncontrolled growth of the black-market economy, environmental degradation, etc.

Large multinational companies develop and control the markets of most of the products we buy, and their policies further deepen the gap between rich and poor. In pursuit of growth at all cost and the maximum economic benefit from the perspective of capital, the defense of Human Rights and the environment are market distortions and, consequently, must be reduced and repressed.

### *D. For the Family*

When we fall into the trap of consumerism, we increase our spending unnecessarily, depriving the family of getting what is really needed. There are many families living in debt for many years, unable to pay their debt, which affect the members of the home.

### *E. At the Personal level*

It is possible that after making bad decisions on purchases, a person can suffer from depression or frustration, because of not being fully aware of the implications of the purchases made. De la Gándara, 1996, said:

The main features of the anomalous behavior are: buying for the sake of buying, excessive number of purchases, that the items purchased are unnecessary and that the subject is aware of it but cannot restrain the impulse. Someone can go through a mall and suffer withdrawal symptoms, in other words, a state of nervousness which can only be calmed when buying begins.<sup>9</sup>

### *ALARMS THAT INDICATE DANGER*

A person may not necessarily be aware that they are chasing consumerism. What at first, was a problem, becomes a habit. So, how does someone come to understand or realize that they

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.consumer.es/web/es/solidaridad/2005/10/15/146185.php>

<sup>9</sup> De la Gandara, J. (1996). *Comprar por comprar*. Cauce Editorial.

can be consumerist? A specialized web page describes the five most common and recurring faults constituting an alarm in the family economy “1). Borrow frequently; 2) Compulsive shopping; 3) Withdrawal of money that is not theirs; 4) Having illogical priorities; and 5) Does not save money”.<sup>10</sup>

According to this profile, we can find other symptoms derived from this such as the use of lies, irritability, malaise, depression, anxiety, isolation from friends and family, among others, that will affect not only the person’s own life but also the family.<sup>11</sup> The important thing here is to find a strategy to help the person to find a balance, to try to enjoy what they have without allowing themselves to be influenced by outside interests that may be motivating them.

#### *IT IS POSSIBLE TO REDUCE OR AVOID CONSUMERISM*

Although the problem of consumerism is a psychological and spiritual one, not wholly due to external formulas, we can highlight that it is possible to reduce and avoid being a consumerist by following some suggestions for changes in habits of conduct, by means of being more disciplined. Manuel Chu, the director of the Graduate School of the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences, highlights: "In order to avoid falling into financial problems people need to know what are their spending priorities, the biggest of which are related to housing and food....A second point that should be prioritized, is the health and education of all household members. The last thing that should be prioritized is diversion and vanity."<sup>12</sup>

However, there are other important factors that should be looked at with a "cool head" when choosing a product, such as: 1) Assessing the impact on personal finance, health and the environment; 2) Analyzing whether the product is really needed or is it wanted just because it is fashionable; and 3) If the time of purchase involves taking easy credit then pay more.

To avoid an economic crisis, another web page suggests taking into account the following:

1. Spending more than you earn. The clearest symptom is when people turn to credit cards as if they were ready cash.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.solucionesmkt.com](http://www.solucionesmkt.com) & [www.comprabien.com](http://www.comprabien.com)

<sup>11</sup> <http://salud.uncomo.com/articulo/como-detectar-a-un-adicto-de-las-compras-3010.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://peru21.pe/mis-finanzas/no-dejes-que-tu-bolsillo-colapse-2122433>

2. Mixing the savings account with the general salary account. People must separate the money they want to save in a separate account different to that used for their frequent daily needs.
3. Confusing the concept of wealth. If a person's concept of wealth is based on cost and not on sustainability, this might threaten their economy and that of their family.
4. Paying a debt acquiring another. This creates a "snowball" in someone's finances and only provokes debt growth out of control.
5. Not prioritizing spending. Not everything can be covered at the same time. People need to review their goals and priorities. Financial obligations need to be classified according to their importance and urgency<sup>13</sup>

Trying to avoid and reduce consumer habits can be achieved through order and discipline. The first discipline implies the need people have to be more organized and know where they want to go, making plans and secondly, necessarily they need to find the strength of will to carry out the plans, despite the difficulties.

For many people, help from outside the family environment, from medical services or the church, may well be needed, bringing encouragement and emotional support.

#### *HOW ARE WE DOING WITH REGARD TO THIS PROBLEM?*

It's no secret that Latin American countries are going through times of economic prosperity. Especially Peru in relation to other Latin American countries:

Currently, the GDP per capita of Peruvians is \$ 6.626 and by 2016 will reach \$ 9.045, thus registering an increase of 36.5%, estimated by the Ministry of Economy and Finance in its Multiannual Macroeconomic Framework for period 2014 to 2016...The Macroeconomic Framework further states that the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of Peruvians on the GDP will grow 29.7% between 2012 and 2016, from \$10.840 at the end of last year to \$14.065 in four years. In this indicator, our country also ranks behind Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil and has only surpassed Colombia.<sup>14</sup>

Knowing that our economy is growing helps us plan future projects of life. In Peru we have primary, secondary and tertiary economic activities, of which the primary activity is the one that is mostly sustaining the Peruvian economy. Mining, especially, is being developed widely throughout the country.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.comparabien.com](http://www.comparabien.com)

<sup>14</sup> [http://peru21.pe/economia/pbi-per-capita-peruanos-llegara-us9-mil-2016-2133132?href=nota\\_mas](http://peru21.pe/economia/pbi-per-capita-peruanos-llegara-us9-mil-2016-2133132?href=nota_mas)

The size of people's income helps us to know the financial health of a country, so according to a study called "Oil and Gas Global Salary Guide 2013" prepared by the Hays recruitment company, says:

South America is becoming one of the most attractive regions for global mining. This is the conclusion of a study released last Wednesday by the Hays company, in collaboration with Infomine, who prepared the first study of "global salaries and recruiting trends" in this sector. In local wages, Chile is followed by Brazil (\$76,800), Peru (\$73,100), Colombia (\$61,100), Mexico (\$56,100), Bolivia (U.S. \$ 52,300) and Argentina (U.S. \$ 41,600)...In a global context, the study indicates that 62% of respondents saw an increase in their base salary in the last twelve months. With this influence, expectations for 2013 were raised. In this way, 40% believe that their income will increase more than 5% and 32% will increase to 5%.<sup>15</sup>

### *How is the money spent?*

We have one of the best prospects for economic growth, so it is better to have a culture of prevention through savings and not borrowing. Of course there are very basic needs that must be met and other necessities which are necessarily secondary or superfluous. In order to clarify this situation, we could ask: How do Peruvians spend their money? According to information provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Lima to the newspaper Peru 21, it is stated:

The sale of appliances grew 11% this year and reached \$ 1.400 billion, driven by domestic consumption and the dynamism of new shopping centers in different parts of the country, reported the Lima Chamber of Commerce. She said that the fastest growing categories of sales are goods such as computers and videos; sales for these goods are expected to rise during commercial campaigns for Father's Day, Independence Day, Christmas and New Year. Technology products such as laptops, tablets, TVs, interactivity specifications (Smart), and smartphones will be most welcome during the campaign for Father's Day. Nationally, 55% of appliance sales take credit, while 45% cash.<sup>16</sup>

But the problem which I believe should concern us is that along with the country's favorable economic projections there is also a need to increase consumer loans. Economic prosperity brings in its wake increased credit card purchases and more economic debts.

It follows then, that the theme of the acquisition of products through borrowing credit due to consumer habits, does not depends on the willingness or otherwise of people's use of their money, but basically responds to the satisfaction of just buying for the sake of buying, that leads them to buy more of what is economically available.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hays.es/guia-mercado-laboral-2013/index.htm>

<sup>16</sup> [http://peru21.pe/economia/venta-electrodomesticos-creceria-11-2132817?href=nota\\_rel](http://peru21.pe/economia/venta-electrodomesticos-creceria-11-2132817?href=nota_rel)

### *Bank Loans*

Bank loans, although necessary to fund basic needs such as housing or basic food, are also used to fund superfluous products; they also give an indication of a potential consumerism. The Association of Banks of Peru (ASBANC) details this information on consumer loans, provided by the newspaper Peru 21:

Consumer loans reached S/26,862 million in April, higher by 13% than that recorded for the same period last year...The advancement of the economy and employment growth have resulted in an expansion of the household demand. Meanwhile, credit to small and medium enterprises resumed their expansion in the past two months. ASBANC explained that these loans totaled S/15,610 million in the fourth month of the year, 8.89% more than in the same month of 2012.<sup>17</sup>

### *Credit Cards*

If consumer credit is now a trend, there is a danger that financial institutions, many of them related to large supermarkets, can manipulate us as to what we should eat. This is actually more evident in European countries and the United States, where advertising, banks and large supermarket chains influence the consumers as to what they should buy, where to buy, presenting exclusive offers, by using the cards given to them.

No wonder the card placement amount has grown since last year. In a report, the Central Reserve Bank informs that the "credit card use has grown 13%. The amount of transactions in domestic currency credit card came to S/3.221 million in April, an amount 13% higher than that recorded in the same month last year".<sup>18</sup>

### *A CALL TO DECELERATE THE RHYTHM OF GROWTH*

The Conference on Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean-Monitoring the Development Agenda Post-2015 and Rio+20, in Bogota, argued that the central problem of Latin America and the Caribbean is not the indicators (of economic growth) or the Millennium Development Goals, but the pattern of consumption and production, unsustainable for this and future generations. The document produced by the United Nations, calls for a structural change if the region wants to reduce poverty, inequality and live to tell the tale in the

<sup>17</sup> [http://peru21.pe/economia/creditos-consumo-crecen-13-abril-2132532?href=nota\\_rel](http://peru21.pe/economia/creditos-consumo-crecen-13-abril-2132532?href=nota_rel)

<sup>18</sup> <http://peru21.pe/impresas/uso-tarjetas-credito-crece-13-2132887>

year 2100. Because the causes and consequences outlined in the description of the problem in the first few pages, is that the problem of consumerism is alerting to global organizations to suggests political solutions and promote moderate consumption in humanity.<sup>19</sup>

Naturally this is a wakeup call, and eventually, the countries should implement these policies. Meanwhile those directly involved, such as society, beginning with the family, need to reorient new habits of consumption, which do not break the harmony with God's creation.

### *CONCLUSIONS*

While consumerism is seen as a global problem in society, there will still be those who attempt to mask the extent of the problem, such as companies and factories who want society to consume their products on a large scale. It will be hard to convince them to change their pace as they depend on this problem for financial benefits.

Consumerism is selfish because it stems from a selfish heart, and also serves to strengthen the ego. Unless people stop thinking about themselves, there will be a problem which needs to be resolved.

Consumerism changes people's identity, creating a new type of person who serves the consumerist cause, whose values no longer curb spending, and who is wrapped up in a continuous anxious search for satisfaction. Those who cannot access the consumerist market due to lack of funds also suffer the effects of discrimination, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem. Consumerism affects the environment through pollution that causes global warming and overconsumption of natural resources.

### *THE CHRISTIAN VALUES AND BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CONSUMERISM*

Have you ever stopped to think about how the church is lately? If so, you may notice that you will find a lot of variety between denominational churches and many other postmodern independent churches. But what they have in common, are their problems: pastors and discontented members, the praise and worship ministries disagree on the type of music form in the service, young people about to give up the church because it is not entertaining, churches

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.cepal.org/rio20/noticias/paginas/5/48925/2013-122-desarrollo\\_sostenible\\_en\\_America\\_Latina\\_y\\_el\\_Caribe\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.cepal.org/rio20/noticias/paginas/5/48925/2013-122-desarrollo_sostenible_en_America_Latina_y_el_Caribe_WEB.pdf)

with a hundred members who are not satisfied until they have two hundred, while those who already have two hundred are not content until they have four hundred members.

The materialistic society is influencing the harmony of the church. It is winning the battle against the original vision of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel of salvation. Jesus anticipated this reaction when repudiating, the rich fool: *"Then he said to them "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions"* (Luke 12:15); *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal"* (Matthew 6:19). To the materialistic Jesus said: *"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"* (Luke 12:20).

We have studied the characteristics of a consumer society, along with their attitudes and behaviors. The Scripture shows that this already existed before and that it may persist in a society marked by corruption, both in the political and unfortunately the ecclesiastical spheres.

The mentality of accumulating, without limitation comes from sin: *"you have gained wealth for yourself ... and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud"* (Ezekiel 28:4-5). *"Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land"* (Isaiah 5:8). According to Ecclesiastes 5:10: *"Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless."*

A church with sound doctrine divests self, and thinks of others, *"All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need"* (Acts 2:44-45). These biblical models are important, as they help us to think about a different sort of God, compared to the culture in which we live today.

### *CONSUMERISM IN THE CHURCH*

A consumerist church is the product of the individual behavior of its members, whose lifestyle is consumerist. But this principle also applies to many contemporary Christians, who apparently go out to "shop around" for the church they like best at the time. In the past, the fidelity of a Christian church or denomination was clear, but now, people look for a particular church that will satisfies their senses.

This situation is endangering the seriousness and importance of the church of Christ. Since the church leaders who do not take this into account are doomed to disappear. Even when

their doctrine is correct, they are forced to "compete" against appearances and false doctrines of independent churches who know how to exploit the marketing and audio visual media to make the gospel more "attractive."

On the other hand, there is the feeling that many leaders are turning faith into a religious market, in order to enrich themselves financially. They focus on a theology based on the needs and selfish desires of individuals. This can be found for example, in the Prosperity Gospel based on the understanding (a business mentality) that "the more I give, the more God will give me."

In these churches of Prosperity Theology, the values of the Kingdom of God are reduced to a search for a God who wants to his children, to be rich financially. Yet Jesus himself said of himself: "...*Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*" (Matthew 8:20). How, then, can we believe that a disciple of Christ can live much better than the Master himself? Jesus lived for others, serving God and his neighbor; this must be the main concern of the believer.

The need for power within a consumerist church, has led to the adaptation of a hierarchical structure that responds to the purpose of preserving the authority and control of the listening public. For example, in the church there are people who call themselves patriarchs, apostles, prophets, and others such titles that were not there previously. The right thing is to use the authority derived from the Word of God, which must be preached and lived out faithfully.

The influence of consumer lifestyle has also come to compromise core values within the church. Here are some of them:

#### *1. Hedonism which exalts personal pleasure, instead of spiritual search for God*

The hedonist seeks to have more and more enjoyment. So he has a never ending pursuit of pleasure. He enjoys having, possessing, testing and dazzling those around him. The consumerist man and the woman are egocentric, because they are building a self-centered world based on their own selfish desires.

Since the hedonistic, only thinks of himself, he also has trouble relating to other people, because he does not appear to be transparent, but as someone who wants to profit from the relationship. The Bible tells us to seek first God and hope in Him, not coveting others who also have the right to become prosperous: "*Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous*

*reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes (Psalm 37:3-7).*

The mature Christian knows that they must mortify necessarily the desires of the flesh, and that their own desires are to be guided by the Holy Spirit of God: *“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:5).*

Happiness based on consumerism leads to a materialistic hedonism; a demand for pleasure that has no end, because dissatisfaction is permanent. In a succinct phrase we could say: "I consume therefore I am". Paul expresses himself: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20 a)*

## 2. *Contempt instead of solidarity*

The consumer society encourages people to live in their own world centered on the desires and needs, not noticing the desires and needs of others. They only see people and situations as means of satisfying their fever for possessions or ostentation. They value the steady increase of property, social success and with it the glitz and appearance of achieving their goals.

The consumerist is someone who does not practice solidarity, who is opposed to the message of Jesus and does not recognize each human being as having the same value as himself. The Bible rejects selfish behavior, urging us to feel for the poor and invest in them and God promises another sort of treasure. Jesus himself exhorted us not to invest in this earthly life, but in heaven: *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:32-34).*

The apostle Paul exhorts us to take into account the wishes of others as if they were our own: *"looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."* (Philippians 2:4).

### 3. *Bartering with God instead of sincere gratitude towards Him*

The consumer society is a society deeply mercantilist, because it works in the ratio buy and pay for the service or product. Do not give something without getting anything, even giving gifts has always self-interested purposes.

The members of the consumer society are always focused on themselves, rather than others. It is about receiving rather than giving. Even if after performing altruistic actions, they always think they expect something in return.

The church, especially the postmodern type of church, has also subtly proposed this kind of thinking. Special emphasis is placed on "sowing to harvest", "giving to receive". For many Christians, the unmerited grace of God for humanity has become a commercial matter, that can be accepted or not. And if accepted it can also be manipulated through works, offerings or economic pacts to enter heaven or make God do whatever people want.

Also, for those close to the church, but not committed to it, John 3:16 is not understood, as little by little, the idea of a God who gives his son's life for the salvation of mankind, is becoming a legend or something considered to be unreal. From that perspective, salvation is going to give greater emphasis to the actions of man, rather than God's divine grace.

### 4. *Dissatisfaction because of false contentment*

Contentment arises in our trust in God that He will provide everything we need, enough to satisfy us. This comes through a process of continuous learning in everyday life. In Philippians 4:11, the apostle Paul says, "I learned," Philippians 4:12 also emphasizes that "I have learned". The tricky part is to decide to initiate the process, with the help of Christ himself. Paul also says in Philippians 4:13, "*I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.*"

There are three results that come when we learn:

- a. *Having an attitude of contentment, helps us to relate better to others, and to do good. "And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).* If the sense of dissatisfaction causes the person to act selfishly, creating therefore problems of interpersonal relationship, being content helps us to relate to others, because we have an attitude of service and solidarity with the people around us.

- b. *It helps us to recognize our dependence on God, and that He can help us understand what we really need. Only the Word of God and our relationship with Christ will stop us from getting something which is unnecessary, or harmful to our life. The Christian life is much better when we are happy with what we have. Paul says: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:6-10).*
- c. *By living with contentment based on trust in Christ, we are also helping to preserve and affirm our relationship with Him: And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).* It is important to understand this because in the toil of contemporary society, which causes stress, frustration, jealousy, envy, disease, among other ills, a further deterioration of the relationship between man and God is brought about. A good relationship with Christ enables a person to face challenges with integrity and gratitude for life.

##### 5. *Worship of personal success instead of honoring God*

The cult of success is a feature of modern society. You have to be competitive and successful, to be valued. The problem is that the person seeking success, has to compete with others, but not because he likes to do things well but because this gives him satisfaction. The individual appears to have everything he/she wants but has to realize that fueling successful appearances costs much more than any great satisfaction received.

Many ministers, measure themselves by the size of the church as to whether they are successful or not, and are tempted to do anything at the expense of any doctrine, to keep church large. The apostle Paul warns Timothy: *"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers"* (1 Timothy 4:16). Ministers

should be cautious and permanently, go to the Holy Scriptures and sincerely search God's will, have a true communion with Christ, in order not to fall into false doctrine.