Consumerism Versus Christian Worldview: Comparative Essay

Introduction:

Today I will be going over the historical framework, contemporary issues, and the Christian worldview for consumerism. Consumerism drives the world today, but do we really know how consumerism came to be in the first place? Where did consumerism come from, what sort of issues did it bring with it, and how does the Christian worldview relate to these issues. Matthew 6 says this about consumerism: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Matthew 6:19-22. This quote perfectly describes how consumerism can affect our lives and how it can drive us to abandon our morals or Christian worldview if we are not careful. So, I will be discussing how consumerism came to be, what sort of issues it brought with it that still affects us today, and some of the Christian frameworks that we can use to understand consumerism.

Body

1) (Main Point 1) How and why did consumerism become a part of Western culture?

a) (Supporting Point 1) The growth of consumerism in the US has rooted itself and grown in Western culture.

i) Hilton said it well in his book Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain, “state consumerism was influenced too by the spread of consumer voluntary bodies, by the dictates of Treasury finance and, ultimately, by the experience of actual involvement in consumer affairs. This resulted not in the development of a new theorization of the relationship between the state and the individual in consumer protection, but in the piecemeal extension of official intervention in the marketplace.” (Hilton 221).

ii) After World War II, America need money to be circulating so that they could grow as a country even more. So, they encouraged others to start spending more and more, and this was what caused the early development of consumerism in Western culture.

iii) Cobb also talks about how we have used traditions that are affected by consumerism in his article Consumerism, Economism, and Christian Faith, “Many Christians have continued essentially the Jewish tradition. That is, we must all put first the quest for justice and righteousness. If one’s concern for possession or consumption supersedes one’s commitment to justice and righteousness, then it is sinful. Greed is one of the seven deadly sins. But if one puts first the Commonwealth of God, then one may find that gaining or retaining property is still acceptable. The issue is then the responsible use of that wealth.” (Cobb I)

b) (Supporting Point 2) Why consumerism became a part of Western culture and how it has

survived up until now.

i) The supply of goods got out of control and became more than the consumer needs. This led to companies actively marketing to try and manipulate consumers into continuing to buy more than they need.

ii) People are always worrying about social status and how they are perceived in their worldview. This was a big marketing point, by selling to the consumers as ‘this product will improve your social status because it is expensive.’ This has been a big reason for why consumerism has thrived for as long as it has.

2) (Main Point 2) How does consumerism manifest itself in the lives of people who live in Western culture?

a) (Supporting Point 1) Consumerism is reshaping the Christian worldview and combining itself into western Christianity.

i) 'Western Christianity, like every other aspect of Western Culture, has been absorbed into consumerism and subsequently reshaped by and reoriented towards expressing and promoting ideas, desires, and hopes that have been drawn from consumer culture. Mainstream Christianity has often been reduced to a kind of spiritual expression of consumerism, at times deliberately in the hope that this will connect with the wider culture and breathe new life into a Church in decline.'(Clavier 14). This quote from Rescuing the Church from Consumerism, talks about how consumerism is infiltrating Christianity and reforming it into something new. They speak of consumerism as a virus that is infecting and reshaping Christianity.

ii) A.J. Higgins puts it well in her online article on Truth and Tidings, “Improving your lot in life is not in itself evil; but if it becomes your ultimate goal, it is evil. Money is a good tool, but a bad god. The Lord Jesus taught us about material things and their value. His parables and teaching, especially in Luke, frequently touched on the danger of materialism.” (Higgins 1).

b) (Supporting Point 2) Consumerism is not all bad if you are proper stewards of your money.

i) Wilkens has a whole section in his book, Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives, dedicated to the goodness in consumerism, here is an excerpt from it, “One thing that consumerism gets right is obvious. Human beings have needs that are directly addressed by consumption. A useful tool for understanding the relationship between consumption and needs has been provided by Abraham Maslow. His hierarchy of human needs begins with the basic physiological and safety needs, proceeding to needs for belonging and love.” (Wilkens 51).

ii) Consumerism has a chance to be a good thing in the Christian worldview, but it is more of being good stewards of our money and using it for good deeds rather than for material possessions.

3) (Main Point 3) What are some Christian or Biblical frameworks that will help us understand consumerism?

a) (Supporting Point 1) What the Bible says about consumerism and how we should treat it.

i) The Bible talks a lot about not serving two masters and about materials things not mattering as much as spiritual things. The Bible directly argues against the practice of consumerism, saying in Matthew 6: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.' Matthew 6:24.

ii) This brings me to my second point about serving God does not work with the consumerism worldview. Consumerism is letting consumer goods control our society and our social system, and I do not think that you can do this and still support a Christian worldview.

b) (Supporting Point 2) There are some frameworks that are related to consumerism and to Christians.

i) We should look at some of the frameworks that Jesus uses in his teachings of material possessions and how it corrupts our lives. Jesus tells the people about not worrying about material riches, but about the richness of your relationship with God.

ii) This quote from Christ and Consumerism sums this up nicely, “The most basic framework in human experience for making sense of ourselves, others and the world around us (which is what the term Worldview effectively means) is that of stories. In our case, the most fundamental storyline within which to make sense of theological principles is that of God's people in the world. It is a story that culminates in the establishment of God's reign (or kingdom) in this world. It is for this reason that we must ask specifically about the nature of God's kingship in biblical thinking. Only then can we hope to make sense of what Jesus is reported to have taught about such things as wealth and prosperity.” (Moritz 60)

Conclusion:

For my conclusion I would like to leave you with a quote from Christ and Consumerism, 'Sociologists tell us that people interpret their lives through basic narratives, that provide a framework within which to understand the world and to establish goals and values. If there is any overarching metanarrative that purports to explain reality in the late 20th century, it is surely the narrative of the free-market economy. In the beginning of this narrative is the self-made, self-sufficient human being. At the end of this narrative is the big house, the big car, and the expensive clothes. In the middle is the struggle for success, the greed, the getting-and-spending in a world in which there is no such thing as a free lunch. Most of us have made this so thoroughly 'our story' that we are hardly aware of its influence.' (Bartholomew 2). This quote tells us about how the history of consumerism is self-made and self-sufficient, and how it has created a struggle for success in a world where nothing is free; It shows us how we end up with all of these material possessions and we don’t even recognize that all of this was subconsciously influenced by consumerism. Most importantly it shows us that we all indulge in consumerism, but we should be giving back to our community instead of buying pointless material possessions, and that is how consumerism is related to the Christian worldview.

Works Cited

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