

BOOK REVIEW

The trouble with Paris: Following Jesus in a world of plastic promises

Mark Sayers (2008). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson.

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Throughout the developed Western world, a corrosive epidemic is eating away at the faith lives of Christians. It assails us in our darkest moments: it comes to us at three o'clock in the morning when we can't sleep. It confronts us at every corner, three to ten thousand times a day. It whispers to our hearts that we've got it wrong, that our faith should not be in Jesus Christ of Nazareth but in something else. (Sayers, 2008)

Among an increasing number of resources that address the implications of a consumeristic worldview, in the reviewer's opinion, this book is still the most practical in dealing with how consumerism impacts faith. Mark Sayers, a pastor in Melbourne, not only looks at consumerism with cultural awareness, biblical insight and humour but moves beyond an analysis of the problem to develop a road map for escaping the trap of hyperreality. The writing style is clear and entertaining while making some difficult to define concepts easily understandable. Sayers synthesises complex material into an easy to read, even if at times, oversimplified, outline of the implications of hyperconsumerism.

Structure: The book is divided into three parts that follow a logical sequence. Part 1 establishes the problem of hyperreality and how it influences Western culture. Of particular interest to teachers is the discussion on how young people are socialised into hyperconsumerism. The section on consumerism as religion is particularly insightful. Part 2 looks at how hyperreality ruins faith and how consumerism shapes pictures of God. Part 3 outlines what it means to say "good-bye to a plastic Jesus" and instead live well in God's reality.

Content: Sayers shows how the combination of a hyperconsumer culture, mass media, and rampant individualism has created a world of hyperreality. The message behind hyperreality is that if people are to have lives of worth, happiness

and wellbeing, they need to move their lives into the hyperreal world.

After establishing how hyperconsumerism has infiltrated culture, Sayers outlines how consumerism is now the primary operating system that most people look to for a fulfilling life. If religion is to be defined as the worldview and beliefs that determine identity, actions and hope, then Sayers claims, hyperconsumerism is the biggest church in town.

Malls and movie theatres resemble churches. Celebrities resemble saints. Shopping becomes a sacrament, and gossip magazines, scripture.

Sayers claims that consumerism sabotages faith and has shaped a Post-Christian Trinity with a distant god, self as God and consumerism as folk religion. After explaining what it means to live in God's reality with a healthy picture of God, Sayers invites the reader to join the "reality revolution".

This resource is made even more useable by its accompanying group guide and DVD curriculum, targeted to older teens and young adults, including activities and application questions.

Comparison: While Sayers addresses issues of worship in thought provoking ways, he does not include the value of Sabbath in addressing consumerism. Jethani, in *The divine commodity* (Zondervan, 2010), does a more thorough job of investigating the implications of consumerism for developing a picture of God and includes a section on the Sabbath and consumerism. Bernard, Penner and Bartlett, in *Consuming youth: Leading teens through consumer culture* (Zondervan 2010), do more in addressing the dangers of consumerism; however, have a much smaller scope. Hamilton and Denniss, in *Affluenza: When too much is never enough* (Allen and Unwin, 2005), provide a more comprehensive sociological overview of consumerism's impact on culture in Australia; however, have not written with a biblical worldview in mind. Sayers' book provides the most comprehensive yet easy to read overall introduction from a Christian perspective.

The trouble with Paris provides a great starting point for addressing the problems of a consumeristic worldview in a Christian context. It represents valuable reading, in terms of personal faith development, for every Christian in a western context; however, is particularly valuable for educators and pastors. It deals with the realities of the world students are living in and the potential impact of the thousands of messages students receive everyday on their faith development. It is easy to read, insightful and thought provoking. **TEACH**