

Section: For Individuals – Budgeting & Saving Tips

Title: Tithing and Addiction

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Some people have one, others have six to a dozen, Imelda Marcos had thousands. Thousands pairs of shoes, different colours, different styles, shoes for any conceivable situation, more than she could ever possibly wear in a lifetime.

Why such extravagance? Is it not because Imelda Marcos was addicted? - A bright, new pair of shoes had the power to rejuvenate her, to make her feel young and fresh again, and to give her a rush of joy and happiness. From all accounts a happiness that did not last. There had to be another pair, then another, and then another until her addiction knew no bounds.

Imelda Marcos became something of a symbol in the West, her extravagance was widely reported in the media. We all laughed at her expense, but we laughed too quickly and easily. She is indeed a symbol of extravagance and addiction. She is only the extreme example of a disease that affects us all: consumerism.

Consumerism warrants careful scrutiny. The manufacturing and the consumption of the world's resources are not simply a matter of economics. The consumptive system we all share is a religion. It propagates its own principles and defines good and evil behaviour in the light of those principles.

The first principle of consumerism is **that *the material world is the only real world***. The world is not held together by invisible powers, God's power or otherwise, and we need not bother looking for them. The stuff that we can see through the microscope is the only real stuff, the only stuff of ultimate importance. What you see is what you get!

The second principle is that ***life-giving power is found in the acquisition and consumption of material things***. Growth is the supreme good in the religion of consumerism. The more resources one can accumulate, the better off we are. Imelda Marcos accumulated shoes, we accumulate anything our financial resources allow. The bigger the house the larger its closets, and none of them ever empty. Our society's motto is: 'The one who dies with the most toys wins!'

Today it appears that any talk of limits is out of bounds. Limits are a figment of our imagination, and one can break through imaginary limits like Roger Bannister broke through the mental barrier of the four-minute mile. Carl Lewis won Olympic gold with a jump of 27' 10 3/4", but the AT&T commercial introduced during the Olympic Games suggested that we all can jump even further than Carl. In the commercial while an athlete jump across the Grand Canyon, a voice beckons: "Imagine a world without limits, where anything is possible." With the technological aid of AT&T, we will apparently be able to

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break the limits of gravity!

Politicians say that the material world has unlimited resources, and the human mind unlimited resourcefulness. "To know no boundaries" is the beatific vision of consumerism, as Merrill Lynch and others have portrayed it.

Putting mind and material together, they promise to build a world so magnificent that we will forget the house that God is preparing for us in His heavenly Kingdom.

The third principle of consumerism is that **people who have accumulated material wealth are upright and intelligent and those who have not are the opposite**. Thus we evangelise poor people in 'soup kitchens' assuming they are wanton and speak deliberately to them as if they are slow of understanding. In turn, we elect rich people to public office, assuming they are wise, and speak differently in their presence.

Consumerism is the religion that has won the hearts of those of us in the West, whether we admit it or not. This is the reason why the forgotten Biblical tradition of tithing is of paramount importance to the church today, taking on a significance that has become more important in our day than it was in ancient Israel.

I believe that tithing confronts our material addiction. Giving 10 percent of our income to further God's purposes does demand a fundamental change in our level of consumption. It means perhaps fewer meals at restaurants, fewer holidays, fewer pairs of shoes, fewer items we have come to see as 'necessary' for the good life.

Tithing is a counter-cultural act. It is meaningful for those who understand the world in the categories of giver and gift. Tithers, both ancient and modern seek the company of the invisible giver and not the visible gift, "for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2. Corinthians. 4:18). In the company of the Holy Giver, they await the transfiguration of their lives into a white-robed gift.

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