

# Consumerism and Christians: Shopping for the Kingdom

*Iain Osborne identifies three aspects of a Christian response to toxic consumerism: firstly, the need to care for things entrusted to us by God – we are responsible to God for them; secondly, to use them for the common good, although that includes looking after ourselves; thirdly, to rely on Christ alone for our security, and for our sense of identity – consumerism tempts us to be someone else, not our true self.*

We live in a consumer society. *Tesco ergo sum* (“I shop, therefore I am”) appears to be a core belief of our culture. Christians are up to their necks in this society just as much as anyone else. And Christians in business are frequently involved in selling, marketing or advertising. It is an urgent task for the Christian church in our age to develop a mature spirituality of buying, owning and using goods and services.

This article looks at consumer *ism*. This is a complex term, with at least three meanings. We look at some of the questions each raises for Christians in business, and particularly some ethical challenges they might face.

## **1. Consumerism as a practice**

First, consumerism is a *practice*. Consumption is a practical activity (involving buying, owning and using),

and we need to think whether we are taking the activity to excess, or pursuing the wrong aims in our activity.

What are the fundamental goals of owning anything, anyway? On this we can be guided by the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup>, who suggests there are two purposes to private property.

The first is that it puts us on the hook to care for things. People tend

