

a brief history of consumption



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IDOLS

REPLACEMENTS FOR GOD

CONSUMABLE IDOLS

NEW MOONS AND MEALS

Read Colossians 2:16-20

Generally speaking, American Christianity is a less-embodied religion. It focuses on the mind, the hard-to-pin-down spirit, but not so much the body. This is unlike the Jewish concern for clean, Kosher food. It is unlike the self-imposed veganism of the Hari Krishna. It is unlike the focus on breathing and stretching that you find in Eastern religious practice.

But where Christianity is more ambivalent to the body, it is less ambivalent to the things that are used by the Christian. Money, goods, and property are all items discussed by Scripture, and always to the end of not letting them take over our lives.

IDOL TESTS - REVIEW

We have 3 idol “litmus tests” that we are working with:

How we create an idol:

- We place our fear in something above God
- We place our love in something above God
- We place our trust in something above God

What we look to an idol for:

- Identity – Something that tells us who we are to a greater degree than or even to the exclusion of God
- Security – Something that tells us we are safe, loved, and secure to a greater degree than or to the exclusion of God
- Meaning – Something that gives our lives meaning to a greater degree than or to the exclusion of God.

What our “idol worship” may look like:

- We allow idols to tell us that we are enough (or not enough). We either spurn God’s Law (you are not enough), or God’s Gospel (you are enough).

- We allow idols to absolve us. We seek absolution (while not necessarily forgiveness) from idols, the transactions from incomplete to whole.
- We make idols the way through which we gain transcendence. We look to idols as a way to get beyond the mundane realities of life to some other plane.
- We form worshipful rituals around our idols. We find facsimiles of our religious worship life including congregations of the like-believing, offerings and sacrifices, calls to faith, and evangelism.

It is worth mentioning that our false idols are almost always reflections of ourselves, if not simply just disguised avatars for worshiping ourselves.

TECHNOGOD

In the novel “American Gods” by Neil Gaiman, one of the chief new gods is named “Technical Boy,” a seemingly adolescent annoying god who has more power than what he should be allowed and is constantly trying to push out “real world” relationships. There is a lot about Gaiman’s depiction that resonates with the “god” of technology: it’s new, it has more power than it has matured to hold wisely, and it is wildly jealous of real world interactions.

Technology is nothing new. The wheel is technology. Most of our farming methods are technologically advanced compared to when we started planting crops. But technology’s grasp on humanity, and its subsequent hold on our religious lives is almost inestimable right now. The Technogod is also a great picture of a god who is never appeased, but constantly continues to move the issue of contentment forward.

ENTERTAINMENT

While it may be difficult for us to consider “entertainment” as separate from the Technogod right now, the two have traditionally been distinct from each other. More similar to the “god of leisure,” the “god of entertainment” promises two things in great amounts – security in the form of escapism, and meaning. One does not have to look far to see either of

these things in entertainment venues such as sports programming, “infotainment”, music, or story based entertainment such as books, movies, and television shows.

FOOD (AND DRINK)

Ever taken a picture of your meal at a restaurant before you dig in? Are you a part of a Yelp (a website where you can post reviews, mostly about restaurants) offline “Elite” community? Then you may be flirting with the god of food. Without blushing toward Paul’s words “their god is their belly,” our cultural relationship with food has gotten interesting in the past years. A rise in “craft” this and that – beer, sauerkraut, coffee, etc – betrays that we are spending more time investing in food.

While the “7 deadly sins” and “gluttony” may come up in your mind thinking about the food god, there is some notoriously “ungluttonous” activity around the worship of the food god. While one segment of food’s worshipers may not be able to resist a pork belly dumpling, another segment won’t touch the plate unless it is filled with farm-to-table kale.

SHOPPING

Malls are dying throughout the United States, but the god worshiped at malls is alive and well on the internet...perhaps even stronger. The feasts of incarnation and ascension (into “the cloud”) of this god are the twin feasts of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. We look to not just possessions, per se, in this god, but even the act of possessing.