

# Born to shop?



## "Born To Shop"

Plain leaf notebook -Smythson watermarked pale blue Featherweight paper, with silver-edge -"BORN TO SHOP" silver-stamped on the front cover -Bound in Pale Blue Pigskin, presented in a tissue-lined Smythson box -3" x 2" / 8cm x 5cm. \$45

## Consumer Christianity

Everywhere you look, consumerism rules. It's the new political touchstone - gone are the days of competing ideology. These days it's the competing bottom line. What's in it for me? We've been conditioned from our earliest days to shop around; we are seasoned bargain hunters; we love freedom of choice, so we channel-surf, we web surf, we relationship-surf. Like no other generation, we are "born to shop."

It's an attitude carried over into the supermarket of religions, too. Rabbi David Cooper, who promotes the Kabbalah movement supported by rock star Madonna, says people are interested in his movement because we live in a time when "people are more and more willing to allow cross fertilisation of traditions... we are shopping for religion." And he's right. Even if you're not shopping for a Madonna-style red-thread bracelet (said to ward off evil spirits), you may well be in another aisle of the same supermarket, shopping for what you define as "the ideal church." It's the church where everything is just as you like it... The church where you feel comfortable... the church where there's something just right for your kids...

In one sense, wise church shopping is essential... but when it gets habitual, it's a dangerous sign.

### Discuss

a) What are some valid reasons to "church shop"?

b) What sort of things do people typically look for when they're "church shopping"?

c) The article "Which side of the Counter" in the March edition of our Cross Current magazine lists five signs of a "Consumer Church":

- **church shopping** - always looking for a better church, never committing where you are
- **a critical spirit** - always assessing "what's in it for me," always assessing "feel-good value" of church
- **minimal attendance** - I'll come when it's convenient
- **lack of relationship with others** - especially avoiding "serving"
- **high expectations of leadership** - "we pay them, so they should do all the work"

Do you see signs of any of these trends in the life of our church? (Or in yourself?)

**Read Philippians 1:1 to 2:18**, and note any points that would correct our thinking on the issue of “consumer church.”

### **Consuming - or being consumed?**

1. Let’s start where we finished and work backwards. What image does Paul draw on in 2:17-18?

- i) How does Paul visualise the results that come from the faith of the Philippians?
  
- ii) How does he visualise his own situation?

For that imagery to really hit home, you’d need to have experienced a ritual sacrifice at the Jewish temple. An animal was killed, prepared, and burned on the altar; as the fire was consuming the animal, the drink offering was poured onto it, and vapourised in the flames. The Philippian Christians are “consumed” by their faith in Jesus Christ, which finds constant expression in acts of service. Paul pours out his own life in the same way.

2. Go back to **2:3-8**. Who are the Philippians to model themselves on?

- i) What will the practical outcome be of following the example of Christ (v3-4)
  
- ii) What did Jesus give up, and what levels did he lower himself to?

How does this example influence what you are prepared to “lower yourself to” as part of our church family?

3. Go back to **1:12-14**. What hardship is Paul facing, and why doesn’t he mind?

- i) Whose interests does Paul have at heart in 1:7-8; 21-26.

4. Read **1:4-5**. What is it about the Philippians that makes Paul so joyful?

- i) How is this partnership expressed in 1:29-30 and 4:10-16?
  
- ii) How can gospel partnership be better expressed by you?

### **Becoming a Partner**

How do you make the switch from “consumer” to “partner”? The first step is a change of mind-set. Instead of saying “someone should clean that toilet”, become the “someone.” See yourself as part of the solution rather than an irate consumer. Get involved in “gospel partnership” by volunteering for ministry and asking to be trained. Don’t attach pride or status to what you do. As you remember the example of Christ, who made himself a servant and died on a cross, volunteer to clean up, or to welcome newcomers, or to visit the shut-ins, or to do anything! If there’s sacrifice and discomfort involved, keep thinking of the example of Jesus. Don’t attach your self-identity to your ministry. Your self-identity is found in Jesus Christ. If you are onside with the cause of the gospel, you will be willing to help in any way that’s needed.

Don’t go to church to be filled up or to be loved. Go to church to love others, and to fill others. As you go to church every week, think: ‘Who can I speak to about the Lord Jesus Christ?’; ‘Who can I help?’; ‘Where will I find a newcomer that I can make feel welcome?’ Drive to church praying for opportunities to serve people.

If you are already doing ministry, keep doing it, and train others. Where you can, do not minister by yourself. Gather a friend to come with you. Often we don’t think this way, but it is such a simple concept. When this happens, you not only multiply your ministry, but you model how to serve others.

**As we meet for our Annual Meeting this Sunday, think of yourself as a partner rather than a consumer. Ask, what can I do to help advance the glory of Jesus Christ? How can I help this to happen? How can I follow his example of self-sacrificial service? Don’t ask “am I being served” - but “am I being a servant!”**