

Christopher's page

Much of Jesus' teaching encouraged his listeners to live life with a sense of abundance. While later Christianity tended to restrict and limit its teaching to what a person could do or not do, the Gospel's give a strong indication that the ministry of Jesus was about removing the strictures and opening the lives of his followers to the abundance and fullness that one could encounter in this world. A remarkable example of this is the passage in John's gospel chapter 10, verse 10, where Jesus says to his disciples, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly." These words are spoken in response to, "the thief that comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

There are many thieves in our world that would destroy abundant living today. This includes rule based fundamentalist religion; immoral and unethical living; fear of failure and an unwillingness to take risks; even a distorted view of ourselves and others. But I want to focus on just one thief of abundant living and that is the thief of consumerism. For us in middle Australia this is always a difficult subject. We have so much and yet we seldom feel as if we have enough. It is also difficult because our economic society is based on consumerism. If we stop consuming then the retail industry suffers and we all suffer (economically at least.)

But constant consumerism and the need for continual growth is not the same as living a life of abundance. While there are real human needs that must be met, housing, food, education, transport among others, there are true limits to how each of those contribute to an abundant life.

Few have been more articulate on this subject than the director of the Australia Institute, Clive Hamilton. In two recent books, *Growth Fetish* and *Affluenza*, Hamilton takes Australian society to task for its financial and consumerist stupidity. He suggests that Westfield shopping centres are more the "quintessential icon of modern Australia," than the Sydney Opera House and Uluru. Two thirds of Australians can't afford what they buy, shows a recent survey but once we have bought it we then become the third biggest generator of landfill per capita in the world.

I raise this here not as a non-consumer, but because at its heart consumerism is a spiritual/values issue. Buying stuff and having more and more things can be a way of dealing with the hunger in us for what is called "the more" and "the more" is the desire to live with abundance. But a grain of wisdom and a pinch of maturity show us that the things, the stuff we have, seldom feeds the need in human beings to satisfy their desire for "the more." Spiritual hunger can only be satisfied spiritually. That means we apply spiritual principles to our lives such as; less is more; or to have something one must let go of it; to find oneself, one must lose oneself; and abundance is discovered in who we are not in than what we have, we need these if we are to live in abundance. And of course no stronger words can be said than what Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly."

Christopher