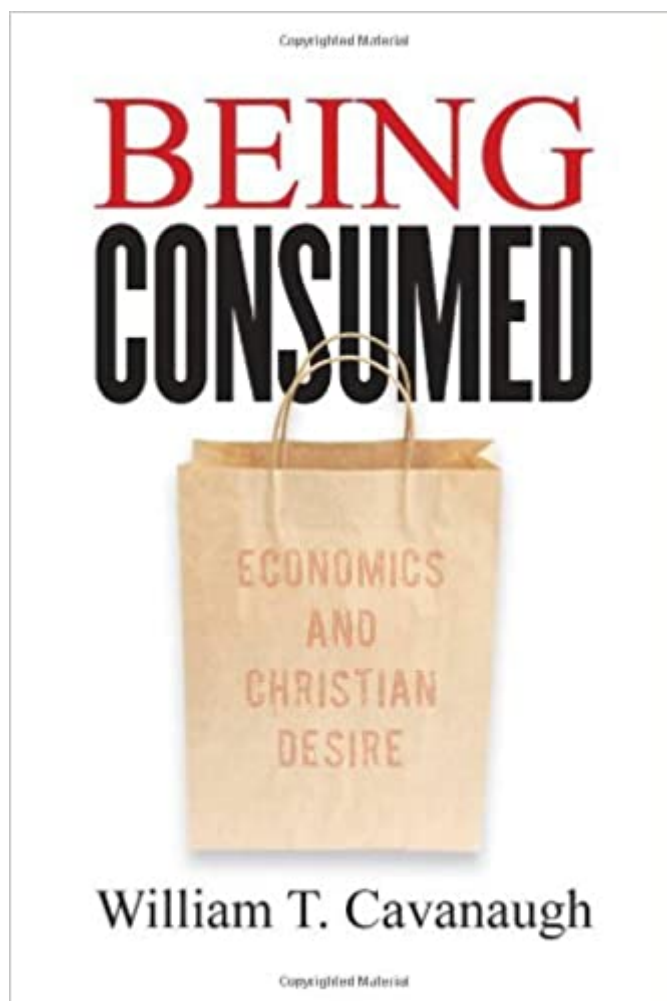


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# Being Consumed: Economics And Christian Desire



## Synopsis

Should Christians be for or against the free market? For or against globalization? How are we to live in a world of scarcity? William Cavanaugh uses Christian resources to incisively address basic economic matters -- the free market, consumer culture, globalization, and scarcity -- arguing that we should not just accept these as givens but should instead change the terms of the debate. Among other things, Cavanaugh discusses how God, in the Eucharist, forms us to consume and be consumed rightly. Examining pathologies of desire in contemporary "free market" economies, *À Being Consumed* puts forth a positive and inspiring vision of how the body of Christ can engage in economic alternatives. At every turn, Cavanaugh illustrates his theological analysis with concrete examples of Christian economic practices.

## Book Information

Paperback: 120 pages

Publisher: Eerdmans; 60590th edition (March 17, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802845614

ISBN-13: 978-0802845610

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.3 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 22 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #49,965 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #30 in *À Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Ethics* #65 in *À Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Ethics* #93 in *À Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Business & Professional Growth*

## Customer Reviews

Joseph Mangina *À* • Wycliffe College, Toronto "Many Christians vaguely sense that all is not well with their relation to consumer society, but find it difficult to name just what ails them.

In *À Being Consumed* William Cavanaugh offers the clearest, most helpful diagnosis I have ever seen. No liberal guilt-tripping here, just some serious theological reflection on matters like God, desire, justice, pluralism, and the nature of human freedom. I especially like Cavanaugh's concrete examples of economic practices consistent with life in the body of Christ. This book will be required reading in my introductory theology course." *À* Gavin D'Costa *À* • University of Bristol "Rampaging retail therapy in our Western economics requires a radical analyst. We have

an Augustinian prophetic voice in William Cavanaugh, who subjects the free market, consumer culture, globalization, and scarcity to Catholic interrogation. He employs the traditions of Augustine, Aquinas, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and John Paul II, proposing an alternative desire that transforms the church and our practices. Envisioning a eucharistic justice that leaves us rich in community-caring and prosperous in our constant sharing, Cavanaugh is lucid, personal, practical, and theologically wise." — M. Therese Lysaught — Marquette University "Can a book free Christians from the 'invisible hand' that seems more and more to dominate every aspect of our lives? William Cavanaugh provides a much-needed how-to manual for just such a liberation. Clearly written and even entertaining, *Being Consumed* frees us from the ironic position of 'having no choice'; but to live by the rules of free-market consumerism in a globalized world of scarce resources. . . Cavanaugh makes clear that the everyday economic life of Christians can be different and can make a difference. And he sows seeds that could, if taken seriously by Christians and churches, produce well over a hundredfold — produce, that is, a revolution." — Catholic Register "Being Consumed" is a thoughtful look at a difficult set of issues. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to understand better how we might apply Christian teaching within our modern economic framework" Expository Times — "Cavanaugh provides a nuanced, yet accessible theological analysis of consumer culture." — Religious Studies Review — "An ecclesologically informed economics whose capacity to transform our lives, if we would heed its various concrete suggestions, should not be underestimated." — Interpretation — "This is a highly readable and incisive book. Cavanaugh boldly engages contemporary economic assumptions — and some of their theological shortcomings — with wit and vigor, and he proves to be a knowledgeable and thoughtful guide." — New Theology Review — "In four accessible chapters Cavanaugh deals with issues that constituted this decade's social, economic, political, environmental, and human rights crises. . . . [The book's] brevity is attractive, but that in no way dilutes its compelling depth." — Christian Century "Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire is a deceptively short yet theologically deep book. . . . Thoughtful and well-timed." — Catholic Books Review — "Cavanaugh's treatment of a complex subject is filled with insights, careful analysis, and helpful suggestions. . . . This book is a must for Catholic and Christian college libraries." —

William T. Cavanaugh is senior research professor at the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology and professor of Catholic studies at DePaul University.

Haven't read the whole thing but what I have read is fantastic. Cavanaugh looks at the problems consumerism ie., what it actually is and is not. He speaks of desire and attachment and detachment from a thoroughly biblically and Augustinian perspective. And while he doesn't go to the extremes that some have with regard to the free market (he still believes in them and is not necessarily anti-capitalist in comparison to other economic systems) he shows what is wrong with the free market, it isn't really as free as free marketeers believe (this point especially, has a lot to say with regard to libertarianism) of which I disagree with. HIGHLY recommend this book.

William Cavanaugh, in his *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, argues that human desire has been lost, in the West, to a consumerism dominated by marketing and branding, pushed by the philosophy that to consume anything is to motivate the global economy thereby helping those who are poor. Cavanaugh posits that consumerism is intrinsically tied to how humans view end of life. He uses his theology of Eucharist to support his call to the catholic church to respond uniquely to the plight of the poor in using Fair Trade companies and local market exchanges. Since we are to be consumed by Christ, rather than by the consumerist economy.

This book is great. It is about 100 pages of theological critics of freedom (in the general sense), free market economics, theological views of freedom as it relates to the economic market, and Eucharist as a better understanding of the Christian perspective of the way in which Christians should participate in economics. This book is not a "how to" manual, but more of a conversation starter. In a four chapters, Cavanaugh addresses a host of concepts and ideas pertaining to the market and what defines human flourishing. In the opening pages of the introduction he places the most basic question for every transaction. He writes "The key question in every transaction is whether or not the transaction contributes to the flourishing of each person involved, and this question can only be judged, from a theological point of view, according to the end of human life, which is participation in the life of God."(Page viii) This begs the question of how we can participate in the life of God through our spending/investing/lending. As I said before this is not a how to manual but it does give some ideas to think about. Researching companies that have sound practices to care for their employees like the ones he mentions in the book as examples. Think about need verse want as a matter of why am I dissatisfied with what I have over what is being marketed to me (do I really need the iPhone 5 when the iPhone 4S still works well?). Ultimately, why am I dissatisfied when my basic needs are provided for? I highly recommend this book for people to read. It has more of a high

theological terminology but well worth the investment.

Can we live different lives, socially and economically as Christians. Cavanaugh say we can - and really we must. This is a great, small book. It's 100 plus pages are meaty - much to chew over. And much to challenge us. Cavanaugh's call is clear and simple, "From a Christian point of view, the churches should take an active role in fostering economic practices that are consonant with the true ends of creation. This requires promoting economic practices that maintain close connections among capital, labor and communities so that real communal discernment of the good can take place". Of course most Christians are aware of the plight of factory worker around the world making designer clothing (Liz Claiborne jackets) which while retailing at \$178, cost only 77 cents per jacket (56 cents an hour). And of course most Christians are concerned. It is just that most Christians are too lazy (yes, fingers pointed at me too!!) to change our shopping habits. But is it possible to be a business and give to the community? Cavanaugh details the pain-based Mondragon Co-operative which was founded by a priest in 1956. The company employs 60,000 people and has annual sales of \$3 billion. But it's philosophy is based on the principles of distributism: this idea is that a just social order can only be achieved through the distribution of property and a recognition of the dignity of labor. Mondragon is entirely worker owned and worker governed. It is based on a system of one vote per worker. Their philosophy is that labor hires capital, instead of capital hiring labor. The highest paid worker can make no more than six times the lowest paid. 10% of surpluses are given directly to community development projects. Not only is the company successful and laborers highly satisfied with their work, but the communities in which Mondragon plays a significant part enjoy lower crime rates, lower rates of domestic violence, higher rates of education, and better physical and emotional health than neighboring communities. There is much more to this book - but I'll leave you to find out for yourself.

A short, but dense read. Cavanaugh makes a fascinating apologetic for Christian understanding of consumption. Though his references points are solidly Catholic in orientation, it is an important read for anyone, Protestant, Catholic, or even non-religious, looking for an alternative way of consuming that doesn't exploit others.

For years I worked for larger churches seeking to appeal to a wider audience of people, however, as I stepped into pastoral ministry I began to see how the entrenched mindset of a consumer based society has sacrificed the Gospel of Christ. Cavanaugh, in a concise manner, nails it on the head.

He looks at the theological implications of how consumerism has affected and infected many of our congregations. This is a must read for anyone entering into ministry.

This is an invaluable little book, and as compact as it is, it truly offers a Christian vision of the very real and viable solutions to many of the world's economic woes! Truly worth the read!

Great as usual!

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