

GROWING *Together*

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A RESPONSE TO ADVERTISERS

If television commercials and magazine advertisements were all we had to go on, one would think we live lives of quiet deprivation. The message is consistent and overwhelming: we don't have enough stuff, and the stuff we do have isn't good enough.

From our earliest exposure, the advertising industry trains us to believe that we are what we own. The key to self-fulfillment, we are told, is owning the biggest flat-screen TV and the smallest cell phone, the fastest computer and the fanciest car. The way for a man to meet an attractive woman is to drink a particular brand of beer. And cosmetics can give every woman a movie star's attractiveness.

Consider ads for household cleaning products. Although we live in the most pristine homes in history, and although some children are so underexposed to common bacteria that they lack normal immunity, advertisements ever more forcefully insist that our families are in grave danger from everyday germs.

It's not just that advertising plays on our fearfulness. It also speaks to the worst of our natures, appealing to almost all of what our spiritual ancestors defined as the seven deadly sins: pride, greed, envy, lust, sloth and gluttony. Only wrath is left out, although most of us have felt at times like kicking in the screen when ceaseless commercials interrupt our favourite TV show.

Advertising promotes scarcity. Whatever they're selling, we don't have enough of it. And if we do – how many cell phones can one person use? – ours lacks the newest feature, which we absolutely must have.



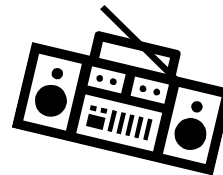
The reality, of course, is quite different. A quick look in the basement or garage will confirm what most of us already suspect – we have too much stuff, not too little. As a society, we are drowning in stuff. In North America, most of us are rich beyond the wildest dreams of billions of others. Anyone who has some money in a bank account, for example, is already wealthier than two thirds of the world's population.

The disconnect between reality and an advertiser's presentation of it should give us all pause. Fortunately, our faith provides an alternative vision, one of a world of enough and more. From David ("my cup runneth over") to Jesus ("I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly") to Paul ("and again, I say, rejoice"), the Biblical witness is clear. We live in a world of abundance – abundant beauty, abundant food, abundant time, abundant everything. What matters is how we react to that abundance.

Faith fosters thankfulness –gratitude– that stands in direct opposition to the advertising industry's message of scarcity. Indeed, the Biblical response to scarcity is not to buy more stuff for ourselves, but to share our abundance with others who have little or nothing.

Try these exercises:

1. In television commercials discern which appeal to our fearfulness, pride, lust, greed, etc.
2. Say a daily prayer of thankfulness, mentioning specific blessings noticed during the day.



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