

*“Silver and gold
I have none;
but what I do have,
I give to you . . .”*
(Acts 3:6)



**RESOURCES TO ENCOURAGE
NON-CONSUMERIST
ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SEASONS**



***These resources come from
a variety of sources.
Acknowledgement of the source
is indicated with the material provided.
We are grateful
for the use of these materials.***

*The Economic Justice Working Group,
JPIC Promoters, Rome, Italy*

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Advent Prayer on Consumerism

By: Education for Justice

Slow us down, O Lord, this Advent,
So we may understand the darkness we are in,
The darkness of fear that comes with wanting more,
And the fear of having less.
Grant us the light of transformation,
As we wait for your true abundance
The love of the Incarnation,
A love that brings us true dignity and security,
A love that embraces all, that enriches all,
That calls us all to share justly and celebrate joyfully.

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We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Simplifying Christmas and Fair Trade Gifts

Resources to help “de-consumerize” Christmas and to promote positive gifts made in a just manner:

Steps to Simplifying Christmas

1. Plan ahead to ensure appropriate ways to celebrate the birth of Christ. Have a meeting to decide how your school, class, parish, group and/or family can celebrate Christmas in a way that is joyous and simple.
2. Reflect carefully on all kinds of gifts you give or donate during the holiday season. Refrain from supporting companies that deny fair wages, healthcare, and other rights to their workers.
3. Give alternative gifts, such as crafts made by U.S. community groups or fair trade gifts from developing countries. Give a non-tangible gift, based on a donation to a non-profit: for example, Catholic Relief Service offers gifts that will provide education for children in poverty or provide aid in poor countries. See the lists on the following page for such gifts.
4. Give a percentage of your Christmas gift budget to an organization working for a just society.
5. Give of yourself—something you made or created, or a coupon book for future services you will personally provide.
6. Draw names in your giving circle, rather than everyone giving a gift to everyone else. Set a price ceiling.
7. When buying gifts for children, choose gifts that will help develop their creativity. Art supplies, building materials, music and books promote children’s development. Encourage multicultural books and toys.
8. Avoid gifts that promote a consumer culture, gender stereotypes, or violence.
9. Avoid stress. Stay away from overly-stimulating stores, malls, shopping centers, or at least give yourself a time limit in such places. Keep decorations simple (remember the stable). Have everyone do part of the work involved with your celebration. Give the gift of your peaceful presence to others—and the gift of peace and quiet to yourself. Enjoy music, good food and good company in a relaxed way.
10. Avoid debt. Set spending limits on gifts, cards, decorations, etc. Refuse to be pressured to overspend.
11. Remember to focus on the true meaning of Christmas: Jesus, who came into the world bringing a radical message about loving God and our neighbors. Remember also that Christ came with a special concern for the poor and the marginalized. Make them an important part of your Christmas celebration in any ways possible.

Adapted from “Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?” Alternatives for Simple Living, at <http://www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/ojp119.htm>.



(from Education for Justice,
www.educationforjustice.org)

ALTERNATIVES TO CONSUMERISM IN “DEVELOPING” COUNTRIES

Is there any consumerism in developing countries? The purchase of goods and services is on a remarkable increase especially among the middle class. This really shouldn't be a surprise with new products being introduced almost daily, especially when it comes to technology products and luxury goods. Buying just the necessities is a thing of the past. This is a challenge for the developing countries where many people hardly meet their daily basic needs. We want to consider Alternatives to Consumerism for Advent and Christmas. The objective is not only to save some money for future use but to promote the well-being of our brothers and sisters, living with gratitude and harmony while enjoying the God given gifts.

All over the world, Christmas is a time of giving. No one is so poor that he cannot give anything. This giving should not be simply exchange of gifts between a certain category of people; friends, relatives, etc. but to whoever in need of food, clothing, house, education; also giving one's self through the visit of the sick, aged, lonely and abandoned. In most of the developing countries, the pain of war and violence has become a day to day reality. Advent season can also be a moment of renewal of our commitment for transmitting human, Christian and moral values necessary for reconciliation and peace building. Last and not least, it is a time to become the voice of the voiceless. These charitable deeds are not new. Many people of good will, as individuals, groups and associations have practiced them in the past making advent and Christmas truly meaningful. “The poor are always with us.” Sacrifice yourself and your time not only during Christmas but throughout the whole year.

(Joyce NJOGU, LSSC)



A SUBJECT¹ BECOMES AN OBJECT AND AN OBJECT BECOMES A SUBJECT

(original in Portuguese)

FreiBetto*

Neo liberal consumerism today generates a feat which causes philosophers much perplexity: the human subject becomes an object and an object (merchandise) becomes a subject.

Consumerism is no longer determined by need. Merchandise carries a brand and status and gives value to those who use it. When he obtains it, the consumer permits himself to be possessed by it. The value it holds, created by advertising and by fashion, emanates, and impregnates the consumer.

In the universe of consumerism, if someone desires to be well accepted by others in his social circle, he must equip himself with all the luxury objects which will give him an aura which can show, socially, his high level and status. Poor him if he does not use certain makes of car, watch and clothing. Poor him if he does not go to select restaurants. Poor him if he does not travel in executive class to New York, Paris or to some Pacific island which is the “latest spot”.

If the subject decides to refuse to use the list of objects which are considered perfect, he runs the risk of being excluded, deleted from the social circle which establishes a certain minimum standard for consumerism as a code of identity.

Summing up, the subject starts to be treated as an object. Doubly an object: for subjecting himself to merchandise and for being rejected by his peers. For in the consumer system only those who move shamelessly in the universe of luxury and the superfluous are accepted.

This dehumanizing process stimulates the obsolescence of merchandise. Now production must cater not to a need, but to a dream, a desire, a longing for social climbing. The product acquired today – car, computer, Ipad – will be obsolete tomorrow.

You may want to insist on keeping the electronic equipment which is adequate to your present needs. All who surround you will notice your anachronism. You have lost your identity with the tribe which moves towards the acquisition of merchandise which is ever more sophisticated, with a bolder design.

The only way to be accepted by the tribe is to acquire the same objects which, as subjects, will rescue you from the grey and mediocre universe of ordinary mortals.

This inverts a human subject into an object and transforms the object into “human” or even “divine”. This is disseminated through advertising – which does not distinguish class. The appeal is the same for all. The billionaire in his executive jet and the young semi illiterate person from the favelas (shanty towns) suffer the same impact from advertising.

¹In Portuguese, the word “sujeito” which translates as “subject” is much used when referring to a person (male) whose name is not mentioned. A “sujeito” is also a subject - a “national or citizen”; a “fellow, chap, bloke, beggar”, etc., as well as a “subordinate, dependent, dominated person”. It has been hard to translate this concept properly.

The difference is that the former has easy access to new consumer icons. The young person absorbs the icons in his knapsack of desires and recognises how he is socially discarded and disposable for not investing in objects which give value to persons. Hence frustration and rebellion.

Frustration can be compensated by the healthy envy of those who perceive the radiance of others: readers of celebrity magazines and those who surf the net, attracted by their idols' call of the mermaid. Rebellion leads to crime – "I am not like them, but I will, come what may, obtain what they have".

Are there any limits to obsolescence? Will super production one day make the supply alarmingly greater than the demand? It seems not. Industry years ago learnt that the consumer is irrational and is not moved by principles, but by effect. Which moves him to shop.

It also learnt to make production follow concentration of wealth. Popular cars are no longer manufactured. Those who mostly purchase vehicles are families who already possess at least one.

Now, in post modernity, people no longer relate to each other, they connect. Encounters are not real, but virtual. We no longer live in society, but in networks. Nobody is excluded, simply deleted.

Intimacy gives way to "extimacy", as expressed by Bauman. It knocks down all walls of privacy. To the point of people becoming saleable merchandise, walking shop windows who expect to be admired, desired, envied and coveted. Thus the heavy investment in gyms, cosmetics, plastic surgery, etc. Many anxiously seek to be objects of desire. Because their self-esteem depends on what others can see. And the market well knows how to manipulate such low self-esteem.

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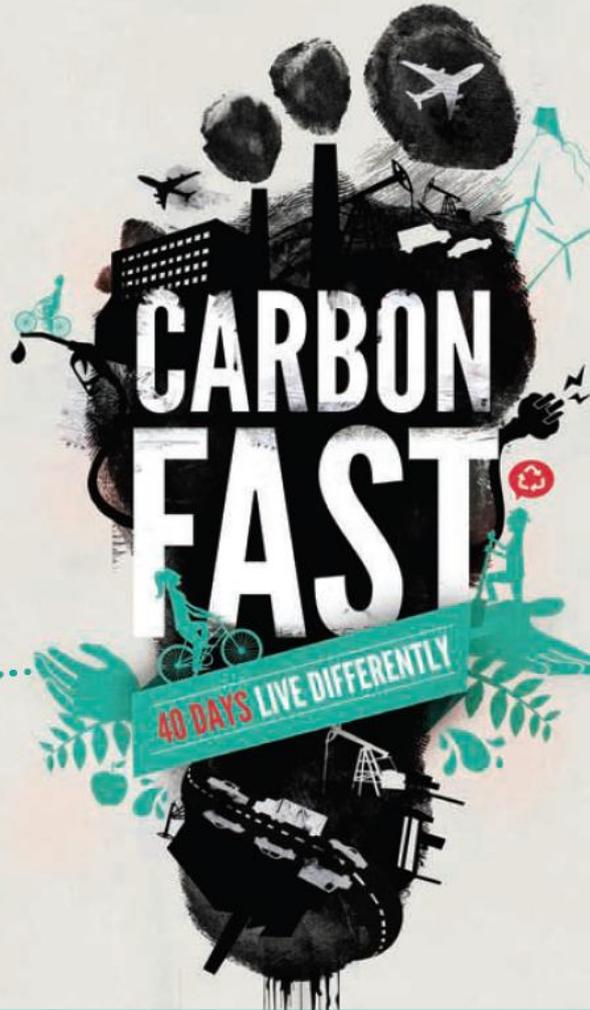
**ABOUT FREI BETTO*

He is a Brazilian Dominican with an international reputation as a liberation theologian. Within Brazil he is equally famous as a writer, with over 56 books to his name. In 1985 he won Brazil's most important literary prize, the Jabuti, and was elected Intellectual of the Year by the members of the Brazilian Writers' Union.

FreiBetto has always been active in Brazilian social movements, and has been an adviser to the Church's ministry to workers in São Paulo's industrial belt, to the Church base communities, and to the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST).

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The **Carbon Fast** is a 40 day challenge that enables you to **learn, live, give, pray** and **advocate for justice** in a changing climate.



Live differently. Learn about God's creation and climate justice for the poor. Be the change, by living more simply, justly and sustainably. The Carbon Fast offers 40 simple action ideas for daily living. Study resources explore 7 themes: Creation, Love, Simplicity, Community, Conversion, Justice and Sacrifice.

Register as a group or individual to get the full Carbon Fast action & study guide. Visit www.tear.org.au/carbonfast or email advocacy@tear.org.au.



This year, thousands of Christians around the world will take the Carbon Fast. Join the movement at www.tear.org.au/carbonfast

40
YEARS | LIVING & GIVING
FOR GOD'S WORK OF
JUSTICE & COMPASSION



Theme 1. Creation: Creativity and our Creator

“God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

Learn

Genesis 1 tells us that God intimately created our world and lovingly declared it ‘good’. God’s loving attitude to creation indicates that it is precious and wonderful, in and of itself. To love God and to be like Him is to care for the things that He cares for.

In Genesis 2 there is no one to till the ground, so God forms man (adam) from the ground (adamah) to care for it. This Hebrew wordplay (adam/adamah) expresses humankind’s solidarity with the earth; we are connected and dependent upon it for life.

Q. In what ways are we dependent on the environment? In what ways has our society insulated us from this dependence?

Q. What does it mean for humans to ‘rule over’ the earth as God’s stewards? How do we rule not in the world’s ways of domination, but in Christ’s self-sacrificing way of servant leadership?

In Genesis 3 the original harmony between humans and the earth was ruptured by the fall. The earth becomes difficult to farm, cursed because of human sin. God says to man, ‘Cursed is the ground because of you’ (Gen 3:17).

Q. Why might human sin impact the earth? Read Jeremiah 2:7, 12:4, Hosea 4:1-3, Isaiah 24:4-6. These suggest that the earth suffers as a result of human wrongdoing... where can we see this in the world today?

Get the full ‘Creation’ study resource at tear.org.au/carbonfast

Action Ideas

1. **LIVE** a “one Earth” life. Calculate how many Earths would be required if everyone in the world lived as we do. See footprintnetwork.org/calculators
2. **LIVE** a less fuel-intensive lifestyle. Commit to a car-free day each week.
3. **GIVE** some time to grow your own vegetable garden at home.
4. **SAVE** water. Reuse shower water to wash the car. See council guidelines.
5. **LIVE** in the image of the Creator God and get creative! Make cards and presents out of recycled items, or come up your own creative ideas.
6. **PRAY** for God to restore his creation. Spend some time outdoors and worship God amongst nature.

“You can’t be a Christian and not be an environmentalist.” Tony Campolo