



Self-serve Christianity

A parody is a comic caricature, a ludicrous likeness, an absurd analogy, a ridiculous representation which exposes a particular reality by comparing it to another of a different order. Parodies can be a useful literary tool to expose the “red herrings” of diversions which distract attention from real issues. By the use of parody one can be direct yet subtle at the same time.

Remember the days when the proprietor at the mercantile, the clerk at the grocery market and the attendant at the gas station would take the time to really serve the customer? They regarded pleasant, helpful service to be their primary responsibility, whereby they might maintain loyal, satisfied customers. Their mottoes were displayed on the wall: “Service with a smile.” “The customer is always right.”

Today, ours is a society of convenience stores, fast-foods and self-service. Aptly referred to as the “Me-generation,” we want just what we want, and we want it now for the least price.

Ours is the age of supermarket shopping. We choose the product of our choice from a selection of a wide range of varieties. Willing to purchase not only what we need, but

almost everything we want, we expect to find everything at one location and a complete stock of every variety. We prefer that it be on sale, or at least have a rebate, for we refuse to pay the full price. We resent having to wait; we expect immediate service. Increasingly we are demanding that the commodities be delivered to our door.

Remember when our mothers and grandmothers would shop at the local grocery for fresh food

items, or go down into the food cellar to get canned food items from the previous season? They would spend hours, sometimes days, preparing meals for the family and friends.

Mealtimes were a time of meaningful family fellowship and personal interaction.

Fewer and fewer family meals are prepared today. When mealtime approaches, we pile into the car to drive to restaurant row. “Let’s take a vote. What sounds good to us today?” Sampling the delicacies of the innumerable food preparation establishments, we cater to whatever suits our taste at the moment. There are ethnic emphases, culinary specialties—a smorgasbord to appease every appetite.

Needing fuel for the automobile, we stop at the gasoline station. Remember how the friendly attendant used to come out and check the oil and water, wash the windows and pump the gas?

We even used to call it a “service station.” Few are willing to pay the additional price for full-service anymore. Instead we pull up to the “self-serve” island to “pump and pay.” Having taken on fuel for the week, we drive off in a hurry to the next convenient, self-serve satisfaction of our every desire.

It is not difficult to liken the foregoing shift in consumerism to the contemporary age of “supermarket Christianity” where we shop around for the commodities we desire. Though unwilling to pay the price, we demand satisfaction of every perceived need and immediate delivery.

The institutional church has catered to such consumer Christianity by attempting to offer a smorgasbord of every delicacy on restaurant row. “Where shall we go to get ‘fed’ today?” Some even conceive of a gas-station Christianity where people can “pump and pay” for a weekly spiritual fill-up.

Whether it be the pleasant personal service of the past or the self-service style of the present, the entire concept of consumer-oriented Christianity must be challenged. Are we consumers demanding to be served, or are we Christians, indwelt by Jesus Christ, living and loving to serve the needs of others?

Self-service Christianity is an abomination! Let us return to real Christian service with a smile. □

—Jim Fowler

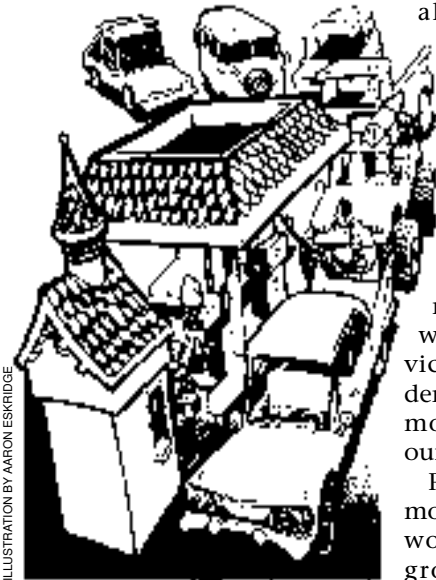


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