Americans obsessed with sacred art of shopping, says USF instructor

TAMPA, Fla. (Nov. 18, 2002) - If you’re already busy buying Christmas or holiday gifts, don’t worry, you’re not alone. And if you tend to shop too much, you’re in good company… with the rest of the nation, according to Dell deChant, University of South Florida religious studies instructor and author of Sacred Santa: Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture. The new book from Pilgrim Press outlines the history and changes of American culture and religious obsession with consuming.

DeChant will hold a discussion of his book at 3 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 21 at the USF Library, Grace Allen Room, fourth floor.

‘We buy, not because something is worn out, but because it’s what we do,’ said de Chant. ‘Holidays are packed with activities and ‘rituals’ that bring about good emotions,’ deChant says. Because consumption makes us feel good, we spend excessive hours around holidays shopping, shopping, shopping. We buy more, and we buy bigger, deChant says. ‘It’s a rush. We give up the money we labor so intensely for in order to obtain products to give away or consumer ourselves. ’

‘We aren’t workaholics, we’re shopaholics,’ said deChant. ‘We work so we can consume.’

Americans have grown away from a production-based society and become a consumption-based society. Even with the current economic downturns, Americans still love to shop for seasonal items.

DeChant says that although contemporaries bemoan the holiday season as bigger and sooner than ever, he argues: "Rather than being secular and nonreligious, America's late capitalist, postmodern culture is actually intensely religious" - with consumption itself serving as a sacred activity.

According to Darrell J. Fasching, USF religious studies professor and colleague: "Without ever lecturing us, he challenges us to look at ourselves and decide for ourselves if the way we are actually living is what we really had in mind." According to the publisher, The Sacred Santa is one of its fastest selling Academic books in the history of Pilgrim Press.

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