

2nd Opinion: Following Christ: More than âRedâ

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By Gary Long

Bono and Oprah are two of the most powerful figures in the entertainment business. So, naturally, it caught everyone's attention when they went "Red." They are two key celebrities affiliated with [the "Red" campaign](#), an idea to brand products and give proceeds from the sales to fight diseases—specifically HIV/AIDS—in Third World nations.

On the surface, it seems like a good idea to "do the 'Red' thing." Bono explained the campaign to *Relevant* magazine: "Some people won't put on marching boots, so we've got to get people where they are at, and they're in the shopping malls. Now you're buying jeans and T-shirts, and you're paying for 10 women in Africa to get medication for their children with HIV."

But my concerns are several:

First, I can make a pretty good biblical case that buying more "stuff" isn't good for people who already live in a culture of excess.

Then there's the whole false sense of having done good. Have I really done

something special by buying a “Red” iPod rather than the white one? And lest we miss this little ethical quandary, there’s the strange partnership of consumer frenzy, corporate profit and fund raising. Aren’t the big corporations just riding a “feel good for buying” wave to sell more of their stuff and increase their bottom lines?

As people who allegedly build our lives based on biblical principles, Christians are called to care for the world by taking up a cross like Jesus, not by taking up our shopping bags. I was troubled by this same issue when President Bush told us the very best thing we could do for our nation in the wake of 9/11 was to continue spending.

Even in the church, this is present. The issue is even more theologically complicated by “prosperity gospel” TV preachers and megachurches that have turned our faith into one more consumer choice to make. In Matthew 10.32-42, Jesus talks about commitment to his cause. He gives startling and difficult words, saying, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” In other words, commitment to Christ supersedes all things. He follows on by saying, “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

Commitment to following Christ is more than our consumer choices. Following Jesus has to be more than the “hip” church we pick, or how our T-shirt touts our cause in some chic/pop/relevant way. Commitment to Christ must mean more than just the things we buy, wear, eat or drink. It must be more than all those things and yet include every one of those things.

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