



“Go out and gather each day ...”: implications of the ethics of Exodus 16 for modern consumerism

J.M. Vorster
School of Ecclesiastical Sciences
Potchefstroom Campus
North-West University
POTCHEFSTROOM
E-mail: koos.vorster@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

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This article focuses on the implied ethical principles of the history of the manna in Exodus 16 and the relevance of these ethical principles for the contemporary culture of consumerism. The principles that can be derived from this history are the principle of labour and rest, of sharing, the ethical principles of responsible consumption, the protection of creation and of remembrance of God’s concern for humankind and creation. Modern consumerism with its underlying neo-liberal economic philosophy appears to violate these principles in many ways. The implied ethical principles of the manna history is thus highly relevant in the ethical discourse about economic planning, labour and rest, the environment and God’s involvement in the modern world.

Opsomming

“Gaan elke dag uit en maak bymekaar ...”: implikasies van die etiek van Eksodus 16 vir die moderne verbruikerswese

Hierdie artikel fokus op die etiese beginsels wat uit die geskiedenis van die manna in Eksodus 16 voortspruit en die betekenis van hierdie beginsels vir die groeiende verbruikerskultuur van ons tyd. Die beginsels wat hier ter sprake is, is dié van arbeid en rus, verantwoordelike verbruik, mededeelsaamheid, die beskerming van die omgewing en die herinnering aan God se besorgdheid oor die mens en die skepping. Die moderne

verbruikerskultuur met sy onderliggende neo-liberalistiese filosofie druis skynbaar teen hierdie beginsels in op veelvuldige wyses. Die etiese beginsels van die manngeskiedenis is dus besonder relevant in die huidige etiese diskoeers oor ekonomiese beplanning, arbeid en rus, die omgewing en die vraag oor God se betrokkenheid in die huidige wêreld.

1. Introduction¹

The narrative of Exodus 16 has been examined from various points of departure. Scholars in literary criticism, revelation history and textual critique raised many questions and engaged in interesting debates about the editorial techniques, historical context and theological relevance of this narrative (cf. Johnston, 1996:253). Ver-venne (1996:21) indicates in a thorough and comprehensive way how the book of Exodus interested many scholars from different fields and led to thought-provoking and useful results that can be of assistance in an understanding of this narrative.

This investigation focuses on the possible ethical implications of the gathering of the manna (Exod. 16) for a modern environment characterised by the culture of consumerism and the quest for luxury. The research question can thus be formulated as follows: Are there any ethical motifs in the instructions of Exodus 16 and if so, what is the relevance of these ethical motifs for a modern environment where rampant consumerism and the quest for a luxurious lifestyle are the order of the day? The aim of the article is to deal with the historical survey of Exodus 16 from a reformed perspective which entails that a revelation-historical hermeneutical approach will be used. The focus on Christian ethical research and the assumption of a Christian point of view entails the following hermeneutical line of reasoning:

- The recognition of the divine inspiration of Scripture and its authority for Christian faith and life.
- The unity of the biblical message and the presence of continuous theological themes such as the covenant, kingdom of God, people of God, redemption and sanctification.

1 It is indeed a privilege and a honor to present this article for the festschrift of Elaine Botha. I do it with fond memories of her guidance and forming influence in my academic career as well as her personal devotion to reformational philosophy and her huge interest in theology. She enriched my life.

- The unfolding consistent revelation in the various genres of the biblical material against the background of the historical and cultural context of this material.
- The reading and understanding of a passage in Scripture within the framework of the whole revelation.
- The distinction between descriptive parts, which narrate a certain historical happening or custom, and the prescriptive parts, which establish ethical principles and norms for modern-day conduct.
- The possibility to formulate clear principles from the prescriptive parts, but also to derive ethical principles from the underlying theological themes in the unfolding revelation (cf. Kaiser & Da Silva, 1994:193).

The central theoretical argument of this article is that the narrative of Exodus 16 provides ethical motifs that can be transposed into modern-day ethical principles and norms in the field of labour, consumption, sharing and environment. These principles are especially relevant in an age of growing consumerism and the quest for a luxurious lifestyle. The relevance becomes evident when this passage is interpreted in the light of a grammatical-historical and biblical theological hermeneutics as it is outlined in the above-mentioned statements (cf. Mills, 2001:4). Firstly, the historical context of Exodus will be explained. Secondly, the ethical implications of Exodus 16 will be addressed, and thirdly the ethical relevance of Exodus 16 for modern-day consumerism will be considered. This investigation does not enter into a discussion of the form or structure of Exodus 16, because it has no real bearing on the ethical principles at hand. For such a study the work of Durham (1987:216 ff.) can be consulted. His investigation in this regard is worth considering.

2. The historical context of Exodus 16

Exodus tells the history of God's act of liberation of the people of the covenant from the bondage in Egypt and movement of the people to the promised land. This action of God is an action of redemption, which is the primary source of the gratitude of God's people. God acts first and then calls people to respond (Wright, 2004:25). God's actions are the foundations of human actions. In this history many important theological topics are revealed and thus also the ethical demands implicit in them. Among other topics one can refer to the people's liberation itself, which denotes the continual deliverance of the people of God from the bondage of slavery and oppression. The institution of the Passover and the way this feast has been treated in

the later history of God's people is proof of this fact. Furthermore, this history reveals the way in which God restored his covenant with the people irrespective of their own unbelief, lack of trust and disobedience. He establishes a new relation that entails the promise of his guidance and caring and the command to have faith and be obedient. Of utmost importance in Exodus is the revelation of God's law in the Ten Commandments. These commandments should be kept by the people of the covenant as a sign of the fact that they are God's people. Exodus is indeed an important source of ethical norms in Christian ethics (Mills, 2001:2).

The covenantal relationship between God and his people was constantly under pressure due to the people's disobedience and their unwillingness to take God on his word and to live according to his commandments. The covenantal relation was a troublesome relationship and sometimes endured the anger of God and his punishment (Vriezen, 1966:215). That was the reason for the wandering in the desert. The wandering in the desert was a direct result of the people's disobedience. It had specific significance. The people lived under the judgement of God because of their distrust of his liberating action and their disobedience. God's provision and the people's dissatisfaction with God, set the backdrop for the whole history of Exodus. According to Durham (1987:228) Exodus is a history of a theological relationship written with an incredible tension hovering, the tension of a loving provident God, giving Himself to his chosen people whose ways reject Him.

The manna history must be understood within this broader context. The event is part of one of these troublesome periods where the people had been disciplined by God because of their lack of faith on the road to the promised land (Motyer, 2005:178). The Israelites longed for the “fleshpots of Egypt” (Exod. 16:1-3) and complained about their harsh conditions. With this attitude they repudiated their covenantal relationship with God (Ryken, 2005:425). God listened to their complaints and promised to provide food. They had to learn to put their trust in the providence of God (Olson, 2004:320). However, in spite of his punishment God still took care of his people.

The history of God's provision is part of a larger “manna tradition” (Malina, 1968:1). Various other parts of the Old Testament apparently shed light on this tradition, such as Numbers 11:6-9; 21:5, Deuteronomy 8:3-16, Joshua 5:12, Psalm 78:23-25; 105:40 and Nehemiah 9:15-20. The main theme in these passages is the fact that God punishes his people for their disobedience, but also exhibits his faithfulness in the way that He nourishes and cares for them.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither of you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deut. 8:3.)

He called them to faith and the expectation of the promised land. Eventually the manna stopped and “they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan” (Jos. 5:12). Eventually the psalmist praised God, because “He brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert.” (Ps. 78:52.) His deeds were remembered throughout their history. “Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert ... You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.” (Neh. 9:19 & 20.)

Durham (1987:227) contends that Yahweh’s provision for his people can be seen as the

... obvious point of the compilation of Exodus 16; and the emphasis of that point overrides considerations of logical and chronological sequence in the introductory and time-setting prologue of vv 1-12 and the narrative development of these themes in vv 13-36.

Furthermore, he indicates that the redactors have gone to great lengths to stress the comprehensive nature of God’s provision. The instructions in these chapters should be seen within this context. During the period of the Israelite’s wandering in the desert and the rebellion against Him, He remained faithful to his covenant and provided for his people. This provision forms the basis of his instructions that should guide and control their life of gratitude.

Scholars in the evangelical tradition, such as Ryken (2005:431), tend to interpret Exodus 16 in the light of the New Testament, especially through the lenticels of John 6:22-40. He provides a good example of this interpretation when he compares the spiritual journey of Christians with the wandering of Israel in the desert and explains that as the Jews fed on the manna and the quails, the believers should feed on Jesus as the bread of life. He says:

There are many ways to feed upon Jesus. We feed upon him as we study God’s Word, which is all about our salvation in him. We feed upon Jesus as we have fellowship with him in prayer. And we feed upon him in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper – not physically but spiritually. The physical bread is a spiritual

sign of the eternal life that Jesus gives to all who trust in him.
(Ryken, 2005:431.)

However, such an exemplarist treatment of the historical event of the feeding with quails and manna does not do justice to the original message of Exodus 16 and the relevance of Old Testament ethical principles for a modern environment (Mills, 2001:6). Old Testament ethical principles and norms first need to be understood from within their socio-historical context and from that point of departure be moulded into a useful ethical tool in view of the history of revelation.

Wright (2004:17) reminds us that scholars of Old Testament ethics should try to put themselves in Israel’s position and try to understand how Israel perceived and experienced their relationship with God and how that experience affected their ethical ideals and practical living as a community. Although Ryken’s attempt to give the Old Testament narrative a New Testament taste, his evangelical approach actually neglects the ethical relevance of Exodus 16 for the New Testament church and modern society. Even though the ethical norms given in the Old Testament are also dealt with in the New Testament ethics, these norms are not of lesser importance for a modern environment (Vriezen, 1966:127). Therefore, Exodus 16 should be discussed within the historical context of Israel’s wandering in the desert. The ethical principles and norms derived from such a discussion can be transposed into norms for a modern-day culture of consumerism.

3. The ethical principles of Exodus 16

3.1 The commands

Several commands can be identified in this passage and every command reveals an ethical principle that should guide Israel’s life of gratitude. In this respect the following references, quoted from the New International Version (NIV) are important (*italics – JMV*):

- Verse 4: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from the heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and *gather enough for that day*. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.’”
- Verse 16: “Each one is to gather *as much as he needs*. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent ...”. Verse 18: “Each one gathered as much as he needed ...”.

- Verse 5: “On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gathered on the other days.” Verse 22: “On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much – two omers for each person ...”. Verse 30: “So the people *rested on the seventh day ...*”.
- Verse 32: “Take an omer of manna and *keep it for the generations to come*, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt ...”.

Many Old-Testament scholars concur that a rich corpus of ethical principles and norms can be derived from this passage when it is investigated within the historical context as described above (Malina, 1968; Motyer 2005; Geller, 2005; Fonrobert, 2004; Olson, 2004). What will be discussed here are the ethical principles regarding labour and rest, sharing, consumption, protection of the environment and remembrance.

3.2 Labour and rest

God commanded the people to go out and gather. They had to work for their food and this labour had to be done every day from dawn to dusk. On the Sabbath, however, they should not gather any food. The history described in Exodus 16 is the first indication of the biblical revelation of the Sabbath. However, to understand God’s command in this passage, it must be read in the light of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. In his literary-theological study of the Sabbath in Exodus 16, Geller (2005:5) contends that this passage reveals two main biblical traditions, covenantal and priestly. For the purpose of this investigation, an assessment of this literary reading is not necessary, although Geller’s conclusions can be regarded as relevant. He indicates that the Sabbath means, among others, to “stop”. This “stopping” reflects God’s act of creation when He stopped working and commanded the day of rest.

The form of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 openly states that the Sabbath is a memorial, a sign of creation, in which human rest imitates, or recapitulates, the divine rest after the acts of creation. (Geller, 2005:15.)

The command to *šābat* is thus the command to rest from the daily labour – in this instance the gathering of food (Houtman, 1996:319; Olson, 2004:324). The people were instructed to remain where they were and they were not even permitted to go out. The Sabbath should be spent at home (Fonrobert, 2004:48).

Other connotations can also be attached to the Sabbath. Later in the history of Israel, the people worshipped the Lord on this day and that was the tradition found by Jesus in the synagogues (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14-41). In the New Testament there is no indication that the Sabbath was explicitly maintained in the New-Testament church (Douma, 1996:11). However, the principle of one day rest was continued. During the reign of Emperor Constantine, Sunday was proclaimed as a day of rest in AD 321. In the reformed tradition the keeping of the day of rest has moral and ceremonial significance. The ceremonial meaning refers to a day of worship, which will not be evaluated here. The moral implication refers to rest in the physical sense (Douma, 1996:111).

The moral principle that can be derived from observing the Sabbath in Exodus 16, is that labourers must have the opportunity to rest from the daily labour. Labour and rest are the two sides of the coin of work ethics. Without rest labour becomes an idol. In a culture of consumerism, with its high emphasis on productivity at all cost and on a climate of ultimate performance, this principle of regular rest is of the utmost importance (cf. Vorster, 2007:95). The day of rest also introduces a sabbath economics. Sabbath economics requires faith: a firm confidence that the world will continue to operate benevolently for a day without human labour, that God is willing and able to provide enough for the good life (Premawardhana, 2011:231).

3.3 Sharing

Apparently the reason why the Israelites had sufficient resources was because they all shared what they had (Ryken, 2005:432). Paul sheds light on this passage in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. He indicates that as during the wandering in the desert, the church of God should share in order to promote equality and to alleviate poverty and hunger. The people who gathered much, shared the surplus with the people who gathered little. The principle of sharing is deeply embedded in the covenant. With his covenant God established a caring community where the affluent cared for the poor. They had to establish a sense of community and communion. This principle was repeated over and over in the Old Testament laws regarding the interpersonal relations in this covenantal society. In the New Testament dispensation Paul transposed this principle to the church of the New Testament. Just as the people of the Old Testament, the church should become a caring community and God's agent against poverty and social distress (Ridderbos, 1971:349).

The community character of God's people is stressed in the commands of Exodus 16. They live in community with God, but this reality means that they have to live in communion as a loving and caring community amidst the social problems of their environment. The communion is not only spiritual and liturgical or cultic, but realistic and concrete. God's gifts must be shared and in this way they worship the Lord of the covenant. The command corresponds with many other instructions in the Old Testament regarding the treatment of orphans, widows, slaves, aliens and even the enemy (Vriezen, 1966:453). Besides the ethical principle of labour and rest, the principle of sharing God's gifts in a concrete and suitable way can thus be derived from this passage.

3.4 Consumption

The people in the desert were called upon to gather enough for one day, and on the sixth day, for two days. Thanks to the Lord, every member of the community will have enough to eat. There will be no one needy in the wilderness, or having too much, which may lead to disruption of the well-being of the community. As provider, Yahweh gives rules for a harmonious society (Houtman, 1996:318). Houtman's note sheds light on two important assumptions. Firstly, the people in the desert can gather enough for their daily needs. They could share, but were not allowed to consume more than they needed. Every day the people had to gather and eat whatever they have gathered. Important economic insights can be drawn from the manna history. Manna always miraculously provided just enough for the people's needs. They could gather what they needed and not what they could. A limit was set for consumption. They should not become the victims of intemperance or overindulgence and there was no room for hedonism. The people should know what they need and the gifts of God should not be wasted. Secondly, the gathering and the provision should serve the communion of the people of God. They should not fall back in the social divisions of poor and rich, employer and employee or slave and free. Everyone had enough and there was no need for envy or a spirit of competition.

The principle taught in this instruction was that of moderation in the consumption of the food as well as the obligation to always be prepared to share the gifts of God (Houtman, 1996:318).

3.5 Protection of the environment

Could ethical principles regarding the protection of the environment also be derived from this history? It becomes clear that even the

environment was protected. The people should gather “just enough”, and from this instruction, one may resolve that wasting the gifts of God was not permitted. As the people gathered enough for their daily needs and as they shared with each other, they did not pollute or exploit the environment. They did not farm or exploit the barren desert with little resources by building permanent dwelling places. They lived in moderation, gathering the manna as the only activity. This practice corresponds with the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28 and its refrain in Psalm 8:7, 8. These passages indicate how God wants to protect the integrity of creation and plans the part humankind should play in this process (cf. Vriezen, 1966:458).

As an integral part of creation and since man is created in the image of God, God has given humankind the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28. This instruction is repeated in Genesis 2:15 when God put humankind in the Garden of Eden to work on and take care of it. After the fall of humankind, God again commissioned humankind with the cultural mandate in the history of Noah (Gen. 9:1-3). Genesis uses strong language and the words used for “subdue” and “rule” give the impression of “trample on”. That is why White (1967: 1230) accuses Christianity of being responsible for the ecological crisis today. Whereas other pantheistic religions deify nature, it seems according to them that Christianity elevates humankind to rule over nature. However, such a conclusion is not valid, because the commission to rule implies service. The command to rule is given within the context of the paradise harmony, and therefore cannot imply exploitation (Moltmann, 1993:209).

In his analysis of the Old-Testament discussion of eco-ethics, Moltmann (1993:29) also says that this biblical charge is a dietary commandment. Human beings and animals alike should live from the fruits that the earth brings forth in the form of plants and trees. In spite of the God-given right to use animals and plants, God also teaches humankind to respect living things. Israel was not permitted to do whatever they wanted to the trees, since when they besieged an enemy’s town, they were not allowed to destroy the groves around the town (cf. Douma, 1996:209). God says: “Are the trees of the field People, that you should besiege them?” (Deut. 20:19.) In the seventh year also the land should rest (Deut. 23:10). The Christian concept of ruling is to serve well (Geisler, 1989:302). In this process humankind is in service of God, like Christ who ruled by serving (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:5-8).

In conclusion, the concept “cultural mandate” as embodied in the full biblical context, entails that humankind has the privilege to utilise

creation for his own good, but it has the responsibility to take good care of everything God has created. The execution of the cultural mandate is subject to many other biblical norms. Humankind has to rule in harmony and not in hostility. Moltmann (1993:29) indicates that humankind's rule has nothing to do with the *dominium terrae*. Humankind may use creation for its own survival, but it has the calling to care for creation as God's steward. In fulfilling its calling, humankind is responsible to God Himself. Use may never become abuse. It is this principle that reverberates in the instructions regarding the gathering of the manna. In Exodus 16 the principles of labour and rest, sharing and responsible consumption are thus complemented by the principle of caring for the environment.

3.6 Remembrance

Some manna should be kept in a jar and placed before the Lord. Later this jar was kept in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle with the ark. The instruction that the people should keep one omer of manna for the generations to come, has a religious character (Fensham, 1970:99). The people should remember that they were kept alive and guided by the Lord. "God's intent was for the manna to be visible (not just the jar but the manna inside it) regularly as an encouragement to faith in God's continual provision for his People." (Stuart, 2006:385.) They had to keep history alive (Houtman, 1996: 319).

This call to remembrance must be seen in a broader context, namely the institution of the Feast of the Huts (Birch *et al.*, 1999:129). Especially important is the fact that the Feast of Huts, like the Pass-over before it, and later the Feast of Weeks, became connected with an event in the history of salvation. It should be seen within the context of the theology of the saving God in history, as described by Westermann (1978:28). Irrespective of its earlier meanings, the essence of the feast was that the Israelites had to live in huts, says the Bible, in memory of the huts (*sukkôth*) in which Yahweh made their fathers live in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. The meaning is expressed in Leviticus 23:42-43, which reads as follows:

Live in booths for seven days. All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Although this feast started as a harvest festival and had an agrarian background, as was the case with many other feasts in the history of

Israel, it became a feast of commemoration – a feast of remembrance, just as the Passover (cf. Vriezen, 1966:281; Zimmerli, 1978:128). They had to remember how God let them dwell in booths when He brought them out of Egypt and into the wilderness and how He cared for them. The specific meaning of the remembrance embodied in the feast, becomes apparent in the wilderness traditions in Exodus.

Birch *et al.* (1999:128) points out that the wilderness traditions taught Israel about hardships and God’s providence. They explain that the wilderness traditions immediately follow the deliverance at the sea, including the crises about adequate water (Exod. 15:22-27; 17:1-7) and sufficient food (Exod. 16:1-36). There are also the history of an attack by an enemy, the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8-16), and a narrative on Moses’ reunion with his father-in-law, the Midianite priest Jethro, who helps him to organise the governance of the people Moses now led (Exod. 18:1-27). Birch *et al.* (1999:129) briefly notes the following important themes that appear in these initial wilderness encounters and which became lessons for their conduct as the people of God:

- God’s salvation does not guarantee life without hardships. The world outside of bondage is also a world with dangers and struggles. Needs are not automatically met, and the lack of food and water for Israel carries the threat to the people’s welfare into the most basic of human needs. In the context of such struggle, even bondage can begin to look attractive. Faced with the wilderness, some would choose the security of bondage over the struggle in freedom. This attitude becomes evident in Exodus 16:3: “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in die land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread.”
- In the wilderness struggle, the people turn on Moses, Aaron and God (Exod. 15:24; 16:3, 9; 17:2-4). This conflict is the beginning of a complex set of traditions concerning the people’s complaint and rebellion in the wilderness that continues on through the Pentateuch. The memory of the Exodus deliverance is not enough to engender trust in the Lord’s providence. Moses must increasingly intervene and mediate between his rebellious people and God (cf. Exod. 16:11-12; 17:4-7).
- God’s people should remember that his response is gracious, merciful and providential. Only later in the wilderness traditions, the people’s rebellion evokes God’s anger and judgement. In the midst of these wilderness trials, the biblical narrative emphasises

God's ability to provide for the people's needs. The resources to sustain life in the wilderness struggle come from God and are trustworthy. God's victory over the chaotic power of Pharaoh, who opposed God's creation, is now reflected in God's use of creation to give life in the wilderness.

- The manna history in Exodus 16 is especially important. Israel returns often to reflect on this history of the people's need and God's providence (Num. 11; Deut. 8; Josh. 5:12; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 78:24). Every day the people could trust that the manna would be available. It is Yahweh who gives the resources that provide life in the deadly dangers of wilderness, but Israel must trust in the reliability of God's provision and avoid the temptation to hoard or control the blessings God provides. The people of God had to learn to receive God's gifts. The attempt to grasp these gifts, is to lose them (Exod. 16:20; Birch *et al.*, 1999:129).

3.7 The ethical principles

In essence the manna history taught the people of God's covenant to:

- work in order to live, but also to rest from the daily labour;
- be willing to share God's gifts, to be compassionate and to create a sharing community;
- consume what is needed and to avoid intemperance and overindulgence;
- be responsible stewards in the use and protection of God's creation;
- remember that it is God that provides.

These principles can be employed in a modern Christian response to the contemporary culture of consumerism.

4. Christian ethics and modern consumerism

4.1 The contemporary culture of consumerism

Himes (2007:133) explains that the word *consumerism* is currently used in different ways. For economists it is a neutral word that is about the empowerment of consumers as citizens, upholding their rights, protecting them from abuses of power and supplying them with objective information that will help them to make rational

choices. He refers to Aldridge in this regard. Furthermore, he explains that another way of seeing consumerism, is as an ideology. In this sense consumerism is a way of talking about a market mentality that defends individuals' freedom of choice and entrepreneurship while criticising economic models like communism, socialism or other approaches that interfere with rational agents making decisions in minimally regulated free markets. However, the term can also point to a way of life – a life with an excessive, even pathological preoccupation with consumption (Himes, 2007:133). Conradie (2009:30) also distinguishes between consumerism and a consumer culture. What is addressed in this article, is not consumer culture or the ideology, but the lifestyle with an excessive and pathological preoccupation with consumption.

Consumerism is part and parcel of the modern neo-liberal economic philosophy. The term *neo-liberalism* is used as an indication of the philosophy of economy as developed by Friedman (1971:61; 1973:27; 1976:42). According to this philosophy, state initiatives in the economy should be limited as far as possible to let the markets control the economy. The philosophy departs from three important presuppositions: the complete freedom of the individual, the freedom of the markets to control the economy unhindered, and the limitation of interference from the state in the economic sphere. All areas of life are managed according to business models. Even health care and education are shifting from non-profit to for-profit providers. All areas of public space are invaded by advertising and marketing efforts. Public services become privatised (Himes, 2007:136). Advertising in emerging markets promote consumption as the way to a prosperous life.

According to the neo-liberal ideology the responsibility of the economy towards the poor is to “make more and more profit” (Küng 1997:191). The angle of approach is that growing and flourishing markets and more profit, create job opportunities and that the poor ultimately benefit in this way. This philosophy is also called “ultra-liberalism” or “neo-capitalism” (Küng, 1997:191). The neo-liberalist philosophy determined the economies of the developing countries in a more or lesser degree since the Thatcher- and Reagan-eras. Meeks (1995:115) was correct in his assessment that the market-driven economy will stay and will even expand in the foreseeable future. This philosophy became more and more influential and determines the economic policies of emerging markets. The market economy resulted in a market society (Antonaccio, 2006:87). The success of such an economy is determined by more and more

consumption of produce in order to create growing markets. Coward (1997:266) characterises the global market economy as “the most powerful contemporary world religion”. In his view the market economy is rapidly binding all corners of the globe tightly together into a common worldview with “consumerism” as its dominant value-system. According to Himes (2007:132), consumerism became the hallmark of American life. However, the same can be said about the developed world and the developing economies. Consumerism is an impending way of life in developed and developing liberal democracies (Conradie, 2009:58).

This policy, therefore, results in a lifestyle of consumerism and Küng (1997) voices valid criticism against this detrimental aspect of neo-liberalism. He says that the total market economy easily develops into a total system and that all values become subjected to it. The total system leads to a “domesticated” and “depotentiated” ethics, and he is of opinion that

... a domesticated and depotentiated ethic puts at risk its very own values and criteria; it serves only as a pretext and remains inefficient. And at the same time, as it is already proving to be the case in many areas and regions, a total market economy has devastating consequences: the law, instead of being grounded in universal human dignity, human rights and human responsibilities, can be formulated and manipulated in accordance with economic ‘constraints’ and group interests; politics capitulates to the market and the lobbying of pressure groups, and global speculation can shake national currencies; science delivers itself over to economic interests, and forfeits its function of achieving the most objective and critical control possible; culture deteriorates into being a contributor to the market, and art declines into commerce; ethics is ultimately sacrificed to power and profit, and is replaced by what ‘brings success’ and ‘gives pleasure’; and finally even religion, offered as a commodity on the supermarket of ideas along with much that is para-religious or pseudo-religious, is mixed at will into a syncretistic cocktail for the convenient stilling of a religious thirst which sometimes overtakes even *homo oeconomicus*. (Küng, 1997:212.)

Consumerism and its underlying ideology raise many ethical concerns (Conradie, 2009:16). Firstly, it is fair to say that the neo-liberalism and consumerism does not prioritise the fate of the poor. The idea that consumption leads to prosperity and to the advantage of the poor seemed to be flawed. In South Africa and in other developing countries where neo-liberalist principles have been intro-

duced, the economic inequalities have grown. The consumption of the rich impoverishes the poor (Terreblanche, 2002:439). From a Christian ethical perspective, in which the fate of the poor is a fundamental theme, the philosophy of the neo-liberalism and its lifestyle of consumerism can thus be seriously criticised. The notion that the wealth of the wealthy necessarily trickles down to the poor, is not always the case.

Secondly, consumerism promotes a culture of selfishness and greed, because it results in a competitive lifestyle due to the fact that people want to emulate the lifestyles of the rich and prosperous. Himes (2007:137) analyses the "competitive consumption" of Americans and conclude:

... the majority of Americans now seek to emulate the lifestyles of the wealthiest one-fifth of the population. No longer do Americans compare themselves to the Joneses next door or those somewhat better off. Instead it is the top 20 percent that becomes the standard of comparison.

Although the socio-economic situation in South Africa is different, the same trends come into view (Conradie, 2009:31). White people, previously the advantaged part of the population due to the policies of apartheid, abandon politics and seek refuge in wealth. Black entrepreneurs are becoming rich due to the new transformation policies and the consumerist trends inherent to them. These tendencies are signs of a new social pattern where the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. The privatisation of health care benefits only the affluent and the institution of business models in state welfare programmes leads to an enormous wave of corruption. Even churches are managed according to business models and as a result they lose sight of the poor and the marginalised.

Thirdly, the principle of rest is at issue in the culture of consumerism. People need more money to pay for their increased consumption, and, therefore, they have to work longer and harder (Himes, 2007: 137). Businesses in South Africa tend to operate with a skeleton staff in order to pay more to fewer and fewer employees. As a result the employees will have a bigger income and more to consume, but they have to work harder and longer. Job creation is thus at risk. Instead of sharing the profits of the company to more employees with lower wages, the profits are spent on fewer employees with high wages. The urge to consume has also led to the burden of debt. People have to work harder and longer to pay their debt and cannot afford to have time for rest (cf. Conradie, 2009:38).

Fourthly, consumerism feeds on intemperance and overindulgence. The urge to earn more to consume, leads to a lifestyle of selfishness where sharing and caring are moved to the periphery of human interest. Consumerism excludes sharing with the poor and the future generation. Furthermore, it often paves the way for irresponsible labour practices, because where profits are concerned, the principles of fair labour practices can easily become compromised.

Lastly, excessive consumption leads to environmental degradation, and this phenomenon has emerged as perhaps the major challenge facing humankind today (Coward, 1997:261). Coward (1997:266) explained as far back as 1997 that more and more natural resources are needed to fuel the ever-expanding global market, leaving less for future generations and producing more climate altering greenhouse gasses. Over the past decade the situation worsened (cf. Conradie, 2009:47).

4.2 “Gather enough ...”

The ethical principles of Exodus 16 have much to say for this ideology of neo-liberalism and its resulting unlimited urge to consume. To “gather enough” teaches Christians today to live an austere and temperate life amidst the growing culture of consumerism. In my view such a moderate lifestyle should take cognisance of the following ethical principles:

- Humans are called to daily work in order to live, and as workers, people are agents of God in the cultivation and development of God’s creation. Humankind may live from the produce of the land. However, daily labour is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of serving God. Labour is not a religion in itself, but part of the worship of God. Therefore, humans have to rest and this rest entails the enjoyment of all the splendour of life like being part of a community, family or other societal spheres; it is involved in the beauty of a fulfilled life and encompassing spirituality. Therefore, Christians should be agents in the promotion of fair labour practices and the development of an environment where all people can have the opportunity to lead a fulfilled life. Such an attitude will inevitably involve a critical stand against consumerism with its exploitation of people, especially the downtrodden and the needy.
- God’s people must always be a sharing community. Therefore, Christians should be protagonists of the praxis of sharing. Society at large should be taught to share God’s gifts, to be compassionate and to create a sharing community. The ethical principles of

sharing and compassion must not only influence our individual ethics, but also enter the domain of political planning and policy-making. Politics should become one of sharing, where social institutions are transformed into tools conducive to sharing and compassion. In this respect, the ideology of neo-liberalism with its high estimation of consumption must be revisited from a Christian ethical perspective in order to develop a responsible socio-economic critique.

- The modern lifestyle in developed countries and the emerging consumerist culture in developing countries, should be addressed in the Christian ethical discourse. Consumerism can not continue unlimited and unchallenged or be praised as the way to more prosperity for more people. Furthermore, Christians themselves should refrain from intemperance and overindulgence and set the example of a modest lifestyle. A Christian lifestyle modelled on the imitation of Christ, should be a restrained and a sober lifestyle. In such a way, Christians can act exemplary and introduce a lifestyle of responsible consumption. Society has to be taught to consume what they need and not what they can produce. From a Christian ethical perspective, the promotion of consumerism in advertising and education as well as in economic policy making, have to be challenged. Society must hear the message and see the example that a happy life does not lie in excessive consumption, but in a temperate use of God's gifts in a spirit of gratitude stewardship and responsibility. It is also not consumerism that creates and maintains a sense of identity through the display of purchased goods (Hays, 2010:394). Identity primarily rests in people created in the image of God and the human dignity it entails (Jonsson, 1988:51). People are people because they are dignified by God and not because they possess material goods. It is the identity founded in inherent human dignity and not the identity of consumerism that should be the centre of contemporary social thinking and planning. In this way the plight of the poor will capture the attention instead of the surge for prosperity and wealth.
- The eco-ethical discourse has become one of the most important topics in Christian ethics (Clark, 2000:94). This fact is proven by the growing list of publications and research reports in this regard (cf. Northcot, 2001:209; Pope, 2007:203). In the time of what Broswimmer (2002:9) identifies as the age of ecocide, this interest in eco-ethics in the Christian ethical discourse is to be expected. Christians are responsible for the maintenance of the integrity of creation as we are inter alia taught in the history of

Exodus 16. In this respect Christians and churches also have to raise awareness of the ecological disaster facing humankind and the whole of creation. This problem will not be solved by politicians in the domains of politics and economy, for many of them are, willingly or unwillingly, deeply compromised with the neo-liberal philosophy and its resultant consumerism. Furthermore, the problem will not be solved only by the introduction of a few eco-friendly policies, because a total new lifestyle is needed. Humankind has to change its habits and this will entail a penetrating revision of consumption, values regarding wealth and prosperity, population-growth and the life of luxury and comfort. Society has to be converted from a mentality of consumerism to a responsible sober lifestyle on behalf of all creation. It is the duty of Christians to call for ecological repentance and a conversion to creation.

- God's children have to keep remembrance alive as they were instructed in the manna-history. This remembrance is of God's saving actions and his deep involvement in human society (Moltmann, 1965:67). Remembrance must first of all be of the saving act of God. He is the God of salvation who changes and transforms situations and institutions distorted by the reality of evil for the better. He is the author of the history of the world and humankind Who establishes peace, love and dignity wherever these noble gifts are trampled upon. He brings new life where people experience hopelessness and despair. He sets new futures when people see no future at all (cf. Harvie, 2009:86). This message was the main thrust of the feasts of the Old Testament and is still the essential preaching of the Holy Communion. The remembrance of God as the saving God is the source of hope for people in despair, and is the motivation for societies in their planning for the future. Christians and churches have the calling to keep this remembrance alive and to translate it into a message of hope for the poor, the oppressed and the future generation as Moltmann (1965) explains in his classic and influential study. He inspires a new enthusiasm for a relevant Christian message of hope based on the confession of God as the saving God in history.

At the same time remembrance must also be a remembrance of the reality of evil and humankind's bondage in sin (Jones, 1995:59; Bash, 2007:13). This bondage is a reality because of humankind's desire to become like God, but instead we became a god against God (Bonhoeffer, 1995:23). This is the reason for the ever-present pockets of hatred, injustices, oppression and exploitation. Evil breeds social injustices such as slavery, institutionalised racism and xenophobia, sexism, discrimination against the poor, human traffick-

ing, aggressive wars, genocides, ecocide and all other forms of degradation of humanity. Remembrance, as expressed in the manna-history, brought this reality to light and calls upon the people of God to repent, confess and struggle against evil – also the evils of consumerism. Christians today have to keep remembrance alive like the manna in the jar in the Exodus history.

5. Conclusion

Consumption is indeed necessary for any socio-economic policy to succeed. However, consumerism challenges Christians to reconsider their lifestyles in such an environment. Taking to heart the ethical principles of Exodus 16, they have to be good stewards of God’s gifts, responsible for how they use resources, aware of the fact that what they buy affects others (Himes, 2007:142). Furthermore, they have to keep alive the remembrance of God as a caring God who is concerned about humankind and his creation, and who calls upon humans to share in this concern by their actions of love, service and caring.

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Key concepts:

consumerism
eco-ethics
labour
manna
neo-liberalism
remembrance
sharing

Kernbegrippe:

arbeid
eko-etiek
herinnering
manna
mededeelsaamheid
neo-liberalisme
verbruikerskultuur