

From Sacred Art to Market Commodity: Music, Consumerism, and the Theology of Waste

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Abstract

The contemporary world is marked by unsustainable overconsumption, where economic growth and material abundance fail to translate into genuine well-being. Despite unprecedented prosperity, societies increasingly struggle with dissatisfaction, environmental degradation, and the commodification of human experience. This article examines these tensions through the perspectives of Pascal Bruckner's 2002 book *The Misery of Prosperity*, Pope Francis's critique of consumerism and the *throwaway culture*, and the evolution of music as both an industry and an art form, with a particular focus on the Eurovision Song Contest. Bruckner's analysis highlights the paradox of modern affluence: despite economic expansion, existential fulfillment remains elusive. He argues that consumerism, rather than fostering happiness, deepens feelings of alienation and emptiness. Similarly, Pope Francis condemns the prevailing economic model that prioritizes profit over human dignity, warning that the commodification of human experience leads to a culture where not only material goods, but also artistic and cultural expressions become disposable.

The Eurovision Song Contest serves as a case study illustrating this phenomenon. Originally designed as a celebration of European cultural diversity and artistic excellence, the competition has increasingly prioritized spectacle over substance. The decline in musical artistry, replaced by formulaic compositions tailored for mass consumption, reflects a broader transformation in the creative industries, where commercial viability outweighs artistic integrity. Music, once a profound expression of human creativity, has become subject to the same market forces that drive fast fashion, disposable technology, and fleeting digital trends. By analyzing Eurovision's evolution through an economic-theological framework, this article argues that the crisis in artistic quality is symptomatic of a deeper societal malaise: the subjugation of cultural meaning to economic imperatives. From a theological standpoint, music and art possess intrinsic value beyond their market worth, serving as mediums for human expression, communal identity, and spiritual elevation. The increasing commodification of music represents a loss of this deeper purpose, reinforcing a culture where immediate gratification supersedes lasting significance.

This study contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse on consumerism, theology, and cultural production by demonstrating how economic models shape not only material conditions but also the moral and artistic fabric of society. It calls for a reassessment of artistic value beyond market metrics, urging a return to a cultural paradigm where

creativity is nurtured for its intrinsic worth rather than its economic potential. In doing so, it aligns with Pope Francis's call for a renewed ethical vision of the economy—one that upholds human dignity over commercial efficiency.

Ultimately, the article situates music as both a product and a mirror of economic and theological structures, revealing how the decline in artistic quality reflects broader ideological shifts in contemporary society. It suggests that resisting the total dominance of market logic in the arts requires a reinvigoration of theological and philosophical perspectives that emphasize meaning, community, and the sacred dimensions of human creativity.