

Getting “High” on God

Inner Opiates and the Genius of the Megachurch “Experience”

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” Jesus, John 3:6-7

Introduction

When looking out upon pan-evangelicalism, a diverse movement primarily consisting of Christians claiming a quasi-commitment to the Gospel, one can be left groping to explain the rise of the megachurch. During this last generation, over 1,600 super congregations, primarily evangelical, have emerged on the American religious scene. **[1]** Can the megachurch movement be accounted for reason that church-goers want to be part of something “big,” where for reason of the strength and unity of their numbers, they really feel that God is at work? Do parents desire their church to be a “full service” institution that can meet the needs of their entire family? Does superior preaching attract the masses? Is the attraction the choreographed spectacle of modern and upbeat “worship” performed by professional musicians that when combined with the latest technological special effects, can deliver the “worship experience”? Answers to these questions and more may help to explain the phenomenon of the megachurch in America, and account for how these large congregations both attract and keep the folks coming back for more. However, a recent study, coming out of the University of Washington, may provide another answer to the question, why the mega-church?

Euphoria’s Source: Transcendent or Immanent?

That study, “‘God is like a drug’: Explaining Ritual Chains in American Megachurches,” concludes that these churches are exceptional in orchestrating the arousals of strong feelings amongst their congregants; euphoria that might be compared to the feeling a crowd gets when seeing its basketball team win a championship game on a last second shot. **[2]** Katie Corcoran, a Ph.D. candidate who co-authored the study, suggests that megachurches are “somewhat unique in that these feelings are not just experienced as euphoria but as something transcendent or divine.” **[3]** As she observed, “You can look up to the balcony and see the Holy Spirit go over the crowd like a wave in a football game.” **[4]** *Yet that same study suggests that the raison d’être for the megachurch may be something more immanent than transcendent.*

The megachurch is good at evoking emotions which, according to Corcoran, are inspired by employing a “unique style of worship” that creates a common and shared experience among their crowds. With the goal of stimulating a unified euphoria, the megachurch employs “upbeat modern music, cameras that scan the audience and project smiling, dancing, singing, or crying worshippers on large screens, and an extremely charismatic leader whose sermons touch individuals on an emotional level,” the synchronicity of which serves “to create these strong

positive emotional experiences.” [5]

Then too, there’s the “pastor [who] functions as an ‘energy star’ who engages the congregation through an accessible, informal and emotional sermon” that “‘just feels right’ or ‘just makes sense’ for congregants,” says James Wellman, a professor of American religion who along with Corcoran, co-authored the study. [6] But the explanation for the megachurch phenomena may yet have a more inner reason.

Chris Lisee, the reporter who covered the presentation of the University of Washington study, assesses, “Maybe religion really is the opiate of the [megachurch] masses—just not the way Karl Marx imagined.” Well, what is the religious opiate that the revolutionary was not aware of? The opiate may in fact be a combination of inner chemicals/hormones that when called up, directly affect the brain to “feel good.”

Pleasure Seekers

Opiates and Oxytocin

A generation ago the English psychiatrist William Sargant (1907-1988) noted that, “feelings of divine possession . . . can be helped on by the use of many types of physiological stimuli.” He goes on to state that, “electrical recordings of the human brain show that it is particularly sensitive to rhythmic stimulation by percussion and bright light among other things . . .” [7]

Now two authors of the University of Washington study theorize that the arousal of good feelings within the human body-soul can be induced by applying the right combination of external stimuli. (I use the combination “body-soul” in recognition that the characteristics belonging to humans are complex and interwoven, and that the interplay between the physical and mental can be externally manipulated to induce profound internal experiences, whether religious or not.) On this point, the authors of the U of W study “theorize [that] the spiritual high from megachurch services is experienced” for reason of “the brain’s release of oxytocin, a chemical that is thought to play a part in social interaction,” something they call an “oxytocin cocktail.” [8] **Oxytocin acts** as a neuromodulator in the brain, and for the role it plays in social recognition, pair bonding, etc., is “sometimes referred to **as the ‘love hormone’.**” [9] And in a sensate culture, people just “love to feel the love.”

Desires and Dopamine

Several years ago, Dean Gotcher researched the interplay of hormones within the human body, and wrote about the role played by dopamine. Of the affective inner drug, he states:

Dopamine is a chemical which the body naturally synthesizes to transmit messages of pleasure from the nerve endings to the midbrain. The midbrain then synthesizes the neurotransmitter dopamine to activate other parts of the brain in an effort to find what caused the pleasure, to record it, and if necessary to figure out how to continue, restore, or create the environment which caused the pleasure. Our body naturally loves the effect of dopamine. It seeks after the conditions which trigger its release in the body. Most drugs of habit are related in some way to affecting dopamine production, replacement, or inhibition . . . [10]

Megachurches are big businesses, and big business calls for an affective way to stimulate and manage growth. If a business is to be successful, the product must be made pleasurable (It seems that's why advertising capitalizes upon images of people being happy and having fun, of partying, romancing, etc.). Advertising must project pleasure in order to make profits. To this end, means must be devised by the corporation to affect the release of dopamine in the human body in order to stimulate customers to feel need for their product(s). *For corporations to become profitable, their product(s) must be made pleasurable.* For this reason, megachurch philosophy has tapped into the human need to be pleased and ministering to those "felt needs" they helped create.

In his book *PyroMarketing* that describes Rick Warren's marketing campaigns, Greg Stielstra notes that,

Our brains are electrochemical devices. Electrical impulses trigger the release of chemicals called neurotransmitters, which, in turn, govern the behavior of electrical impulses. **The chemical messenger dopamine is the pleasure drug.** Its presence reinforces pleasurable behaviors. [11]

Remember the cultural manta, "If it feels good, do it."? As we live in a sensate culture, it then becomes the "purpose" of the megachurch, like any other successful business enterprise, to plug into a marketing philosophy that will cause its customers to "feel good" about what they're doing—what might be called the dopamine affect. On this point, Stielstra writes:

The reward circuit that we each possess influences our thoughts and guides our behaviors. . . . **As we anticipate a good experience, our brains release a certain amount of dopamine.** If our expectations are met, then elevated levels continue. If things turn out even better than we had hoped, dopamine is increased even further. If we are disappointed, then dopamine levels plummet. We learn by repeating those activities that feel good and avoiding those that don't." [12]

Of course, the obvious connection of the dopamine affect to the megachurch phenomena is their emphasis upon ministering to "felt needs"; and in an intentional way, emotional "needs" tend to overwhelm rationality. That is why the U of W study relates that the "energy stars" who serve as the churches' "communicators" generally are not "analytical or theological" in their messages. (Or should I have written, 'massages'?).

Ecstasy and Endorphins

In her best-selling book, *Full & Fulfilled*, Nan Allison states that, "High concentrations of **endorphins** in the brain **produce a sense of euphoria**, enhance pleasure, and suppress pain, both emotionally and physically." [13] In his book *Music, The Brain, and Ecstasy*, Robert Jourdain states:

Special neurons produce substances called **endorphins**, which **resemble opiates** and which act on neurons in the brain's pain pathways . . . If endorphins are released when

there is no pain to be counterbalanced, a euphoria results that is much like that produced by drugs like morphine. [14]

What then can be employed to stimulate the release of endorphins—the morphine which is endogenous to the human body? Jourdain observed that as a mechanism, music can stir-up ecstasy. Of the pleasure, he wrote:

Ecstasy melts the boundaries of our being . . . engulfs us in feelings that are “oceanic.” A defining trait of ecstasy is its immediacy . . . Ecstasy happens to our selves. It is a momentary transformation of the knower . . . **Music seems to be** the most immediate of all the arts, and so **the most ecstatic** . . . Nonetheless, once we are engulfed in music, we must exert effort to resist its influence. It really is as if some “other” has entered not just our bodies, but our intentions, taking us over. [15]

Renowned guitarist Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970) knew what his music could do to his audience’s head. He testified,

Once you have some type of rhythm, like it can get hypnotic if you keep repeating it over and over again. Most of the people will fall off by about a minute of repeating. You do that say for three or four or even five minutes if you can stand it, and then **it releases a certain thing inside of a person’s head.** [16]

The brain’s release of the pleasure hormones may explain what Hendrix noted about his audience’s response to his music, and why Rick Warren thinks that a song can touch an audience in ways that a sermon can’t. On his *Pastors.Com* website, he has stated,

A song often can touch people in a way that a sermon can’t. **Music can bypass intellectual barriers and take the message straight to the heart.** It is a potent tool for evangelism. [17]

Because of its intrinsic emotional appeal, music delivers “feel” to the human body and soul. That’s why the language of music is said to be universal. Though listeners might be linguistically diverse, they can together feel a song even though not comprehending its words.

Why are certain songs felt? Who knows, whether it’s a hit by an “oxytocin cocktail” or perhaps some other combination of inner opiates which affect a “feel good” mood within the human brain and body. Nevertheless, the release of these hormones may help to account for the genius of the megachurch. From the effects observed, audience-driven megachurches know how to titillate the release of the feel-good hormones within the brain (like adrenalin in the body) so that their seeker-sensitive audience will leave on a “high note.” This may explain one congregant’s candid explanation of why he attended one megachurch. In an interview for the U of W study, he confessed: **“God’s love becomes . . . such a drug that you can’t wait to**

come get your next hit. . . . You can't wait to get involved to get the high from God." [18]
And it's called worship, of course.

This whole idea of going back to church to get your next "love-hit" from God reminds me of a 60s hit song, performed variously by different artists and groups. Evidently, in a created ambiance consisting of upbeat music, special effects and the "energy star" whose sermons touch the congregants on an emotional level, megachurches have discovered their "Love Potion No. 9." That song concludes with a man, so love smitten with the help of a gypsy counselor, kissing a "cop at Thirty-Fourth and Vine"! On this point, it can be noted the original version of the song did not end with the lyrics of a man kissing a policeman, but rather:

I had so much fun, that I'm going back again,
I wonder what happens with Love Potion Number Ten? [19]

And in their going back to church to get repeated "highs from God," returnees might be wondering what's going to happen when they get "love hits" numbers 11, 12, 13, 14, and so on. As the following testimonies indicate, music affects mood.

Pleasure Finders

Testimony #1—Rob Bell

In his book *Velvet Elvis*, the emergent-liberal churchman Rob Bell describes his musical experience turned spiritual:

I remember the first time I was truly in awe of God. I was caught up for the first time in my life in something so massive and loving and transcendent and . . . true. Something I was sure could be trusted. I specifically remember thinking the universe was safe, in spite of all the horrible, tragic things in the world. I remember being overwhelmed by the word true. Underneath it all life is somehow . . . good . . . and I was sixteen and at a U2 concert. The Joshua Tree tour. When they started with the song "Where the Streets Have No Name," I thought I was going to spontaneously combust with joy. This was real. This mattered. Whatever it was, I wanted more. **I had never felt that way before.**
[20]

Seemingly, music can be "consciousness-altering," can't it?

Testimony #2—Wilburn Burchette

In Brad Steiger's book *Revelation: The Divine Fire*, Jack Wheaton relates in an interview that, "rock music . . . is the simplest and cheapest—and least dangerous—way for young global village adolescents to 'trip out'." [21] Then Steiger tells how he developed a fascinating relationship with a "young occultist-musician named Wilburn Burchette" who "was deep into his unorthodox

experiments with music”; for Burchette believed that at the most basic level, “everything in our universe is composed of vibratory atoms.” So in order to experience “any creative-spiritual breakthrough,” the vibrations of music must be experimented with. So Burchette experimented and reported this “breakthrough” which happened to him while listening to rock music as a young boy:

I was getting to the point where my mind was blank. I remember shifting consciousness and having a sensation of my mind being above time. I felt I could move forward, backward in time. The physical sensation is an orgasm of the soul, because you are in complete, absolute union. **You extend your mind and being out of this dimension, and wham! You receive a knowing beyond words.** When you transcend over into the other dimension, you split in two, and yet you are one. This is what all the alchemists brought out: you split in two, and yet you are one. This is pretty weird for most people, but you have split in two, you have another being which can realize the Absolute, the Godhead. These two you’s are in perfect union. [22]

Burchette then adds: “Emotions are not stagnant; they are dynamic. This is why music motivates them [emotions] so well.” [23]

Testimony #3—Tom Beaudoin

Tom Beaudoin describes his spiritual encounter engendered by listening to music.

The effect of the music coursing through my nervous system **is to produce a lift, a somatic levity that sends me at once deeply within and outside my body**, spacing me in three simultaneous modes: as embodied spirit, as disembodied spirit, and as a spirit ecstatically holding them bound. [24]

Who and where was he when he experienced such mystical ecstasy that was simultaneously both inside and outside his body? The author was a guitar player who played Christian rock-‘n’-roll for 15 years, and what he experienced, while listening to the rock band Creed, was on a spiritual retreat in of all places, a monastery!

Testimony #4—a Disc Jockey

A reporter for the Chicago Sun Times interviewed a popular area disc jockey. When asked to define himself spirituality, the disc jockey responded, “I’m a mystical expressionist . . . I take the idea of mysticism very seriously . . . the idea that there is something within each and every one of us that can take us to a place we’ve never been before . . .” Then the reporter comments, music is the “vehicle” that pushes her and the disc jockey “and so many others—toward the place we might call enlightenment, or God, or **the higher consciousness**, or Grace.” [25]

Testimony #5—the International House of Prayer (IHOP)

Mike Bickle testifies that, after years of “pretty boring” prayer, “a series of supernatural events and divine directives” caused him and twenty full time “intercessory missionaries” to launch the

International House of Prayer, Kansas City, Kansas. These missionaries would commit to raise their own financial support and pray fifty-hours a week, one half of that time being spent in a central prayer room where intercession would be blended with musical worship. How did the music affect the “experience” of praying?

Bickle reports that since the blended worship started years ago, “the music has never stopped. We call that keeping the fire on the altar,” he relates. Misty Edwards, the most recognized worship leader at IHOP, testifies of the experience of leading twelve two-hour sets of prayer-music-worship each week for nine years: “In those early days, **the music being related in our brains to fire was brilliant.**” [26]

Testimony #6—King Saul

When in His judgment upon the king the Lord allowed an evil spirit to trouble Saul’s soul, his servants knew that a musician “who is a cunning player on a harp” could **make him feel better** (1 Samuel 6:16). If only fleetingly, music possesses power to soothe the soul. Though David’s music did not drive the haunting spirit away from Saul, it temporarily relieved the king from the angst caused by his sin and the evil spirit (1 Samuel 16:14-23; 18:10; 19:9). David’s ministry to Saul was palliative.

Seemingly, music-worship can be “mind” and “consciousness” altering. As indicated by these testimonials, music can affect a persons’ perception of their psychological being, and to one degree or another, all of us perhaps, have experienced the “feel good” relief music can provide. But many people, Christian and not, testify of having attained psychological relief in their beings through experiencing music. The *relief* within their consciousness is no doubt triggered by the *release* of inner opiates that pleasure the human soul and body.

Worship Eroticized

So like secular rock concerts, many contemporary worship services employ music and technology to stimulate the audience’s experience of ecstatically feeling at one with each other and with God. A dictionary on alternative spiritualities states that the activities of drumming, chanting, dancing and hand-clapping are considered means for “raising consciousness because the energies and movement of many people are united, which facilitates achievement of the objective.” [27] And what, we ask, is the objective people seek to experience together? It is, as the dictionary says, to “achieve an altered state of consciousness, ecstasy, communion with the Divine . . .” [28]

In modern worship the experience of “communion with the Divine” evidences itself as the audience—with their eyes closed and faces alternately contorting in grimaces of ecstasy and agony—lifts their hands toward heaven, mouths the familiar words, and sways together from side to side. Feelings of being at one with God and each other are enhanced as “cameras . . . scan the audience and project smiling, dancing, singing, or crying worshippers on large screens.” [29] In a technologically rich environment, worshippers are experiencing the psychological abandonment of self which lies at the heart of all mystical experience. Worshippers believe that in their altered states of consciousness they are experiencing God. But the explanation of the phenomena may lie closer to home; worship experiences may have resulted from the release of “feel-good” hormones (love potions) in the body, the release of which has been triggered by the

energy of up-beat “worship” music and enhanced by visual technologies that build into a crescendo the audience’s feelings of togetherness with God and with each other. (Can’t you just feel the love in this place?) As to this assessment, each believer under God and in the Spirit needs to make their personal evaluation all the while knowing that one of the Spirit’s fruit is “self-control” (Galatians 5:23). And as indicated by many worship scenes today and as at a secular rock concerts, people, individually and corporately, appear “out of control.” **[30]**

My impression of the whole contemporary worship thing, and inquiring onlookers are catching on to it, is that much of the so-called worship experience in megachurches results from the application of certain stimulants to the soul (music being the most immediate), and as such, as the flesh is momentarily gratified, as the angst of guilt temporarily relieved, and as self-control briefly lost, worshippers exit the celebration exclaiming, “Wow! I could really feel the love in this place!” As an elderly Jewish friend, now deceased, once told me, “People leave church all excited over excitement!”

But such worship is not really spiritual because worshippers are being manipulated by the baser stimuli that naturally lie within them. That’s why Jesus told Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). Proof to the point: one can attend or observe secular rock concerts and observe the same mass erotic behavior and phenomena taking place as in modern worship services. Readers, you may not agree with this assessment. But from the phenomena that are taking place in “the church of what’s happening now,” somebody, and I am not alone, needs to address this issue.

In some earlier writings, I documented that the essence of music is mysticism; that is, by itself, as it originates within the human soul without words, music is alogon (i.e., irrational). **[31]** (Perhaps that’s why a certain genre is called “soul music.”) As to the influence of mysticism upon the Christian faith, T. Austin-Sparks, whose insights in the differentiation between soul and spirit I have grown to appreciate, observes that mysticism easily deceives people into thinking they’ve had a spiritual experience. The author explains [bracket comments are mine]:

How near to the truth in perception and interpretation can the mystical go! What wonderful things [**a world of make believe**] can the imagination see, even in the Bible! What thrills of awe, amazement, ecstasy [**passionate feelings**], can be shot through an audience or congregation [**the worshippers**] by a master soul [**“an extremely charismatic leader . . . an energy star”**]! But it may all be a false world with no Divine and eternal issues. It may all go to make up this life here, and relieve it of its drabness, but it ends there. What an artificial world [**musically and technologically induced**] we live in! When the music is progressing and the romantic elements [**inner opiates, oxytocin “cocktails”**] are in evidence—the dress and tinsel—and human personalities are parading [**worship teams**], see how pride and rivalry assert themselves, and what a power of make believe [**positive emotions**] enters the atmosphere [**“Can’t you feel just feel the love?”**]! Yes, an artificial world. **[32]**

Yes, it’s a world dominated by the artificial, superficial and temporal love-god that originates within the human soul, the god which goes by the name of Eros. Austin-Sparks then goes on to

say, “The tragedy in this melodrama is that it is ‘real life’ to so many. This soul-world is the devil’s imitation. It is all false, wherever we may find it, whether associated with religion or not. . . How Satan must laugh behind his mask!” [33] As Warren Smith has stated regarding his experiences in New Age religion, “The devil can make you feel good about things that are bad, and make you feel bad about things that are good.” And devil’s trick resides in the inner “trip”.

Conclusion

“Centuries ago” commented Dr. Wheaton, “Plato said that he cared not what others taught in the schools of a society, but that if he could teach music, he would eventually control that society.” [34] Megachurch leadership has evidently caught on—if they control the music, they can control the emotions of the congregants, and if they can control the emotions, they can control the micro-society which is their congregation! The problem with such a control mechanism is that it begins with the arousals of the flesh and ends in the arousals of the flesh. There’s nothing spiritual about it. The whole thing is a charade.

“Wow” Worship

We live in an erotic and sensate culture which says, “Let your feelings be your guide,” a culture that megachurches have discovered how to tap into through the manipulations of modern technology. So the “experience” of worship can be accounted of for reason of the awakening and release of inner opiates in the human body that lie dormant until aroused and sustained through technological control mechanisms, which the megachurch has discovered to involve upbeat modern music accompanied by strobe lights and smoke (the arousal), giant screen projecting images of an audience smiling, dancing, singing or crying together (creating the feeling of oneness), and a cool communicator who touches people at the emotional level (this place just feels right). On this point, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) warned, “that our ‘techniques’ and our ‘mechanics’ [of spirituality] actually divert the attention of people from the truth of the message to some lower, particular, immediate and practical action may have the opposite effect from what is intended.” He then adds, “It is surely our business to avoid anything which produces a merely psychological condition rather than a spiritual condition.” [35]

Simply stated; much of modern worship appeals to fleshly instincts, those canal delights resident within humanity’s fallen being. What begins in man’s heart ends in the same sphere. While momentarily gratifying, fleshly feelings are ephemeral. They don’t last. As the congregant previously cited confesses: “God’s love becomes . . . such a drug that you can’t wait to come [back to worship and] get your next hit.” [36] This fact alone ought to indicate that these ephemeral arousals have nothing whatsoever to do with God’s steadfast love, His “lovingkindness” (See Psalm 48:9.). Nevertheless, the fleshly appeal of getting your next “love hit” prevails over much of what today passes for, “Wow-Worship!”

A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) noted that carnal worship distracts Christians from really desiring God. He assessed:

We’re so determined we want to be happy that if we can’t be happy by the Holy Ghost we’ll drum up our happiness. Religious ‘Rock and Rollers’! We’re going to get happy somehow [even] if we’ve got to beat it up with a tom-tom. [37]

Often contemporary worshippers excuse their new way of worshipping with the caveat, “Oh, it’s not about us.” But with the selfish arousals the music and accompanying technology stimulate, along with egocentric feel-good sermons that feed those arousals, maybe . . . just maybe, the worship really is about them and not Him. And if that is the case, then like Israel’s worship of the “Golden Bull,” a god they could both see and “feel,” such worship is idolatry, all protests notwithstanding! How Satan and his demons must laugh behind their masks as contemporary Christians—stimulated by the sights and sounds of worship so-called, and thinking they are worshipping Almighty God—have in reality become “hooked” upon their own emotional experiences. But then, maybe in a panentheistic way, their feelings do represent the god they believe dwells within (entheogens). [38] In the fleshly nature of souls, have in the fleshly nature that is their soul, become duped on dopamine!

“Will” Worship

Scripture does portray music as employed to worship God, but from the New Testament perspective, only as it glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ (See Colossians 3:16; Revelation 5:9-14.). If like marijuana, music is employed to stimulate ecstasy within the human body-soul, it is, as the worship of the “Golden Bull” in Exodus portrays, idolatry. And as described by the sight and sounds narrated in Exodus, that worship does resemble a rock concert and what passes today as worship celebrations (Compare Exodus 32:1-35; Psalm 106:19-27; 1 Corinthians 10:6-8.).

To me it stands as an irony that, as in contemporary churches, stringed instruments are the instrument of choice for worship in Heaven (Revelation 5:8). But in some way, Lucifer must distorted the worship of Heaven for Scripture records that in God’s judgment “the pomp and music of [his] harps” were thrown out with him (Isaiah 14:11). Perhaps those instruments were perverted by Satan in the idolatry of self-worship (“I will . . . I will . . . I will . . . I will . . . I will . . . ; Isaiah 14:13-14). I think it can be concluded that Satan’s worship was all about himself.

To remind us, Jesus stated: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Unlike false teachers whose modus operandi is appealing to fleshly arousals (2 Peter 2:10), the Apostle Paul never employed the methods of the flesh to achieve results in the Spirit. Like oil and water, flesh and Spirit do not mix. Jesus said so. But Satan’s con-job is ever to make people think that experiences in the soul are experiences from the Spirit. Yet based upon the findings presented in this writing, I am fearful that so much that is called worship today is simply the parading and gratification of the flesh, and **“that which is born of the flesh is flesh.”**

ENDNOTES

[1] As a former local church pastor, I attempted in a previous writing to understand the megachurch movement and offered my explanation which for the most part, with a few exceptions, was treated with disdain and disagreement by many, and indifference by most. See Larry DeBruyn, *Church on the Rise: Why I am not a “Purpose Driven” Pastor* (Indianapolis, IN: Moeller Printing Company, Inc., 2007). I concluded that the genius of the megachurch was that it was able to deliver “feel-good” experiences to congregants via rock ’n roll music and short and uplifting messages delivered by the pastor. As my views were scorned by many, I sometimes wondered whether or not my views were sane. Now a recent study by researchers

at the University of Washington has brought some confirmation regarding the “genius” of the megachurch movement.

[2] Chris Lisee, “Study: Large Worship Services Trigger a High,” *Church Report*, Wednesday, August 22, 2012 (<http://www.thechurchreport.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=siteContent.default&objectID=159270>). Ironically, the results of the study, conducted by researchers at the University of Washington that consisted of 16,000 surveys and 470 interviews of mega-church attendees, were presented at the American Sociological Association in Denver on Sunday, August 19, 2012.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. The reporter quotes Corcoran’s assessment.

[6] Ibid.

[7] William Sargant, *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brain-Washing* (London, England: William Heinemann Ltd., 1957): 88. Though disavowing Sargant’s humanistic assumptions and conclusions, I find his treatment of the techniques whereby religious experience can be manufactured helpful for understanding what may be taking place in many of today’s churches.

But that God has reasonably revealed Himself in the Word, delivers my soul from any despair that the Christian faith and experience can be accounted for and explained away by reason of having applied certain mind-altering techniques. Salvation comes to us not by the application of procedures, but rather on account of believing God’s revealed Word. In Christ, God has come down to us! Therefore, experiences manufactured below will not get us to the One who is above. Disavowing salvation by the application of any technique, Jesus told Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6a).

[8] Emphasis added, Lisee, “Large Worship Services Trigger a High.”

[9] Emphasis added, “Oxytocin,” *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxytocin>).

[10] Emphasis added, The Discernment Research Group, “The Dopamine-Driven Church,” *Herescope*, April 19, 2007. See: (<http://herescope.blogspot.com/2007/04/dopamine-driven-church.html>). This article interacts extensively with Dean Gotcher’s presentation, “The Dialectical Drug Culture: If you build it, they will come,” *Institution for Authority Research*, Revised April 6, 2007, which can be read at: (<http://www.authorityresearch.com/2006-11%20The%20Dialectical%20drug%20culture%20-%20Dopamine.htm>).

[11] Emphasis added, Greg Stielstra, *PyroMarketing: The Four-Step Strategy to Ignite Customer Evangelists and Keep Them for Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005): 127.

[12] Emphasis added, Ibid.

[13] Emphasis added, Nan Allison, *Full & Fulfilled*, quoted in “What are Endorphins?” *Altered States* (<http://altered-states.net/barry/newsletter260/index.htm>). “Endorphins (‘endogenous morphine’) are endogenous opioid peptides [originating from within the body] that function as neurotransmitters. They are produced by the pituitary gland and the hypothalamus in vertebrates during exercise, excitement, pain, consumption of spicy food, love and orgasm, and they resemble the opiates in their abilities to produce analgesia and a feeling of well-being.” See “Endorphin,” *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endorphin>).

[14] Emphasis added, Robert Jourdain, *Music, The Brain, and Ecstasy* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1997): 317.

- [15] Emphasis added, *Ibid.* 327-328.
- [16] Emphasis added, David Henderson, *Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky: The Life of Jimi Hendrix* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1981): 356.
- [17] Emphasis added, Rick Warren, "Match the music to the people you want to reach," *pastors.com*, Ministry Tool Box, Issue 190, January 19, 2005 (<http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=190&artid=2924&expand=1>).
- [18] Emphasis added, Lisee, "Large Worship Services Trigger a High."
- [19] "Love Potion No. 9 (song)," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_Potion_No._9_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_Potion_No._9_(song))).
- [20] Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 20005): 072.
- [21] Jack Wheaton quoted by Brad Steiger, *Revelation: The Divine Fire* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973): 90. Dr. Jack Wheaton, then a member of the Music Department at Cerritos College (1973), has subsequently authored books on the decline of Christian music, including *Crisis in Christian Music* (Volume 1), *Crisis in Christian Music: The Paganization of Worship* (Volume 2), and *The Amazing Power of Music*.
- [22] *Ibid.* Burchette quoted by Steiger, 92.
- [23] *Ibid.* 95.
- [24] Beaudoin, "Ambiguous Liturgy." Understanding rock music's connection to mysticism, Beaudoin describes one singer to be "like some modern-day hesychast." A "hesychast" is "a member of a sect of mystics that originated in the 14th century among the monks on Mount Athos, Greece.
- [25] Cathleen Falsani, "The Rev. of rock 'n' roll," *Suntimes.com*. June 25, 2006 (www.suntimes.com/output/falsani/cst-nws-falsani25.html).
- [26] Marcus Yoars, "IHOP Marks 13 Years of Non-Stop Prayer," *CHARISMA NEWS*, May 7, 2012 (<http://www.charismanews.com/us/33360-ihop-marks-13-years-of-non-stop-prayer>). Reproduced on the Internet, the article originally appeared in the November, 2010 issue of Charisma magazine.
- [27] Rosemary Ellen Guiley, "Chanting," *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991):92.
- [28] *Ibid.*
- [29] Lisee, "Large Worship Services Trigger a High."
- [30] In his study of the relationship between drumming, dancing, trance, and collapse among African tribal peoples, Sargant observed that during part of the ritual, "They looked very much like fans of the Beatles or other 'pop groups' after a long session of dancing." See William Sargant, *The Mind Possessed, A Physiology of Possession, Mysticism and Faith Healing* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1974) 118. As described by Sargant, the tribal phenomena may be compared to "The Spinners," a communal group of young followers of Grateful Dead, who would twirl away as the band played. Upon completion of the concerts, they were often observed lying prostrate. See Matthew Rick, "The Magic and Mysticism of the Grateful Dead," *Deadisticism* (www.lster.net/~shady/deadisti.html).
- [31] See DeBruyn, *Church on the Rise*, 123-138. Pastor Larry DeBruyn, *Drumming up Deception: whether in celebration or in contemplation—"feeling" the beat!* (Indianapolis, IN: Moeller Printing Company, Inc., 2008). Pastor Larry DeBruyn, "On Religious Excitements," *Discernment Newsletter*, May-June, 2009 (<http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Newsletters/NL2009MayJun.pdf>). Pastor Larry DeBruyn, "Emergent Worship:

Wonder or Wasteland?" *Discernment Newsletter*, January-February, 2010, (<http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Newsletters/NL2010JanFeb.pdf>).

[32] T. Austin-Sparks, *What is Man?* (Tulsa, OK: Emmanuel Church, 2009 reprint of 1963 edition): 78.

[33] *Ibid.* 78-79.

[34] Plato cited by Jack Wheaton. See Steiger, *Revelation*, 91.

[35] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Conversions: Psychological & Spiritual* (London, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1959): 40. Lloyd-Jones wrote this booklet as a response to Sargant's point that religious experiences could be wholly accounted for reason of the mechanisms applied.

[36] Lisee, "Large Worship Services Trigger a High."

[37] A.W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment*, Compiled by James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1997): 103.

[38] The word *entheogen* derives from three Greek words: a preposition "en"; the noun "God"; and a verb "to generate." The resultant meaning of entheogen is "that which generates god or divine inspiration in a person." Some drugs are known as "entheogens." To achieve consciousness of one's own divinity, entheogens (i.e., psychedelic drugs) are employed. In Galatians 5:20, in the apostle's list of the fruit of the Spirit, "**idolatry**" and "**witchcraft**" ('**sorcery**,' NASB; Greek, *pharmakeia*, i.e., drugs) are associated together. As they mess with peoples' consciousness, drugs engender the idolatry of feel-good experiences apart from God.