

Getting “Higher” on God (A Sequel)

Opiates and the “Experience” of Rave Worship [1]

“And **be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;** Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” The Apostle Paul, Ephesians 5:18-21

Introduction

Scores of architecturally significant churches dot the landscape of the Australian city of Adelaide, structures that were built to last and perhaps bear testimony to a Christian influence in that part of the world. Upon visiting that city last year (September 24-25, 2011), my initial impression was perhaps like that of the Apostle Paul when he was in Athens and said, “Men of Athens [Adelaide], I observe that you are very religious in all respects” (Acts 17:22).

Under the auspices of Christian Witness Ministries and with Philip Powell the director of CWM, the Lord gave me the opportunity of ministry with The Street Church, a small Bible fellowship of committed Christians in Adelaide. The church is led by the Corneloup brothers, Sam and Caleb, the former who came to the Lord out of a life of crime. In many ways the fellowship encouraged my spirit with the presence of many young people. For the seminars, the church rented The German Club in the downtown area in that city.

With some of the members of The Street Church, I had my first opportunity at “street preaching” at Rundle Mall, an open air shopping area in the heart of Adelaide. [2] As an American with a distinct “Michigander” accent, people passed by, briefly stopped to listen, and then went their way. Because The Street Church regularly engaged in the activity, secular authorities tried to muzzle the preachers by passing laws against them. But in the name of “free speech,” and because of the legal knowledge of Caleb Corneloup, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the street preachers. If other secular groups espousing a radical ideology were allotted the legal right of public assembly to express their views, then why not The Street Church?

The whirlwind weekend of ministry passed by quickly, and before I knew it, the time arrived for me to get to the airport on Saturday evening in order to catch a flight to Melbourne so that I could connect to another flight to Wellington, New Zealand, the next morning. (For a week, I was scheduled to preach in various cities throughout the north island.)

HEAVEN!

My driver, a young man from The Street Church, drove me to the Adelaide airport. During that

ride and upon leaving the city proper, we drove by one of the beautiful church structures in that city. From the outside, the church appeared no different from the other church buildings with the exception of a large banner that brazenly hung across the steeple and over the entrance of the historic building. On that banner was painted one word: **HEAVEN**. I turned to my driver and asked him, "Is the name of that church **HEAVEN**?" He answered, "Yes!" and then proceeded to inform me that the church was the one he used to attend before he became a believer in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I asked him what kind of church it was. He informed me it was a "rave" church. Well, not knowing what a rave church was for not ever having heard of such a church before, I questioned him further about what it was. He told me that in their gatherings the worshippers played loud and raucous music, danced, did drugs and partied (And who knows what else?).

Needs based Worship

After his description of "rave" worship, I thought to myself . . . Is this where adapting worship to fulfill the "thrills and chills" sought by seeker audiences, where tweaking the worship style to fit the mood of the culture and the needs of congregants will lead? Worship that resembles the atmosphere of Israel's partying before the "Golden Bull" when "the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:1-35; *6); clamorous worship that to Joshua sounded like war was going on in the camp (Exodus 32:17). Is this what results when so-called worship becomes sourced in "the wants" of peoples' bodies and brains (i.e., the Bible calls them "the lusts of the flesh," i.e., Greek *epithumias sarkos*)?

Rave in the Nave

Rave worship seemingly originated amongst young Anglicans in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom, where Matthew Fox, the defrocked Roman Catholic priest who later became an Episcopalian, picked it up, brought it back to San Francisco, and adapted it to suit his New Age "**eco-mysticism**." [3] In 1994, about a year after leaving the Roman Catholic Church, the *LA Times* confirmed that Fox got the idea for "the head-banger liturgy [the rave mass] after visiting a band of unorthodox young Anglicans in England—where the 'Rave in the Nave' features loud music, women dancing in bikinis and video monitors flashing messages such as 'Eat God' [evidently referring to their belief in the Eucharist's transubstantiated elements]." [4]

On this point, it can be noted that as early as 1991, evangelical leader Leonard Sweet sourced his "creation spirituality" in Fox's "eco-mysticism" when he wrote that, "Creation spirituality is of tremendous help here in weaning us from this homocentric warp [that is, any understanding that makes humanity the centerpiece of God's creation and entrusts the stewardship "over" nature to them]." [5] Rave worship, sourced in the eco-mysticism of a pantheistic or panentheistic worldview, has as its mantra, "If it feels good, do it!" So do it they do.

U2-charists

Perhaps spinning-off the idea of Rave Masses, some Anglican-Episcopal churches now blasphemously call their Holy Communion service a "U2-Charist" in which hymns are replaced by the Irish rock-group's best-selling songs. [6] The communion service is described:

In what is more rock concert than Book of Common Prayer, a live band will belt out U2 classics such as Mysterious Ways and Beautiful Day as worshippers sing along with the

lyrics, which will appear on screens. The [nightclub] atmosphere will be further enhanced by a sophisticated lighting system that will pulse with the beat [7]

A few years ago, *USA Today* reported that “U2-charists” have also come to Episcopal congregations in the United States, and perhaps will find their way into other denominations and congregations as well. [8] One young worshipper, a Roman Catholic who attended a “U2-charist” at a nearby Episcopal church, reported of her “U2-charist” experience: “**It makes you, like, warm inside.** Usually at church you love Jesus and everything. But this way you can express **how you feel.**” [9]

Descriptions of Rave

Rave is thought to be a rising supernatural movement in the UK consisting of a wide spectrum of Christians who, disaffected by and having dropped out of organized religion, “are burning for Jesus.” [10] A 4th annual “Sloshfest” held in 2010 in South Wales, attended by a crowd of about 600 from “alternative churches” all over the UK, was described as involving “wild-eyed and out of control” participants—“sweaty clothes clinging to their backs”—flailing “wildly to a booming beat.” During what appeared to resemble more a primitive and tribal religious celebration like those which have occurred in many cultures from time immemorial, some “ravers” even passed out amidst their whirling and dancing. The party, so it is claimed, consisted of “revellers” unaffected by either booze and/or drugs, but rather by the power of God, an ecstasy of worship that participants ascribed to “**‘God-ka’ and the ‘yum rum of Heaven’.**” One 38-year-old participant made no apology for the participants acting out of themselves because in his opinion, God is “a party animal who wants to win over youngsters with supernatural highs.” Another raver states:

Heaven is going to be wild. God will show up and be the life of the party. We want to see fun coming back into the Church.

Testimonials of Ravers

Matthew Fox first became acquainted with “rave masses” in England. In one instance, the Mass was “held in the basement of a sports complex and included 42 television sets flashing images of galaxies, dancing atoms, DNA, lunar eclipses and male-female archetypes.” [11] He offered his impressions of the masses he attended:

My first experience of the Mass was that this is a very friendly experience for a generation raised on television. My second experience was that these people are taking television away from the broadcasters and doing it live in the heart of the community, which is worship. [12]

Now the following testimonials of participants in the rave worship which occurred at Sloshfest are offered: [13]

People are looking for something relevant to them. If you like to party, drink and take

drugs, our advice is, 'Don't drink Vodka, drink God-ka'.

There is no greater high than the Most High. When you come into God's presence there is an intoxication that is overwhelming.

God wants us to enjoy his wine and embrace the spiritual realm.

Of course we all like to drink the yum rum of heaven, too.

When I'm worshipping I know I look absolutely insane, but that's how I'm affected by my heavenly daddy.

It is such a wild fire. It is a fierce wild fire. It is untamable and undomesticated. (These words were spoken by a middle-aged woman dressed as Pinky Pirate who shaking uncontrollably grabbed a microphone and bellowed them out to the raucous crowd.)

I'm Mrs. Jesus. I love my husband. (A woman dressed as a pirate queen uttered these words while crawling on the floor, looking spaced out, and manifesting red, puffy eyes and a vacant stare despite no sign of alcohol or drugs consumption.)

Revellers or Revilers?

Because Sloshefest is a Christmas party, revellers dress up like a monk, priest, nun, dancing pirate, Abraham Lincoln, unicorn, winged fairy, court jester draped with Christmas lights, etc. Amidst all the costuming, "in the main room the party is pumping, with dry ice, air horns and dazzling disco lights adding to the debauched atmosphere."

So is Sloshefesting, reveling in God, or reviling to Him? To answer the question, only the Word of God can be our guide and judge. And on this point, what was the Lord's take on one of the original Sloshefests (I say "one of the original" because amongst primitive peoples they had been going on long before the incident of Israel's worshipping of the "Golden Bull.")?

Assurance for me regarding this issue, notwithstanding all the participants' testimonials, can only be moderated by the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). To this point, Archibald Alexander wrote:

There is nothing more necessary than to distinguish between true and false experiences in religion And in making this discrimination, there is no other test but the infallible Word of God; let every thought, motive, impulse, and emotion be brought to this touchstone. **[14]**

To this pastor it stands axiomatic and logically consistent that the spiritual work of God will in nowise contradict the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit inspired to be written (1 Peter 1:21).

Unlike the crowd at the first Pentecost, whom skeptical onlookers accused as being drunk with

“new wine,” but who in fact were not (Acts 2:13), the claim of ravers that their euphoria has nothing to do with taking drugs or drinking alcohol may ring a bit hollow. As one worshipper exclaimed, God “makes me so happy. I love him but **I’m a bit drunk.**” One well-known speaker at Sloshfest, who claims to have met Jesus on an acid trip, is described as slurring through his sermons and talking “about ‘smoking the Baby Jesus,’ being ‘whacked out’ and ‘tokin’ [urban slang for smoking pot] on the Holy Ghost’.” **[15]** He calls these expressions “metaphors” of the Christian life! In 2005, that speaker, John Crowder, wrote a book *The New Mystics* in which he promoted “Sloshfest-style ecstatic worship and mystical Christianity.” Then in 2009, he wrote a sequel, *The Ecstasy of Loving God: Trances, Raptures, and the Supernatural Pleasures of Jesus Christ*.

Further insight into the question lies in John Crowder’s testimony, one in which he claims to have met Jesus while on an acid trip, and his message when he talks about “smoking the Baby Jesus” and “tokin’ on the Holy Ghost.” How can such activities, so diametrically opposed to the work of the Holy Spirit, things categorized by the Apostle Paul as “lusts of the flesh” (i.e., “sorcery,” Greek, *pharmakeia* or **drugs**, and “**drunkenness, carousing** and things like these,” Galatians 5:20-21, NASB) in contrast to “the fruit of the Spirit” (i.e., “self control,” Galatians 5:23, NASB) be instrumental in saving a person’s soul in any way? Persons may be saved *from such activities*, but they are not saved *by such activities* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In all fairness, one Sloshfester does testify to his having been saved from drugs and alcohol. **[16]** But this man’s soul was not converted because of the influence of drugs and alcohol, but in spite of it.

Are These People Mad?

Sloshfesting impresses me not as being church, but as **carousing**. Rave worship (as in “stark raving mad”) impresses me as being opposite from one fruit of the Spirit, “self-control.” In rave, people are “out of control.” The inbred and eccentric phenomena of rave, observed first hand by passers-by or inquirers who watch it on *You Tube*, will not only give unbelievers a wrong impression about the meaning of the gospel, but also fail to impress many observant believers. As the Apostle Paul questioned, “If . . . ungifted men or unbelievers enter [or go online?], **will they not say that you are mad?**” (1 Corinthians 14:23). Illustrating the apostle’s point, one curious passer-by is reported to have shook his head and laughingly commented after having through a steamed-up window observed the rage of rave: “Looks like one hell of a party.” To me, the phenomena of rave church as manifested at Sloshfest 2010, may be compared to The Toronto Blessing of the 1990s, only on steroids. **[17]** As rave and Sloshfesting, doing the “Holy Ghost Hokey Pokey” belongs to the same genre of worship so-called. **[18]**

Conclusion

“Getting High on God” was meant to draw attention to a study coming out of the University of Washington which suggests that “attending a Protestant megachurch actually does produce a high much like being on drugs.” **[19]**

Drugs: An Implicit Connexion

From the U of W study, it has been noted that megachurches are “powerful purveyors of emotional religious experience” as they blend together popular music, state-of-the-art technology and positive and non-threatening messages, all of which and more, contribute to

make up an “Oxytocin cocktail” that affects a “sense of recognition, trust, and a reduction of stress” in the brains of congregants. [20] The U of W study makes *implicit* the connection between the megachurch and the inner opiates that, when stimulated by the right mechanisms, provide spiritual euphoria.

Drugs: An Explicit Connexion

This article, “Getting Higher on God,” has sought to draw attention to the new wave of worship that many are seeking to catch a ride on, worship that unabashedly makes *explicit* the connection between drugs (Whether induced from within or ingested from without, who knows?) and the attainment of spiritual ecstasy. The point being, that such spiritual experiences, whether *emotionally euphoric* or *mystically ecstatic* are not the result of the Holy Spirit’s ministry in the life of a believer, but rather the result of the hyped-up machinations, manipulations and managements of church leaders. The difference between the euphoria engendered by the megachurch and the ecstasy by the ravechurch may well be only one of degree, but not kind. A comparison might be made between smoking pot (“the euphoria lite” engendered by the megachurch) and shooting heroin (“the ecstasy heavy” roused-up by the ravechurch). Megachurches have mastered a strategy of how to offer their congregants a “lite” dose of experience (euphoria) while the ravechurch is offering its participants a heavy dose of experience (ecstasy). Neither movement evidences sober-mindedness, that spiritual attribute the New Testament enjoins believers to cultivate (Titus 2:2, 4, 6; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8).

In fact, if the euphoria or ecstasy is induced by means other than by the Holy Spirit, then it violates Paul’s injunction to “**be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit,**” the manifestations of which (“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”) bear no resemblance to those exhibited in “Sloshfesting” (Ephesians 5:18-21). Worship that masquerades as drunkenness in the Holy Ghost resembles more the wine-bibbing of a bacchanal celebration than worship of the Holy God. [21]

“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but **let us watch and be sober.** For they that sleep sleep in the night; and **they that be drunken are drunken in the night.** But let us, who are of the day, **be sober,** putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” The Apostle Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

ENDNOTES

[1] My initial article’s title “Getting High on God” was based solely upon my reading of *The Church Report* article written by Chris Lisee. At that writing, I was unaware of Keegan Hamilton’s article “Getting High on God: A new UW study suggests that attending a Protestant megachurch is a lot like doing drugs,” which had appeared in the *Seattle Weekly News*, August

29, 2012 (<http://www.seattleweekly.com/2012-08-29/news/getting-high-on-god/>). I became aware of Hamilton's article and its title as I was researching and writing this sequel. Though titles are not copyrighted, my ethics dictate that I should explain to any readers that knowingly I did not copy Hamilton's title, but titled my article independent of any knowledge of what he had written. I appreciate Hamilton's article in that it both informs and substantiates my thinking about the "genius" of the megachurch as it has developed over the last several years.

[2] "Street Preaching in Australia," *YouTube*, September 4, 2011 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k_4UGFocYQ).

[3] Religious News Service, "'Rave Masses' Seek to Appeal to Those Raised on Television," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1994 (http://articles.latimes.com/1994-04-30/local/me-52216_1_episcopal-church).

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Leonard I. Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic* (Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1991): 124. In footnote number 67 on this page, Sweet refers readers to Fox's books, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Parts, Twenty-six Themes, and Two Questions* (1983), and *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (1990).

[6] Jonathan Petre, "Hymns replaced by U2 lyrics at church," *ReligionNewsBlog.com*, January 30, 2007. Online at: www.religionnewsblog.com/17326/hymns-replaced-by-u2-lyrics-at-church.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Gary Stern, "Episcopal 'U2-charist' uses songs in service," *USA Today*, October 26, 2006. Online at: www.usatoday.com/life/music/2006-10-25-u2-churches_x.htm.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] David Lowe, "The ravers who get high on God," *The Sun*, January 21, 2010 (<http://www.the-sun.co.uk/sol/homepage/features/2817306/The-ravers-who-get-high-on-God.html>). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and allusions in this writing are taken from Lowe's report in *The Sun*.

[11] Religious News Service, "Rave Masses."

[12] "'Rave Masses' Seek to Appeal to Those Raised on Television."

[13] All the quotes which follow are taken from "The ravers who get high on God" by Lowe.

[14] Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978): xviii.

[15] "The You Tube Prophet (aka Getting High on Jesus), Parts One and Two" *YouTube* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKUuUUvpMxE>). The video exhibits the actions of participants to be like those manifested in The Toronto Blessing, only "kicked-up several notches."

[16] He states: "From around the age of 18 I got into drink and drugs. I'd take speed, acid, amphetamine and smoke cannabis every day. Three years later I went to a church in Newport with a friend who'd reformed and I realised [sic] Jesus had plans for my life. I gave myself to him and that ripped out the desire for drugs and alcohol." *Ibid.*

[17] See Pastor Larry DeBruyn, "Sour Grapes: Vineyardism and the Toronto Blessing," *Guarding His Flock Ministries*, November 1, 2010 (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/11/01/rotten-grapes/#more-1385>).

[18] "The Crazy 'Holy Ghost Hokey Pokey'," *You Tube*, October 22, 2011 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs2CJlCO0rE>). For discerning critique, see Dave James, "Holy Ghost Hokey Pokey," *The Alliance for Biblical Integrity*, March 19, 2010

(<http://www.biblicalintegrity.org/blog/2010/03/19/holy-ghost-hokey-pokey/>).

[19] Hamilton, "Getting High on God." Hamilton *satirically* assesses: "But with all the passing of the collection plate, the substantial time commitment, and the constant exposure to contemporary Christian rock, it might be cheaper and more pleasant just to start shooting heroin."

[20] Ibid.

[21] Bacchus was the Roman god of wine and intoxication, equated with the Greek Dionysus. A festival, introduced in Rome around 200 BC, honoring the god was celebrated in the late winter and early spring of the calendar year.