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“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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ON RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENTS

The Sights, Sounds, and Spectacles of Spurious Spirituality

By Pastor Larry DeBruyn

We reject all shameful and underhanded methods. We do not try to trick anyone, and we do not distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know that.

(The Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 4:2, NLT)

Along with other Americans, I am a sports fan, especially of football and basketball. I grew up loving, playing, and watching both sports, especially basketball. After shoveling the snow off his driveway in the dead of winter, for hours at a time I used to shoot the round ball at a goal attached to my neighbor's garage. During cold and snowy winter months, my father would drive me to Godwin Field House to watch our local semi-pro team, the Grand Rapids (Michigan) “Tackers,” play on Saturday evenings. (In that day, my hometown was known as the furniture capital of the world; hence the name “Tackers.”) Although the players were not nationally known, watching big and skilled men play a finesse game was an awesome experience for a young boy. In my late teens, I regularly played pick-up games on public courts around the city. Because I was more force than finesse, I earned the nickname “junk man.” Today, as a half-season ticket holder of the Indiana Pacers, I still enjoy watching the biggest-best athletes in the world compete in the NBA. But there's a world of difference between having attended a Tackers' game in the early 1960s, and going to a Pacers' game in the 2000s!

Upon entering Indy's Conseco Field House, and climbing the steps to the concourse where free programs and gifts are distributed, a rock or pep band can usually be heard playing in the background. In the countdown before the game, rock and rap music blare constantly over the PA system as the players warm-up shooting and stretching on the court below. Then, as coaches and players stand in lines facing one another, there comes the singing of our national anthem, often by a well-known recording artist. Then, after introducing the opposing team in an ordinary way, the public announcer introduces the Pacers' starting lineup in a darkened arena accompanied by pulsating music, a cheering crowd, flashing strobe lights, and a mini fireworks display.

During timeouts, the PA system plays music as cheerleaders dance on the playing floor below, as Boomer—the team mascot—and his friends shoot and hurl T-shirts into the stands. And from the catwalks above, arena workers drop parachutes with hanging gift cards or yellow mini-balls to the crowd below. On the giant four-sided TV screens situated above center court, there is the constant visage of

replays, live pictures of the crowd behaving out of themselves, and sports news casts. At half-time, entertaining and flamboyant juggling, magic, balancing, gymnastic, etc., acts, imported from Las Vegas or wherever, perform.

Between the third and fourth quarters Boomer and his acrobatic entourage put on an exciting dunk show as they propel themselves off from mini-trampolines, fly and somersault through the air, slam the ball through the basket, and finally crash on the landing mats below. If the game is close at the end, the PA announcer, accompanied by pulsating music that heightens the excitement, exhorts the cheering and screaming crowd into greater and greater fervor and frenzy.

All the while, expensive drinks and food are sold by vendors on the lower and upper concourses surrounding the arena. From the time a fan enters the arena until the final horn ends the game, there's wall-to-wall excitement to be found in the Pacer experience. This is why, I guess, they call the NBA franchise, “Pacers Sports and Entertainment.”

But amidst the goings-on, the game remains. That's what fans come to watch . . . or, do they?

How Can We Make Our Services More Exciting?

As I reflect upon all this business, I cannot help but think of how like the corporation of Pacers Sports and Entertainment, many American churches have become, as they provide their congregations with excitements and experiences. A congregant once asked me how we might make our worship services more exciting. These days it seems, religion must be made “fun,” or else.

So, like sports marketers, churches try to spin the sensual into the spiritual. If the spiritual blessing of worship does not descend from above, religious entrepreneurs will attempt to compensate for that lack of reality by ginning up excitement below. After all, to be believed in, the crowd needs to feel God doing something, and excitements give the impression that He's at work.

So, church leadership designs worship services to be an experience akin to attending a Pacer game. A pervasive “need” seems to exist amongst congregants to get excited over excitement. I presume that's why churches call their Sunday morning services, “celebrations” (Remember the tune, “Celebration,” by *Kool and the Gang?*).

But I often wonder how the attendance numbers would fare if the Pacers did away with all the extra-curricular excitements? What if the atmosphere became like that of those old semi-pro Tacker games I attended as a kid. How many people attend games to just watch the game? Or, must there be other inducements?

Similarly, how many people really attend church to worship God? I remember reading where A.W. Tozer once

questioned how many people would attend church if the only attraction was God. Seemingly, vast numbers of Christians want to attend “The Church of What’s Happening Now.” For any too young to remember, during the early 1970s this was the comedic church pastored by a con-artist named Reverend Leroy, who was played by the comedian Flip Wilson (1933-1998) on a TV show named after him.

Exodus and Excitements

The problem being raised is not new (Read Exodus 32:1-35.). Upon their exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel were not content to worship a God they could not see or feel, a God who was apparently not meeting their needs. “*Is the Lord among us, or not?*” they asked, as they grumbled against Moses and God because of a shortage of water in the wilderness (Exodus 17:7). Not satisfied to walk by faith and to trust the Lord to meet their day-to-day needs, the children of Israel wanted tangible proof that the Lord was with them. So as they wondered and wandered, they grew increasingly restless and disgruntled.

In spite of Mount Sinai acting like a volcano for reason of the Lord’s presence (Exodus 19:18), and when later Moses delayed on the mountain and did not return to give them a “signal” report of the Lord’s dealings with him, they couldn’t stand the drab silence. They needed something more, something visual and exciting. So they demanded of Aaron the High Priest, “*Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him*” (Exodus 32:1).

So being the accommodating religious leader he was, Aaron took their sacrifices of praise, their jewelry, and smelted and engraved the precious metals into the image of a powerful bull. To the mass of religious voyeurs he then declared, “*This is your god, (lit., ‘these are your gods’) O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt*” (Exodus 32:4). Israel no longer needed to wonder if the gods were with them. One had miraculously jumped out of the fire! As Aaron explained to Moses, “*I threw it [i.e., the jewelry] into the fire, and out came this calf*” (Exodus 32:24).

But not only did the Israelites possess “the need” to see their gods, but also “to get high” over them. So in an act revealing the utter ungodliness of the audience-driven and seeker-sensitive approach to ministry, Aaron announced, “*Tomorrow shall be a feast [a celebration] to the Lord*” (Exodus 32:5). It was on his own initiative Aaron decreed this feast, for the Lord had already mandated the three feasts Israel was to observe, and this wasn’t one of them! (See Exodus 23:14-17.).

So the next day, the Exodus narrative describes the frenzied excitement that built up around the entertaining image of the bull. Upon hearing the wild worship going on in the camp when he and Moses descended from the holy mount with the two inscribed tablets of stone, Joshua supposed that the celebration was “*a sound of war in the camp*” (Exodus 32:17). But Moses knew differently. “*It is*

not the sound of the cry of triumph, nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat,” he said, “*but the sound of singing I hear*” (Exodus 32:18). A celebration was going on!

To explain the displeasure of God against this kind of stuff happening in the church under the guise of worship, the apostle Paul referred to this incident. To the Corinthians he explained, “*Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed . . .*” (1 Corinthians 10:6-8a, KJV).

Signs and Adultery

In working His messianic miracles, His “*signs and wonders,*” Jesus attracted crowds (Matthew 8:18; Mark 9:25; Luke 5:19; John 5:13). Jesus exorcised demons out of afflicted persons restoring them to spiritual and emotional health (Mark 5:1-20). He caused the lame to walk and healed the sick (Isaiah 35:6; Matthew 11:4-5). He even raised people from the dead (John 11:1-46). Can it get anymore exciting than this? Expectancy built up among the Jewish people as they observed the signs and wonders Jesus worked, as He temporarily put a stop to disabilities, sickness, and death (John 21:25). In some instances, Jesus requested those He healed to keep it quiet (See Matthew 8:4; Luke 8:56; John 5:13.). But often they disobeyed Him and told others, indicating that though they liked what Jesus did, they would not listen to what He said.

The miraculous displays left many voyeurs craving for more. Jesus’ miracles piqued the curiosity of many Jews. They were spectators of spectacles. This helps explain why at the height of His ministry, certain Jewish leaders came to Jesus and said, “*Teacher, we want to see a sign from You*” (Matthew 12:38). Signs and wonders made for good theater.

So Jesus censured the sign seekers telling them that, “*An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign . . .*” (Matthew 12:39a). He then proceeded to explain that, “*no sign*” would be given to them except “*the sign of Jonah the prophet,*” and that the repentant persons who had lived at the time of both Jonah and Solomon would rise up to judge them (Matthew 12:39b-42). The Jews wanted theater, but unlike the schmoozing and audience-driven preachers of today, all Jesus would talk about was their guilt and the coming divine judgment. Jesus seemed to know that spectacles produced spectators, but He was looking for followers.

Question: On account of the present cravings for spectacle spirituality, how much of the “we-got-to-feel-it” atmosphere which is aroused in our worship celebrations indicates that, like Jews of His day, Jesus might consider us to be an evil and adulterous generation?

No stranger to controversy that comes from standing for God’s truth amidst a multitude’s cravings for show-time religion, Methodist evangelist Rev. Mr. Beverly Carradine (1848-1931) perceived that, “The whole demand for signs

springs from unbelief.”ⁱⁱⁱ He then continues,

We are referring to a spirit of doubt that will not take God’s word nor move forward as He directs without some peculiar display of the divine presence and power, which in our conceit we dictate to the Lord and also decide as to its fashion, form and continuance . . . The Lord seeks to bring His followers into a life of such faith in Him that they will not ask nor care for strange sights and sounds . . . If we want to please God we must throw away every doubt when He has spoken; quit asking for strange tokens and wonders; and, resting on His word, say, “No matter what happens, I believe God; and though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”ⁱⁱ

We should know that Jesus is not looking for *fans*, but for *followers* (Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21; John 10:27; etc.). He calls us to the cross, and not to celebrations, to self-denial, and not to self-indulgence. He told His followers, “*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*” (Matthew 16:24).

Self-denial is not a “feel good” experience. In fact, sin and its guilt, which lies at the heart of Jesus’ atonement, makes us to feel bad about ourselves; and this may account for the reason there is so little preaching about sin and guilt in contemporary churches these days. Any such a message would dampen the celebration!

But the need to be entertained not only manifested itself amongst the Exodus Israelites and the Jews in Jesus’ day, but also the pagan Greeks.

Ecstasy and Idolatry

On Mars Hill, the Apostle Paul addressed the Athenian philosophers: “*Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device*” (Emphasis mine, Acts 17:29). The word “device” is interesting. It was formed from the preposition *en*, meaning “in,” and a noun *thumos*, meaning “strong feeling, passion.”ⁱⁱⁱ Literally, we should not liken God to be a graven image carved “in passion by man.” Paul, as evidenced by the Exodus Israelites, viewed that passion is integral to both idolatry and immorality. People feel strongly about their gods. All of which brings us to evaluate the relationship of religious excitements to genuine Christian spirituality.

Excitements can be manufactured. There are mechanisms that can be used to trigger states of self-transcendence. For example, drugs, drumming, and dancing can deliver participants out-of-themselves. These deliverances masquerade to be genuine encounters with the divine. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), a British expatriate who spent his adult life living in Los Angeles, and was obsessed by interests in psychedelics, mysticism, the paranormal, and

the occult, once remarked of the power of mechanical means to induce arousals. He wrote that,

all we can safely predict is that, if exposed long enough to the tom-toms and the singing, every one of our philosophers would end by capering and howling with the savages.^{iv}

As a manner of evangelistic speaking, the philosophers would be “converted!”^v Theologian Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898) observed that,

Blinded men are ever prone to imagine that they have religious feelings, because they have sensuous, animal feelings, in accidental juxtaposition with religious places, words, or sights.^{vi}

Frequently, I hear persons announce that they are “really passionate” about this or that. What they mean is that they feel quite strongly about a particular issue, subject, or belief. Increasingly, Christians are determining the rightness or wrongness of their belief based upon how passionate it makes them feel. Bypassing revelation and reason, they feel their way to faith. Theirs is a religious epistemology by experience (The word epistemology concerns how we know what we know, and why we believe what we believe.). I think of the person who declared, “I refuse to believe in a God I cannot feel!” As Dabney observed, “People are ever prone to think that they are feeling religiously because they have feelings . . . about religion.”^{vii}

So the pan-evangelical movement has and is continuing to develop spirituality, not based upon the clear teaching of the Word of God, but rather upon manufactured sights, sounds, signs, and sensations that generate religious feelings within them. Theirs has become a faith based upon desires, not doctrine.

The New Testament has much to say about desires and lusts (Greek, *epithumia*). True, they have their good side. Paul desired to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23), and to again see the believers at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:17). But desires also possess a dark side. Often they can lead us spiritually astray. Thus the New Testament employs the word to mean “evil desire” as frequently translated by the word “*lust*.”^{viii}

Lusts and Lies

Because of the underlying sin nature that is constitutional to our being, our feelings can be and most often are, self-centered, self-indulgent, and self-serving. Perhaps more than any other aspect of our personality, we bend our experiences to be about “us.” We indulge that which titillates and pleases us, but shun activities and ideas which prove painful. After categorizing emotions into four groups of individual emotions—personal taste, remorse, fear or hope, and sympathy—that can be aroused by external stimuli, Dabney comments regarding personal taste:

Now it is most obvious that the movements of taste . . . carry no moral imperative whatever. They have no more power to reform the will than strains of music or odors of flowers. Yet how many souls are deluded into supposing that they love God, duty, and gospel-truth, because these aesthetic sensibilities are stimulated in connection with such topics [i.e., by sights, sounds, smells, and spectacles of spirituality]!^{ix}

So the New Testament calls such emotional wants “lusts”—“*deceitful lusts*” (Ephesians 4:22); “*foolish and hurtful lusts*” (1 Timothy 6:9); “*youthful lusts*” (2 Timothy 2:22); “*worldly lusts*” (Titus 2:12); “*fleshly lusts*” (1 Peter 2:11); “*ungodly lusts*” (Jude 18); and so on.

Regarding the relationship of lustful excitements to spirituality, Paul warned Timothy, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; (or ‘lusts,’ Greek, epithumia) and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths*” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

To Tickle the Fickle

Several features of Paul's warning need to be noted. First, the apostle predicted that professing Christians will not endure healthy teaching. Like addicts, they will revel in unhealthy teachings which make them feel good, the teachings of false teachers who by “*speaking out arrogant words . . . entice by fleshly desires* (Greek, *epithumia*), *by sensuality*” (Greek, *aselgeiais*, 2 Peter 2:18). Note that Peter equates fleshly desires to sensuality.

Second, false teachings find entry for reason of the comfort level they induce in a person's *psyche* (Compare 2 Timothy 3:6-7.). False teaching resonates within them because it meets needs immediate to them. Regarding the desire to have “*their ears tickled*,” John MacArthur states, “They have an itch to be entertained by teachings that will produce pleasant sensations and leave them with good feelings about themselves.”^x Of such apostates another observes,

They have closed their ears to all that contradicts their own inner emotions, feelings and urges. There is, for them, no fixed point of reference by which to judge truth or error. Their only standard of measure is their own subjective feelings at any given moment.^{xi}

Third, given their insatiable desire, they will stockpile—“*they will accumulate for themselves*”—false teachings in their spiritual refrigerators and pantries. Pseudo-believers hunger after heresies, and pay top dollar for what they want to hear (See 2 Peter 2:1-3.).

Fifth, they will turn away from the truth. These spiritual sophisticates will turn their noses up at the preaching of God's Word, and in so doing snub both the Son and the Scriptures (See John 14:6, and 17:17.).

And finally, they will turn aside to myths (fables and fictions). They will forsake “*the faith . . . once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). They will exchange the clear teaching of the Word for an imaginary world of make-believe. Fiction will replace the faith, and stories the Scriptures.^{xii}

Lusts are the addictive perversion of love. Insatiable, they inevitably leave us unfulfilled and craving more when we indulge them. These sensual and addictive feelings are deceptive in spiritual matters.

“Fantastic!”

This indulging of fleshly lusts accounts for why so many churches engage in what Paul Proctor labels *evangetainment*. Worship is about them, not Him. He writes that, “today's church no longer believes that Jesus is enough—that the Living Word of God can't really compete in a sensory-driven world and that the Holy Spirit needs our help.” Thus he continues, “It's not even enough to ‘tickle our ears’ anymore. Now we need our eyes tickled, our noses tickled, our taste buds tickled and our funny bones tickled . . .” (See 2 Timothy 4:3.)^{xiii}

After questioning whether the rousing revivalism of his day had any impact upon the lives of those involved in it, R.L. Dabney noted that it made,

[N]o difference; they are still excited and ‘happified’ in meetings; they sing and shout, and sway to and fro with religious feelings. Thus these worthless, sympathetic passions are trusted in as the sure signatures of the Spirit's work.^{xiv}

So how is it that the contemporary church has come to be in such a sensate state?

A Tall Tale of Two Brains

There has arisen a two-brained theory/myth that persons dominated by their left brain are characterized by “logical thinking, analysis, and accuracy,” while those in touch with their right brain are into “aesthetics, feeling, and creativity.”^{xv} Illustrating the distinction, a blogger explained why he had not written any devotionals lately. “At long last,” he wrote, “I've decided to restart my (online) devotional time. I think the reason I didn't feel ‘released’ to do this is that my prior attempt was very Left Brain and I needed to do something from the Heart.”

In his book *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren wrote that feelings are a key to spiritual maturity. Seemingly, if believers get their feelings right, they will get their faith right. In addressing “**Maturity Myth #6: All you need is Bible study to grow**,” Warren buys into the left-brain-right-brain theory. He wrote:

Many evangelical churches have been built on this myth. I call them “classroom churches.” Classroom churches tend to be left-brain oriented and cognitive focused. They stress the teaching of

Bible content and doctrine, but give little, if any, emphasis to believers' emotional, experiential, and relational development. All you need to be spiritually mature, says one well-known classroom church, is to have 'doctrine' in your frontal lobe.^{xvi}

Obviously, a right-brained ministry favors ministering to the subjective feelings within as opposed to the cognitive faith without the person. This approach is but a variation of *fideism* in which knowledge of God rests upon feelings, "to the exclusion of any rational considerations."^{xvii}

If you are left-brained in your approach to faith, are you beginning to feel discriminated against? When subjected to the scrutiny of Scripture, is this right-brained emphasis right? For several reasons, as has already been shown from 2 Timothy 4:3-4, desires can be deceiving.

True, spiritual maturity is more than just being exposed to biblical teaching. But spiritual maturity is not less than understanding Bible doctrine. As the reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote,

For feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.^{xviii}

So let's proceed with a Scriptural explanation as to why the right-brained approach to Christian maturity is deficient. Amidst a sensate church, it may come as a surprise to some that the Bible is left-brained book!

First, the greatest commandment Moses gave to that nation—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"—states that Israel was to "**teach . . . diligently**" their children (Emphasis Mine, Deuteronomy 6:4-7). Unger and White note that the verb lays stress on, "Judaism's traditional emphasis on teaching and thus preserving its faith . . . found in the Old Testament, specifically Deut. 6:4-9."^{xix} They go on to note that the later Jewish term Talmud, meaning "instruction," is derived from the verb to teach.^{xx} The word "teach" is common in the Psalms indicating that one purpose of singing hymns was to—left brain—teach (See Psalm 60 superscription, "A *Mikhtam* of David, to teach"). So in the greatest of all commandments, the emphasis is on the left brain!

Second, to teach the nation of Israel, the Lord appointed first the priests, and then the prophets to that responsibility. In contrast to Levi, the first priest in whose mouth was "*the law of truth*," succeeding generations of priests failed to teach people the Law. The prophet Malachi indicted the priests of his era stating, "*For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*" (Emphasis mine, Malachi 2:7). To compensate for the failure of the priests, God raised up the

prophets. But having been desensitized to God's word by irresponsible priests and false prophets, Jeremiah described the response of the people to his prophetic ministry, "*And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction*" (Jeremiah 32:33, KJV).

In the same way, God gives pastor-teachers to the church to instruct so that the people may seek instruction from them. But it appears this whole teaching ministry has been preempted by a generation of pastors who, having been taken captive by a "touchy-feely" culture, and by-passing sound doctrinal preaching in order to meet the "felt needs" of their audiences that want what they want, no longer preach the Word. They may preach about the Bible, but they do not preach the Bible.

Third, Jesus referred to Himself and was called "*Teacher*" by others, even by His enemies (Matthew 10:24-25; Mark 10:17; Matthew 12:38). One cannot read the words of Jesus in the Gospels without noticing that He engaged the minds—the left brain—of His audiences, and that He commissioned His disciples to do the same in His absence.

Fourth, Jesus ordered His disciples to make disciples by "*teaching*." Jesus told them, "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Emphasis mine, Matthew 28:19-20). If a church is not a teaching church, then it is not a disciple making church. Personally, I believe this is why so many young people defect from the faith when they go off to college. Their churches have never really taught them God's cognitive truth. All they have offered them is emotional experiences.

Fourth, the apostle Paul was a teacher. One cannot read the book of Romans without noticing the great theology of the letter. In it, there's some heady truth! With its emphasis upon right-brain spirituality, is the user-friendly church missing Paul's message?

Fifth, the central gifts for the church's edification are those of "*teacher*" and "*pastor-teacher*." The risen and ascended Christ gave these gifts to the body of Christ so that it might come to, "*the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God . . . [and] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (i.e., 'teaching')" (Ephesians 4:11-14). The exercise of these gifts is consistent with the example of Jesus. Too, the exercise of these gifts is consistent not only with Paul's ministerial example, but also with his exhortation to Timothy to instruct the church (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 4:11; 6:2).

Right Ain't Right

This two-brained approach to spiritual maturity has led to doctrinal dyslexia. Many Christians can no longer discern left from right, truth from error. For example, many no longer believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to

get to heaven, and this in spite of His upfront statement, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me*” (John 14:4).^{xxi} How can such a defection from plain truth be accounted for? One pastor, past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, observes that the number of churches “who teach a clear doctrinal message are a minority today,” while another professor remarks that while overall people claim to be religious, “they have no command of theology, doctrine, or history.”^{xxii} Clearly, right-brained based spirituality has led to a dumbed-down version of the Christian faith. By way of contrast, Luke records that the early Christians “*were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching*” (Acts 2:42). When looked at in both testaments, the Bible appears to appeal to the left brain, doesn’t it?

By ignoring the Word the Holy Spirit inspired (2 Peter 1:21), and those He has gifted to minister that Word (1 Corinthians 12:11, 28), the right-brain emphasis short circuits the whole process of Christian growth. In the journey to spiritual maturity, **there can be no growing where there is no knowing** (Romans 6:3, 6, 9, 11). To put it bluntly and ungrammatically, “Spirituality stink when it no think!”

After stating that the primary appeal of the gospel is not to the emotions (that would be sentimentalism), or to the will (that would be legalism), D. Marytn Lloyd-Jones counseled,

The emotions and the will should always be influenced through the mind. Truth is intended to come through the mind. The normal course is for the emotions and the will to be affected by the truth after it has first entered and gripped the mind . . . this is a principle of Holy Scripture. The approach to the emotions and the will should be indirect. Still less should we ever bring any pressure to bear upon either the emotions or the will.^{xxiii}

Regardless whether it might feel good to us or not, the Bible is balanced. On the one hand the Psalms reflect the experience and emotion of those who probe the meaning of believing amidst the trials and struggles of life. But those feelings are invariably reigned in when the psalmist reflects upon the rock solid truth regarding who the Lord is and what He’s said. As a one poet expressed it,

Three men were walking on a wall—
Faith, Feeling and Fact.
 When *Feeling* got an awful fall
Faith was taken back.
 So close was *Faith* to *Feeling*,
 He stumbled and fell too.
 But *Fact* remained and pulled up
Faith,
 And *Faith* brought *Feeling* too.
 (Unknown Author)

Conclusion

Lamentably, the sensate church has been seduced by sights, sounds, and spectacles of spurious spirituality. There are so-called evangelical churches in which the majority of members do not believe that one, the Bible is the Word of God, and two, Jesus is the only way of salvation. Yet their celebrations continue unabated. For reason of their having had their feelings titillated, a majority of professing Christians have not been edified, seemingly for reason that they, for reason of having had sympathetic passions aroused within them, “consider themselves in a high and certain state of grace.”^{xxiv}

Presumptuously, in our worship we may offer to God so-called sacrifices of praise, but the overriding question is . . . does God accept them? As Carradine noted, we cannot “dodge behind some corporeal service and call that an offering.”^{xxv} It should not be supposed that He accepts our “sacrifices” if the celebrations are really for us, and not Him. As the Lord told Israel through Amos, “*I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols*” (Emphasis mine, Amos 5:21-23, KJV). Clearly for Israel of old, happiness did not translate into holiness, and neither does it for us.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Rev. Mr. Beverly Carradine, “Gideon,” *Master Christian Library* (Ages Software Version 8, Albany, Oregon, 1997) 18. Carradine’s life is explained by Gene A. Long, Time and Location Line of the Life of Rev. Beverly Carradine, (<http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/2401-2500/HDM2475.PDF>) 2005. He refers to Carradine as, “The Prince of Holiness Writers.”

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.* 18, 19.

ⁱⁱⁱ W.E. Vine, “Device,” *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984) 297. Granted, the word “device” (Greek, *enthumēsis*) is translated as possessing a mentalist meaning (i.e., “thought,” NASB; “imagination,” NRSV, NAB; “skill,” NIV; and “devising,” NKJV). But the diverse translations indicate it’s not certain how to handle the word. Like the word “desire” (Greek, *epithumia*), “device” (Greek, *enthumēsis*) is emotional at its base (“wrath,” Greek, *thumos*). Obviously, idolatry can be a passionate experience.

^{iv} “Aldous Huxley on Self-Transcendence,” *The Psychedelic Library* (<http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:3ltfJaOmgK4J:www.psychedelic-library.org/loudun.htm+aldous+huxley,+%22tom-toms%22&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>). The quote is taken from the Huxley’s book, *The Devils of Loudon* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), the Epilog of which is reproduced in its entirety on this site. Peter Webster summarizes that Huxley “writes here about self-transcendence and the various methods used in its pursuit.”

The caution to believing souls is obvious: Self-transcendence is a state of soul that can be mechanically induced, and in their cravings for anything supernatural, many churches employ drumming music to induce corporate states of self-transcendence

which the worshipping experientialists receive as a “sign” of real spirituality. All the while however, the self-transcendent ecstasy is but a selfish man-centered experience masquerading itself as the authentic thing.

On the other hand, genuine spirituality of soul in the Bible is characterized by a deep, abiding, and piercing conviction over sin which not only is self-transcendent—the contrite heart understands the being of God’s absolute holiness—but also is self-immanent—the convicted become acutely conscious of the sin resident within them. As Isaiah the prophets declared, “*Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*” (Isaiah 6:5; Compare Paul’s self-confessed state of soul in Romans 7:18-25.). But this is a pierced state of soul drumming music is designed to dull and blunt. After all, church is all about “getting all excited” and having “fun,” isn’t it?

^v In this regard, we note how Rick Warren once remarked that, “A song can touch people in a way a sermon can’t. Music can bypass intellectual barriers and take the message straight to the heart. It is a potent tool for evangelism.” See “Match the music to the people you want to reach: Three thoughts about music in worship,” *Pastors.com*, Rick Warren’s Ministry Tool Box, Issue #190, January 19, 2005.

^{vi} Robert L. Dabney, “Instrumental Music in Public Worship,” *Discussions*, Volume V, Edited by J.H. Varner (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1999) 332. As a point of historical note, Dabney’s wife was first cousin to the wife of Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson (1824-1863).

^{vii} Robert L. Dabney, “Spurious Religious Excitements,” *Discussions*, Volume III (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1996) 459.

^{viii} Vine, “Desire,” *Expository Dictionary*, 289.

^{ix} Robert L. Dabney, “Spurious Religious Excitements,” 459.

^x John MacArthur, Author and General Editor, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997) 1880.

^{xi} John Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (The Woodlands, Texas: Kress Christian Publications, 2009) 436.

^{xii} In this regard, we must note the popularity of the bestselling religious allegory, *The Shack*.

^{xiii} Paul Proctor, “America is not Prepared for What’s Coming,” *NewsWithViews.com*, February 24, 2009 (<http://www.newswithviews.com/PaulProctor/proctor174.htm>).

^{xiv} Robert L. Dabney, “Spurious Religious Excitements,” *Discussions*, Volume III (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1996) 469.

^{xv} On Purpose Associates, “Right Brain vs. Left Brain,” *Funderstanding* (<http://www.funderstanding.com/content/right-brain-vs-left-brain>).

^{xvi} Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church, Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) 340.

^{xvii} Alan Cairns, “Fideism,” *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Expanded Third Edition (Greenville, South Carolina: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002) 178. Norman L. Geisler, “Foreword” to Arthur L. Johnson, *Faith Misguided, Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1988) 10.

^{xviii} Norman L. Geisler, “Foreword” to Arthur L. Johnson, *Faith Misguided, Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1988) 10.

^{xix} Merrill F. Unger and William White, “To Teach,” *An Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984) 419.

^{xx} *Ibid.*

^{xxi} “Survey: My Way Isn’t the Only Way to Earn Salvation,” *The Indianapolis Star*, June 24, 2008, A1, A6.

^{xxii} *Ibid.*

^{xxiii} D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Conversions, Psychological and Spiritual* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1959) 39. Lloyd-Jones wrote this booklet to address issues raised by Dr. William Sargant (1907-1988) in his book, *Battle for the Mind*. Son of a Methodist minister, psychologist Sargant dismissed all conversions to be mechanically induced as experiments with Pavlov’s dog showed. As expected, Lloyd-Jones argues that such is not the case, *but* notes that Christians ought to avoid revival methods that invite the accusation that conversion can be accounted for reason of psychological inducements that are engineered below (Contra John 3:3, “*a man must be born from above*”). Nevertheless, as Dabney observed, “Doubtless, many ministers are unconsciously swayed by the natural love of excitement.” See Dabney, “Spurious Religious Excitements,” 471. And, like Aaron, many pastors will pragmatically stoop to any carnal means to stimulate excitement in the camp/church.

^{xxiv} Dabney, “Spurious Religious Excitements,” 468.

^{xxv} Rev. Mr. Beverly Carradine, “Church Entertainments,” *Master Christian Library* (Ages Software Version 8, Albany, Oregon, 1997) 60.

NOTE: This article ran as a recent 4-part series on our Herescope blog, where Pastor Larry DeBruyn is a frequent contributor and member of the Discernment Research Group. See:

<http://herescope.blogspot.com/2009/05/religious-excitements.html>

<http://herescope.blogspot.com/2009/06/excitements-idolatry.html>

<http://herescope.blogspot.com/2009/06/ecstasy-lusts-lies.html>

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