

TODAY'S WORSHIP: FLESHY OR SPIRITUAL?

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a drug-oriented society; every day thousands of young people become addicted to nicotine, others to harder drugs such as heroine, cocaine etc, and many more become addicted to alcohol. Addiction is a many sided problem caused by many different factors and it affects more people that is generally realized.

We have become accustomed to these addictions and the law enforcement agencies do what they can to fight illegal drugs. Laws are introduced in an effort to stop our people becoming ensnared with these things. Those who become addicted suffer in the most terrible way. For some it leads immorality and shame, for others it may lead to despair and suicide, whilst others have their lives shortened by respiratory, liver or heart disease, not to mention the various cancers that such abuse

encourages.

This brief paper, which in no way claims to be exhaustive is, however, designed to draw your attention to an addiction that has spiritual ramifications and eternal repercussions. The matter before us is that of non spiritual worship or at least one aspect that is of some major concern today, that being the contemporary or so-called Celebration Style worship, that has taken the place of the more traditional forms of Christian worship. It is not uncommon for churches to lose members to these so called contemporary forms of worship. The writer has been the victim of a number of such losses over the years. When asked why the people choose these modern forms, the answer is usually that the Celebration Style is more exciting, more dynamic, more stimulating.

It is the writer's proposition that, far from being of a spiritual nature most, if not all of these so-called acts of worship are, in fact nothing more than religious forms, of the excitement and thrill-seeking that is readily found in the world, particularly in the world of entertainment: fleshy thrills, given the respectable name of Christianity. When the Celebration Style worship of the pseudo-christian scene is compared with the concerts, celebrations and festivities of the world, there is little, if any difference between them, that is apart from the fact that the violence, drinking and drugs etc., that normally accompany non religious celebrations are noticeable absent, although it is the writers premise that addiction is present on a very large scale, yet it passes unnoticed although enjoyed by most of those who are present.

THE CRAVING FOR EXCITEMENT

It is this element of excitement that is the subject I wish to look at and within the limitation of this paper, to briefly analyze. Excitement according to the dictionary means to 'arouse, to inflame the spirits, to stimulate, to bring into activity.' Is it not this very thing that is the very essence of today's culture? Today, ordinary people are seeking more and more exciting things to do, some finding it in such pursuits as rock climbing or white water rafting, others in water or snow skiing. Bungee jumping is the thrill generating sport for the less weak hearted, as is the growing sport of jumping off buildings, along with free fall parachute jumping and hang gliding, to mention a few.

Not everyone can afford the thrill offered by these relatively expensive sports, but for those who need this type of adrenaline rush, the Fairground or Theme Park industry provides such things. They have developed rides that are as far removed from the original thrill giving helter-skelter. Today's rides include multiple loops, sheer drops and heart-stopping spins, all of which are given names that in themselves generate the idea of fear and excitement.

Others get their thrill by watching sports, the mania for soccer, horse racing, athletics etc, bring excitement into the lives of the fans. Then there is the newest of these thrill inducing activities, that of virtual reality, where a person can become a player in some bizarre computer generated game, and have all the excitement without the danger of getting hurt. The entire leisure industry is geared to supplying thrill after thrill, in as many different forms as it is possible for the fertile mind of man to conceive.

There is one area however, that outdoes all the other sensation seeking, thrill inducing pastimes and that is music and film industries, two industries must be included together as they are inseparable twins. One of the earliest silent movies, depicted a steam locomotive rushing headlong at the audience, causing a great thrill, even inducing fear in some. The excitement of these early movies was added to by the inclusion of piano music playing in conjunction with the action on the screen. It was the music rather than the scene being portrayed that set the excitement

level. Silent films without music are not the most thrilling things to watch, that is with the exception of the connoisseur who would disagree, but for most people, they are not very exciting.

From these rather tame films, we have moved on to films that are most violent, pornographic and physically graphic, each film trying to out do the other in these areas. Even the so called family films contain an increasing amount of tension filled situations and again the background music is a vital element in these productions, it continues to set the emotional mood.

However, it is the music industry that has the lion's share of the market. Billions of tapes both video and audio, together with discs are sold each year. It is said that "Music soothes the savage breast" whilst this may be true in some instances it is not always the case. In fact, music is the one great emotional mood changer, it is a medium that has a dramatic effect on the way we feel and indeed act. This is something that has been known by the armed forces for centuries, there is nothing like a good old patriotic military march to get soldiers ready for battle, to go over the top for their country. Military music tends to get even the most faint hearted of us standing up straight, with chest out, walking, if not marching, with an air of pride; it does something for and to us.

Other music may leave us weepy and sad, some makes us angry, whilst other such as Jazz, Ragtime, Rock and Roll along with Waltz time etc. give us the feeling of wanting to dance. No matter what the style music affects us, in some cases it is so bad we simply do not want to listen, it annoys us, yet still it has affected us. Some such as Rock, which emerged in the early nineteen fifties, has a detrimental effect on ones health, and is according to Dr. John Diamond, a well-known Australian Physician, "As addictive as drugs and as dangerous. It fragments our brain waves and weakens our muscles. It undermines our health, increases our aggression, and poisons our environment." In other words music is a very serious and powerful thing; it affects us and our moods at some level or another.

The point is this, the music that we enjoyed and which gave us a thrill twenty or thirty years ago, no longer satisfies or thrills, the popular music of past generations does not produce the excitement, the electrifying effect it once did. The Rock and Roll of the Beatles, Elvis Presley and other pop idols of the fifties and sixties simply has a nostalgic feel about it today, it does not bring about the rush it once did, the excitement and thrill is no longer there, more is needed.

The music that brought thousands to their feet in adulation of the musicians, simply brings polite applause, the concerts that turned to near riots are things of the past. Today it is heavy metal, heavy rock, synthesized music, flashing laser lights, added to which are video pictures, often of the most sensual kind, many bordering on the pornographic. It is this that now gives the young generation its thrill, its excitement, its daily fix of adrenalin. The entire music and entertainment industry is geared to satisfying an ever-growing demand for excitement for this thrill-seeking, fast-moving generation. What once satisfied no longer has that affect, something more is wanted to arrest our attention and capture our emotions and lift us to new heights of perception. The adrenaline rush is all part of the music package just as it is jumping out of an aircraft in free fall.

These are not the sole areas of excitement-inducing activities. Many people find their excitement quota in their daily work, of taking on and overcoming tough projects. Their thrill is overcoming the seemingly impossible, of making break through in the many fields of science, it is the thrill of the chase, even in the sterile rooms of a science laboratory. To some level most, if not all in the western world, are caught up or effected by the craving for excitement and the more we get the more we want, because the things that caused the excitement yesterday do not cause the required thrill today. In other words we are talking about addiction.

Once a person becomes hooked on these things, they will seek to obtain their fix through one or more of the many activities mentioned above. One of the things that we see and hear a lot about, particularly in the sporting environment, is the need to get 'psyched up' before the event. This includes both the mental preparation for the contest or conflict that is to take place, and the injection into the system of a high level of adrenaline. This makes the combatant feel good and invincible, so that he or she can take on the world and win.

What, you may be thinking, has all of this to do with Christian worship? Excitement is a feeling, a sensation, even the feeling of euphoria, the heightened sense of well-being; of having gained. This has spilled over into Christianity resulting in the craving for celebration type worship and all that this entails. No longer is worship something that is God-ward, it is now something that excites the flesh, therefore it is flesh-ward.

THE ADRENALINE RUSH

Adrenaline or, as it is otherwise known, epinephrine, is a hormone that is released from the inner part of the adrenal glands and once hooked on this hormone, the addict will seek to obtain his fix through the engagement of one or more of the many means available to him today that will release this hormone into the blood stream. The adrenal glands are situated on top of the kidneys and are part of the body's defence system. The hormone, adrenaline, is released from these glands when prompted by the 'sympathetic nervous system'. When pain, injury or danger is experienced, the sympathetic nervous system triggers the adrenal gland to release adrenaline, which in turn increases the heart rate, reduces the need for sleep and often produces the feeling of excitement and euphoria, as well a feeling of wellbeing. Adrenaline prepares the body either for flight or fight. It stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, when there is a perception of fear, excitement, exhilaration, and the need for action is imminent.

When a person engages in the afore-mentioned pastimes, there is in them all to a greater or lesser degree an adrenaline release, the feeling of excitement, and the pounding of the heart, what we might call the 'thrill of the chase.' This thrill may be produced by one's actual physical involvement in the activity, or passively by watching an activity, what we might call by proxy, such as in watching a football game.

It is possible to become addicted to the pleasurable feeling that adrenaline produces, which can happen two ways. First there is the psychological dependency, that is the excitement that adrenaline arousal produces; there is also the physical addiction that prolonged exposure to the hormone can produce. What happens to the adrenalin addict when the effects begin to wear off? As with any other chemical substance addiction, there is a withdrawal and different chemicals produce different symptoms. In the case of adrenalin withdrawal, the symptoms include the inability to remain still; there is restlessness, the inability to concentrate on a quiet restful activity such as doing a jig-saw puzzle or reading a book. Sometimes this withdrawal is accompanied by a feeling of depression, of being let down.

The writer can well remember a situation in which he found himself, which entailed a degree of public exposure through the Press in respect of some Christian activity. The press and many of the other Churches in the district were opposed to the Protestant stand that he was taking, and it became a matter of public debate, with the local Newspaper becoming involved. Initially, the exposure was painful, but as time went on the notoriety became both acceptable and even pleasant. When all the fuss died down, there followed a feeling of let down, of despondency and the need to somehow regenerate that situation which brought about the thrill and adrenaline rush.

Other symptoms that may occur when the body tries to return to its normal levels of adrenaline include headaches, diarrhoea, fatigue and a sense of anxiety. It is for these reasons that there is a continual thrust to perpetuate the activities that adrenaline stimulation produces.

THE ADDICTION ALSO AFFECTS PROFESSING CHRISTIANS AND WORSHIP

This is the main point of this paper. It was whilst pastoring his first church that the writer had a young family converted under his ministry, or at least this was the impression given. The parents were both baptized and gave testimony of their salvation. Things went well for a while, until the wife came across a book written by a leading Charismatic, who was advocating a second blessing, called the baptism of the spirit: this was to be accompanied by speaking in tongues together with signs and wonders.

The couple, with their family attended one of this man's meetings. They were excited by what they saw and felt, and very soon they became addicted, not so much to the doctrine being taught but to the feelings being generated, by the highly charged atmosphere, the expectation that something new and sensational would take place. It was not long before they were both speaking in tongues and engaging in the many unbiblical activities associated with this movement.

Very soon, the couple became dissatisfied with the traditional worship and Bible teaching of the Church. For them it had lost its ability to satisfy their need, its ability to make them feel good, the novelty had worn off. After a difficult period, they left the Bible-based fellowship and joined in with this new group, going from one extreme to another. No longer was their spiritual need being met by spiritual things such as prayer, Bible study and biblical worship. Their need had turned to physically induced excitement and thrill. Eventually the excitement the new religion originally gave them waned; it no longer gave them the rush it once did. It was not long before they left these new associations and started tampering with eastern mystical religions.

The above is an example of what is happening in many Christian circles: the question is why? In order to try and answer this, let us take a hypothetical example. A man is, for five days of the week, engaged in challenging work, as indeed was our aforementioned friend, during which time he enjoys a high degree of adrenaline arousal. For five days, he is to use a modern term "psyched up". Come the weekend, when he is away from this situation things begin to change, his removal from the source of arousal, precipitates a slow down and the adrenaline levels begin to drop as the body seeks to return to a normal state. The result is that a withdrawal begins to take place. However there are certain things that may keep the adrenaline at a level that has little, if any, noticeable affect maybe the football match, keeps things ticking over. Nevertheless, in an over-stimulated society such as ours, the absence of stimulation switches off the adrenaline flow, and the unpleasant side effects of withdrawal are soon manifesting themselves.

Come Sunday morning and time for Worship, the adrenaline is low, there is a craving for excitement, there is a need to restore the feelings known during the week. This is the day for Christians, when they meet together for Divine Worship, the problem is where does the adrenaline addict go? The point is this, the traditional worship service, does not cater for his need, traditional worship services are God oriented, they are quiet and reverent, focusing the mind on the Lord. The result is that the adrenaline addict finds the services boring and unexciting, the music and traditional hymns that have a sound Theological basis, having the effect of 'turning people off'. We will return to this point in a moment, for it is important that we understand a little about the biblical method of worship.

THE BIBLE CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

The biblical emphasis on worship is that of quietness, the stillness of heart and mind. It is true that there are some civil celebrations that are associated with a noise, physical arousal, festivities and celebration. However, when it comes to the act of worship, this is a spiritual and not a physical matter. In fact, the Lord Himself tells us very plainly that because God is Spirit we are to Worship Him in spirit and in truth and, of course, in the beauty of holiness. Worship is a solemn act of reverence and adoration. Scripture associates worship of God with repose and serenity, not with noise and physical arousal.

There are many examples that may be quoted, for example Psalm 46:10 encourages us to *“be still and know that I am God.”* In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, we are exhorted to *“Study to be quiet.”* In the Old Testament we have the great example of Elijah before the Prophets of Baal; he did not get excited, did not tear around singing and dancing, but quietly got on with the work that glorified God. The noise, the excitement, the Adrenaline rush came from the ungodly prophets, not the man of God. A little later we find this same man hidden in a cave, depressed in fear of his life, feeling sorry for himself, thinking that he alone was left faithful to the Lord. Here the Lord communicated with him, not in wind, fire or earthquake, but in a still small voice.

Then, what about the Sabbath day? This is a day of rest: rest from the normal busy everyday things. The word Sabbath has the meaning of resting, or repose, of sitting still, being quiet, of cessation of activity, excitement and work, of quietude of heart and mind. This all suggests something very different from the noise, excitement and activity of much that goes under the name of worship on the Lord's Day today.

TRADITIONAL WORSHIP SERVICES BORING!

With this biblical concept in mind we must return to the proposition that the adrenaline addict finds traditional worship services boring. In the traditional service there is very little that excites the flesh, this has to be admitted. However, we must ask, are we in church simply to satisfy the flesh? The answer is “no”. We are here to worship Almighty God and we are to do so in a way that is acceptable to Him, in spirit, in truth and in holiness.

On Sunday morning in a traditional Bible based Church Service, the adrenaline addict, now in the early stages of withdrawal, will find it difficult if not impossible to remain still and relatively quiet for an hour. There is a craving for excitement and the traditional hymns do not stimulate the adrenal gland, neither are the Bible readings and prayers designed for this purpose. In fact, divine worship is designed to subdue the flesh, centring minds, souls and bodies of the Living God, for once in seven days man is not to be the centre of attention, his needs and desires are secondary. God is central.

The reflex action of the adrenaline addict is to seek under the respectful guise of divine worship, in spiritual devotion a form of activity that will act as a stimulus, whilst at the same time being seen as an act of Christian worship. In other words the need for the stimulation of the adrenal gland is the mandate for the type of worship to be engaged in: something that gives the gland the required kick start, that will produce the feelings of excitement and euphoria that the mind and body is demanding.

This physical need is being met today by the Charismatic movement in its many untraditional, sensational-type meetings, meetings that are designed to produce a festival, celebration-type atmosphere. This type of atmosphere is not difficult to generate when believers get together in larger than normal crowds. In these conditions the music often in the form of Rock, the

repetitious singing of choruses that have little, if any, theological basis, and which are generally man-oriented. In addition to this, the music is dominated by synthesizers, drums and guitars, mediums used by the contemporary culture of the world.

Added to these factors is the man-centred preaching, all of which combined has the desired effect of exciting the individual. Oftentimes these meetings are accompanied with the promise of healings or other signs and wonders, including the speaking in tongues, prophecy and dancing, all of which add to the exhilaration, excitement and expectation. An important question needs to be asked here why speak in tongues? Is it for God's glory? The answer is no, it is for the glory of man: the same applies to so-called prophetic utterances.

This caters to the adrenaline addict's need and switches on the adrenaline flow, resulting in the desired feelings of euphoria. These sensations may be far removed from that experienced during the work week, but nevertheless the hormone is released and is satisfying the fleshly craving. These things have little if anything to do with the worship of Almighty God, but that does not matter; the flesh has been satisfied, it has had its shot and it can be called, to all intents and purposes worship.

It should be pointed out that there is nothing wrong with having a celebration, there is not a red-blooded person in the world that does not enjoy such a thing, but celebration is not worship. Celebration in the Bible was the spontaneous reaction to the special providences of God; such events should never be equated or confused with the worship of Almighty God. An example of this is to be found in the book of Exodus, when Almighty God led Israel out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, Exodus 15:20-21 *"And Miriam the prophetess, and the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and rider hath He thrown into the sea."* This is not to be understood as a norm for worship, for it is not worship in the normal and acceptable sense. This is the spontaneous response to God's providential grace. In general, Celebration has to do with civil and cultural affairs, other examples may be found in Genesis 31:27, Exodus 15:20, Judges 11:34, 1 Samuel 10:15 and 18:6, 1 Chronicles 13:8, Job 21:12, Psalm 81:2, 149:3 and 150:4, to mention just a few.

In these celebrations, Israel takes up the typical forms of the world and culture, in order to celebrate specific events of God's provision, mercy or deliverance. These events are very different from the formal worship instituted by God and regulated by Him through the Mosaic law and priesthood. True biblical worship today is also governed by God, through what is called the Regulative Principle. Celebration and worship are, therefore, two very different things and certainly celebration will have the affect of arousing the adrenaline flow, because it is directed and conditioned by the flesh and the systems, at least in part, of the world. The Celebration form of worship adopts its ideas and concepts from the world and is therefore worldly, it is of the earth it is not of heavenly origin, even though the event that prompts the spontaneous celebration is.

Much of the so-called contemporary worship is little more than Christianized entertainment, the music employed being very little different, if at all, from that of the world. Thirty or forty years ago Christian music was noticeably different from that of the music hall and night club. There was a reverence about it, and the word was both readily understood and had meaning and application. Today, there is little, if any, distinction between contemporary music and non-Christian music: contemporary Christian music, with its sensual sound and rock beat that encourages and even demands applause is in itself, indicative of the man-centeredness of the so-called worship engaged in.

The same principle applies to many of the so-called preachers and teachers of this movement. In

some cases, there is little if any difference between them and the stand up comedian or Chat Show and Game Show Hosts of the entertainment world. They dress the same, they act the same, and they speak the same and even look the same. The messages presented, rather than eliciting repentance and godliness, elicit applause and admiration for the man, none of which should come as any surprise to us when we consider that they are employing the techniques of the world and emulating their worldly counterparts, from the modern methods of communication were derived.

These things may also be seen in the mass meetings of many of the modern evangelists, where worshippers get a massive adrenaline rush from the excitement that is generated. Unfortunately, this very physical thing is being identified as spiritual and as being the work of the Holy Spirit.

The fact is that adrenaline addiction is extremely deceptive and rather than encouraging spiritual growth and development has an adverse affect. There is a very real danger of the adrenaline addict, becoming dependant on the hormone for the good feelings of living, and in so doing confusing spirituality with adrenaline arousal. In other words the person does not feel spiritual unless first stimulated by adrenaline. The consequence is that the proper work of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by the work of the adrenal gland. For, unless there is an adrenaline stimulation, there is little if any desire to worship God.

There is therefore a real need in the Church to be able to clearly differentiate between the two different concepts and seek to return to true spiritual worship on the Lord's Day. Worship is not a fleshly or earthy thing; it is heavenly and it is not induced by a chemical reaction, that produces in us nice feelings, but by the Holy Spirit of God, who directs through His Word as to what and how we are to worship the Lord our God. We need, therefore, to study the Scriptures in order that we might once again return to true spiritual God centred worship in the Churches.