



STATEMENT DP-244-4

THE COUNTERFEIT REVIVAL (Part Four): Modern-Day Mesmerists

by Hank Hanegraaff

Summary

What Counterfeit Revival leaders attribute to the anointing of God is far better explained by the old and pervasive principles of hypnotism. Whether referred to as hypnotists, Holy Ghost bartenders, or Hindu gurus, today's "mesmerists" all employ similar methods and obtain similar results. Counterfeit Revival leaders work their subjects into altered states of consciousness, manipulating them through peer pressure, exploitation of expectations, and the subtle power of suggestion. Ultimately, revival mesmerists convince their followers that reality can be reduced to a personal experience of enlightenment, leading them into severe spiritual deception.

In the 19th century itinerant "mesmerists" bedazzled the common folk in American towns with their mysterious powers of suggestion.

In a fascinating recollection of his teenage experiences with such a mesmerist (c. 1850), American humorist Mark Twain describes sitting on a platform with several other townspeople while the mesmerist/magician attempted to entrance them. One of these local citizens, a man named Hicks, succumbed dramatically and complied with the mesmerist's every suggestion. Twain, however, felt nothing. The young Twain resented the attention and admiration the citizenry lavished on Hicks for his antics on the stage. Twain recalls:

On the fourth night temptation came and I was not strong enough to resist. When I had gazed at the disk a while I pretended to be sleepy and began to nod. Straightaway came the professor and made passes over my head and down my body and legs and arms, finishing each pass with a snap of his fingers in the air to discharge the surplus electricity; then he began to "draw" me with the disk, holding it in his fingers and telling me I could not take my eyes off it, try as I might; so I rose slowly, bent and gazing, and followed that disk all over the place, just as I had seen the others do. Then I was put through the other paces. Upon suggestion I fled from snakes, passed buckets at a fire, became excited over hot steamboat-races, made love to imaginary girls and kissed them, fished from the platform and landed mud cats that outweighed me — and so on, all the customary marvels. But not in the customary way. I was cautious at first and watchful, being afraid the professor would discover that I was an impostor and drive me from the platform in disgrace; but as soon as I realized that I was not in danger, I set myself the task of terminating Hicks's usefulness as subject and of usurping his place.¹

Twain so succeeded at convincing the audience that he was under the mesmerist's spell that even 35 years later, when he confessed his chicanery to his own mother, she refused to believe him.

MESMERISM TODAY

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Today's "mesmerists" operate not only in carnivals but also in churches and communes. Whether they are referred to as hypnotists, Holy Ghost bartenders,² or Hindu gurus, the methods they employ have much in common.

First, they all work their subjects into altered states of consciousness. Second, each of them uses peer pressure to conform followers to predictable patterns. Third, they depend heavily on expectations. Fourth, the power of suggestion is pivotal to their performance.

Cynics may write off the use of *altered states of consciousness*, *peer pressure*, *expectations*, and the *suggestions* of hypnotists, Holy Ghost Bartenders, and Hindu gurus as sociopsychological manipulation. Christians, however, must comprehend an even more significant threat — these manipulation techniques are fertile soil for satanic and spiritual deception.

Such manipulation tactics pose a threat so significant that I've developed the acronym A-P-E-S to facilitate remembering and resisting them. The A represents *Altered States of Consciousness*; the P, *Peer Pressure*; the E, *Expectations*; and the S, *Suggestibility*.

As the father of eight children, I have made countless trips to the zoo. It's always humorous to see my kids mimicking the movements of the various mammals they encounter. It really gets hysterical when we get to the apes. They are as likely to mimic my kids as my kids are to mimic them! The apes "ape" the kids, the kids "ape" the apes, and my wife, Kathy, and I end up breathless with laughter.

What is not particularly funny, however, is that despite the peril, evangelical pastors and parishioners worldwide are now "aping" the practices of pagan spirituality. Before looking at the crisis this has caused within Christianity, it is critical that we first gain a perspective on the history of hypnotism.

THE HISTORY OF HYPNOTISM

Back in the 18th century *Franz Anton Mesmer* (1734-1815) — a Viennese physician who moved his practice to France — caused people to laugh, fall into trances, and jerk spasmodically by simply gesturing in their direction. Popularly referred to as "the Wizard from Vienna," Mesmer, from whose name the word *mesmerize* is derived, earned other appellations as well:

He has been called the father of psychotherapy as well as of Christian Science, the discoverer of hypnosis, the progenitor of clairvoyance, telepathy and communication with the beyond; and he has been denigrated as a rogue, a charlatan, an arrogant pursuer of social and monetary favor, a meretricious magician. In his day it was asserted that he had sold his soul to the devil. More subtly, he has been cast as a visionary who unwittingly stumbled upon a discovery the value of which he was not able to see.³

He promulgated the principle that a magnetic force emanated from his hands, enabling him to direct the actions and thoughts of subjects.

Even those who questioned Mesmer's motives admitted that the impact he had on patients was dramatic. Their convulsions were reported as "extraordinary for their number, their duration, and their force."⁴ By simply pointing a finger dramatically in the direction of one patient, "she moved convulsively as if in great pain and arched her body from shoulders to feet into a rigid position until he released her."⁵

Two royal commissions investigating "Mesmerism" in 1784 reported that the convulsions of Mesmer's patients were "marked by violent, involuntary movements of the limbs and the whole body, by constriction of the throat, by throbbing in the chest and nausea in the stomach, by rapid blinking and crossed eyes, by piercing cries, tears, hiccups and uncontrollable laughter."⁶

Among the testimonials sent by Mesmer to the Royal Society of Medicine was that of an army officer named Charles du Hussay, who suffered from a number of physical symptoms such as fever, nervous trembling, and partial paralysis. After being treated by Mesmer, he wrote, "I know nothing of the means used by Dr. Mesmer. However I can say in all candor that, without treating me with drugs or any other remedy than what he calls animal magnetism, he caused me to feel powerful sensations from head to foot."⁷ Charles du Hussay went on to testify that after feeling

the sensations of intense cold that caused his body to feel as if it were turning to ice and heat that caused him to sweat profusely, he was completely healed of his infirmities.

Early in his career Mesmer maintained that he could heal people by means of metal magnets. By 1775, however, his beliefs had undergone a metamorphosis. He now maintained that his healing prowess was the result of an indwelling force he referred to as "animal magnetism." So convinced was Mesmer of the validity of his method that he wanted to teach it to the clergy of his day. In countries such as Germany, magnetism became so popular that by the early 19th century Berlin physicians had erected a monument to Mesmer and theology students were trained in the treatment of diseases through the use of animal magnetism.⁸

In time the belief that certain people could exercise influence over others by means of the indwelling force of animal magnetism was largely discredited. Yet the manifestations that Mesmer and his successors produced in their subjects could not be dispensed with as easily. The manifestations came to be viewed, not as the result of Mesmer's magnetism, but as the result of mental manipulation.

The person most responsible for this shift in perspective from mesmerism to modern hypnotism was an English doctor named *James Braid* (1795-1860). The manifestations that Mesmer attributed to the "doctrine of animal magnetism," Braid attributed to the "doctrine of suggestion." The primary difference between Mesmer and Braid was one of perspective. Mesmerists believed that through an indwelling force called animal magnetism they could cause their subjects to experience such manifestations as uncontrollable laughter and spasmodic jerking. Hypnotists, on the other hand, believed that the manifestations experienced by their subjects were not the results of a power residing in the hypnotist, but rather the results of a heightened state of suggestibility that a subject experienced while in a hypnotic trance.

Braid discovered that through mental manipulation he could alter a patient's perspective to such an extent that he was able to perform surgical procedures that were virtually painless. By deliberately inducing his subjects to fall into a sleeplike altered state of consciousness, they became extraordinarily responsive to suggestion. Braid termed this sleep state *hypnosis*.⁹

While Braid has been credited with coining the term "hypnosis," the phenomenon itself can be traced to virtually every culture, civilization, and century. As one writer observed, "It is as common in Polynesia today as it was at the fortune-telling shrines of ancient Greece and Rome."¹⁰

In recent history pseudo-Christian cults have seized on the principles of hypnotism to advance their pernicious principles and practices. J. Gordon Melton underscores this reality by correctly associating mesmerism (hypnotism) with the mind science cults:

Mesmerism was developed into a new healing system by Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), a professional mesmerist who felt that many diseases could be cured by suggestion and were therefore essentially illusory. Eventually drawing the conclusion that all diseases are illusory, Quimby in 1859 began teaching the system that he called Science of Christ, Science of Health, and occasionally Christian Science.¹¹

What has been commonplace in cultic systems such as Christian Science is today becoming commonplace in the Christian church as well. Like Gnostics in the second and third century, many who claim the name of Christ are taking a trip beyond Christianity into the world of the occult. Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival are convincing them that reality can be reduced to a personal experience of enlightenment — a transformation of consciousness that will initiate them into "true spirituality."

ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

As we move into an examination of the "A" in the acronym A-P-E-S, we would do well to note the comments of Dr. Charles Tart, who has been credited with coining the term "altered states of consciousness" (ASC). Tart says during deep hypnosis "a transition to a new state of consciousness" takes place, a state in which the hypnotized subject's identity "is potentiality, he's aware of everything and nothing, his mind is absolutely quiet, he's out of time, out of space."¹²

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As we will see, leaders of the Counterfeit Revival use a wide variety of techniques to work followers into altered states of consciousness. One of the most disarming methods used is to sing one song over and over until participants finally lose touch with reality.

Counterfeit Revival leader Rick Joyner confessed that at one of his conferences participants sang one song "for over three hours."¹³ As a result, he said, "the gulf between heaven and earth had somehow been bridged."¹⁴

Joyner reports that "when that one song finally ended, some of the musicians were lying on the floor." Says Joyner,

I looked at Christine Potter and Susy Wills, who were dancing near the center of the stage and I have never seen such a look of terror on the faces of anyone. An intense burning, like a nuclear fire that burns from the inside out, seemed to be on the stage. Christine started pulling at her clothes as if she were on fire, and Susy dove behind the drums. Then a cloud appeared in the center of the stage, visible to everyone, and a sweet smell like flowers filled the area.¹⁵

Leaders like Joyner see the human mind as a lower form of consciousness. Thus, like Eastern gurus, they work their devotees into altered states of consciousness. Joyner, in fact, says "experience is a much better teacher than words."¹⁶

In stark contrast, Dr. Elizabeth Hillstrom warns that altered states of consciousness can be an open invitation for demonic deception:

Having largely set aside their ability to think rationally and critically or to exercise their will, they have become hypersuggestible, which means that they are likely to accept any "spiritual truth" that enters their minds. Even more remarkably, they seemed to be primed for mystical experiences and may attach great spiritual significance to virtually any event or thought, no matter how mundane or outlandish. Seeking mystical experiences through altered states, as defined here, looks like an open invitation for deception.¹⁷

Arnold Ludwig, writing in Tart's *Altered States of Consciousness*, confirms that when "a person enters or is in an ASC, he often experiences fear of losing his grip on reality."¹⁸ A classic illustration is provided by best-selling neopagan author Lynn Andrews. As she progressed into a trance state she believed she was going insane: "I was terrified. I began to inhale great breaths of air, gasping. I sobbed uncontrollably. I had finally done it — I had lost my mind."¹⁹

Offending the Mind

Whether in the ashrams of cultists or at the altars of churches, the objective of achieving an altered state of consciousness is always the same: to dull the critical thinking process because the mind is seen as the obstacle to enlightenment. As John Wimber and John Arnott put it, "God offends the mind to reveal the heart."²⁰

Counterfeit Revival guru Rodney Howard-Browne explains that "you can't understand what God is doing in these meetings with an analytical mind. The only way you're going to understand what God is doing is with your heart."²¹ Thus, while Howard-Browne allows his subjects to make nonsensical sounds, he has often prohibited them from praying. On one occasion, as a woman was about to lapse into an altered state of consciousness, she became apprehensive and called out to God in prayer. Immediately Howard-Browne commanded her to cease. "Would you listen to me?" he shouted indignantly. "If your praying had helped, it would've helped you; now get laughing."²²

Even while people are lined up waiting to receive his touch, Howard-Browne commands them not to pray: "Now people in the lines, wait for me to come and lay hands on you, and don't pray, please don't pray." He addresses those who insist on praying as "stubborn people," adding, "People come trying to be all serious and praying. No! This is not the time to pray. This is not a prayer meeting; get in the joy; you can pray on the way home."²³

Like Rodney Howard-Browne and leaders of the Counterfeit Revival, the late Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh denigrated the mind, going so far as to say that the "goal is to create a new man, one who is happily mindless."²⁴ Rajneesh's experiences "on the road to enlightenment produced temporary insanity, possession, and almost killed him."²⁵

Dynamic Meditation

Rajneesh's prescription for attaining this new consciousness was a process referred to as "dynamic meditation," which was used to subjugate the critical faculties of idealistic devotees to the will of the "Master." They chanted mindlessly in unison until the hushed moaning of their mantras filled the ashram. Sanskrit songs of praise were sung to the accompaniment of rhythmic clapping. At the subtle suggestions of the "Master," they engaged in repetitive physical motions to complete the process of becoming mindless. Some jumped up and down furiously and chopped their hands frantically through the air. Others threw their heads backward and forward violently and bent wildly at the waist. Alternately they laughed and sobbed uncontrollably. Their frenzied behavior produced a mind-altering form of hyperventilation that dulled their critical thinking processes and emptied their minds of coherent thought. In the end they personified Rajneesh's rendition of the "mindless man."

As shocking as it may seem, what was once relegated to the ashrams of cults is now replicated at the altars of churches. In the ashrams of the cults there is no pretense. Despite such dangers as spirit possession or insanity, Hindu gurus openly encourage trance states through which devotees tap into occult realms and discover their "higher selves." Whether they experience involuntary movements or encounter illusory monsters, all is written off as progress on the road to enlightenment.

When Jack Kornfield, a Western psychologist seeking Eastern enlightenment, suddenly and involuntarily began flapping his arms like chicken's wings for two solid days, he was simply instructed to contemplate his experience.²⁶ When followers of the Counterfeit Revival have even more bizarre experiences, they are seduced into believing that they have simply overdosed on the Holy Ghost.

What Eastern gurus like Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh characterize as a trance state, Holy Ghost bartenders like Rodney Howard-Browne characterize as being "drunk in the Spirit." John Arnott is even more crass. He calls it being "marinated in the Holy Spirit."²⁷

Southern Baptist pastor Bill Ligon claims that God is directly responsible for this condition of "spiritual drunkenness." According to Ligon, God told him, "I have to get My people drunk in My Spirit because they have been drunk on the world. Their minds have been polluted, they feed their doubts — there is no confidence in Me and My power. I have to get them so drunk that I can change their thoughts and their attitudes."²⁸

Striking Parallels

When I first visited the Anaheim Vineyard, the drunken behavior of devotees instantly reminded me of Rajneesh's ashram. The late John Wimber's daughter, Stephanie, stood at the altar, testifying that the power of God was upon her as she jerked spasmodically in what her father referred to as a chicken walk. It wasn't long before others had joined her in jerking while rhythmic clapping and repetitive choruses filled the auditorium with sound.

Before the evening had ended, the crowd was engaged in the same practices Rajneesh devotees used to achieve their altered states of consciousness. Some were jumping up and down furiously, chopping their hands frantically through the air. Others were violently throwing their heads backward and forward and bending wildly at the waist. One woman looked as though an invisible hand had grabbed her and was shaking her as if she were little more than a rag doll. All the while, sardonic laughter punctuated by animal noises rose eerily from the bodies writhing on the ground.

Later, when I visited the Airport Vineyard in Toronto (now the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship), the sights and sounds I experienced were even more shocking. One of the participants was in such a profound altered state of consciousness that even when people tripped over him on the way to the restroom, he remained oblivious.

Counterfeit Revival leader John Arnott says people are acting "like lions and oxen and eagles and even warriors."²⁹ Arnott admits that these experiences deeply frighten people, but maintains they are divine rather than demonic. The problem, according to Arnott, is that we have been conditioned to believe "that the Holy Spirit's a gentleman" who would never do anything "rough or impolite." That, says Arnott, is simply "not true!"³⁰

Counterfeit Revival leader Wes Campbell recalls that during a Wimber Vineyard conference a man named David was merely playing the piano when suddenly "he was seized by the Spirit like a rag doll and just shaken and

bounced like a jackhammer, violently...and then he was thrown to the ground, just thrown to the ground...his glasses were knocked off, his nose was pushed to the side, his ears pinned...."³¹

Campbell says this encounter was so violent that David had to be taken to a back room to be checked for demons.³² During a subsequent meeting, David again was supposedly decked by the divine: "Next thing this big — it's like the fist of God just comes right down on his head and goes bang! right on his head. I saw his whole head just snap...."³³

When God suddenly seized Campbell's wife, he was so scared that he started screaming. For the first six months, Campbell says, "I was scared to go home with her at night!...the slightest thing would set her off."³⁴ The behavior of the Holy Spirit was so out of control that, as Campbell puts it, "we didn't want to let Him out of the back room."³⁵

Center Stage

Today what was once relegated to the "back room" is center stage in the Counterfeit Revival. Thousands testify to "getting drunk" and personally experiencing powerful psychological and physical manifestations. These experiences are so "real" that many key evangelical Christian leaders are convinced that they cannot be explained apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tragically, many of these leaders are dangerously ignorant of the striking parallels between their experiences and those of Eastern meditators who achieve altered states of consciousness through occult practices. As has been well documented from studies of the world of the occult, the dangerous effects may involve depression, detachment, depersonalization, disillusionment, and many equally serious disorders.

In addition to pain, meditators may sense energy flows coursing through their bodies, or feel tingling, tickling, itching, or vibration on their skin. These sensations usually begin in the feet or pelvic area and move up the back and neck to the crown of the head, then down across the face and abdomen.

Meditators may experience extreme heat or cold, and find their bodies making strange involuntary movements — muscle twitches, prolonged trembling or sinuous writhing....The automatic movements of the body may be accompanied by spontaneous crying, laughing, screaming or whistling. Other common involuntary behaviors include speaking in tongues, chanting unknown songs and making a variety of animal sounds and movements.³⁶

In addition to these physical manifestations, Dr. Elizabeth Hillstrom warns of profound psychological disturbances as well:

Emotions swing wildly from ecstasy, bliss and peace to intense fear, depression, anxiety and anger. Thoughts become strange and irrational, and experiencers may slip into dissociative or prolonged trance states. They may feel very alienated and confused, and often seem to be watching the things that are happening to them as if they were outside observers. Not surprisingly, experiencers often fear that they are losing their minds.³⁷

God is not obligated to protect people from the consequences of unbiblical behavior. Whether someone works himself or herself into an altered state of consciousness in a cult or in the church, the destructive effects are the same. Nonetheless, Counterfeit Revival leaders like John Arnott have been unwilling to reconsider their destructive doctrines and practices. Instead, they have become masters at employing peer pressure to maintain their current following as well as to attract new followers.

THE PREDICTABLE PATTERNS OF PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure is such a powerful force that even the threat of physical or psychological pain does not always prove to be a sufficient deterrent. Moreover, many who fall prey to the Counterfeit Revival are not moved in the least when its deceptions are exposed. The peer pressure that caused them to participate in the first place often keeps them from acknowledging that they were willing participants in a spiritual lie.

A well-known charismatic leader participated in a Benny Hinn television extravaganza. Hinn was "slaying" his subjects "in the Spirit" when suddenly he moved in this man's direction. Hinn stretched forth his hand and shouted, "In the mighty name of Jesus!" Immediately the man fell backward into the hands of a designated "catcher."

Later the man confessed that his experience had nothing to do with the power of God. Peer pressure had caused him to fake his fall. Revealingly, when he asked a cameraman to edit out the faked fall, the cameraman merely chuckled and told him it was common for people to fake it.

Like Hinn, leaders of the Counterfeit Revival use peer pressure to conform their prospects to predictable patterns. They urge them to follow the crowd rather than considering the consequences. John Arnott, for example, tells his prospects that the greatest deception is not false doctrine but being among those who fail to recognize a move of God. In the United Kingdom he told followers,

If you're going to be concerned about deception, then please be concerned about the greatest deception that there is, and the greatest deception of all, in my opinion, is not to fall for teachings of a false prophet or fall for some, you know, wild goose chase of a rabbit trail out there or whatever and wake up in ten years that you've been deceived. In my opinion the greatest deception of all is to have a move of God come through and you not recognize it.³⁸

The Power of Peer Pressure

Arnott and his associates have carefully crafted their worship services to enhance the likelihood that Christians will cave in to the power of peer pressure. They kick off their meetings with the testimonies of those who allegedly once feared deception but now embrace the exotic experiences of the Counterfeit Revival as a genuine move of God. The "time of testimony" is followed by a "time of teaching" designed to further pressure people to work themselves into an altered state of consciousness. The grand finale is a "time of ministry" in which virtually anything goes. The peer pressure to participate during the ministry time is so potent that even otherwise discerning Christians often end up casting caution to the wind.

During the "time of testimony," pastors and participants routinely testify that once they were blinded by the devil but now their eyes have been opened. Once they doubted that God could be involved in such bizarre manifestations as believers pawing the ground like an angry bull, but now they "know" experientially that God often moves in mysterious ways.

Often, as the initiated give their testimonies, they model the effects of the manifestations. Recall that while Stephanie Wimber was testifying to the power of God upon her life, she was bending violently at the waist. It wasn't long before people in the pews were mimicking her strange behavior.

Stephanie Wimber's testimony gave way to a time of teaching. As she walked back to her seat (still bending at the waist), a Vineyard pastor began reciting his rendition of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. He hammered home the notion that there were two categories of believers: the initiated and the uninitiated. Before God knocked Paul off his horse, he was an uninitiated Pharisee. Thereafter he joined the ranks of those who had experienced the power of God firsthand.

The pastor's message was cleverly designed to pressure people into becoming initiated like the great apostle Paul, rather than remaining uninitiated like the apostate Pharisees. The "time of testimony" and the "time of teaching" place enormous peer pressure on people to participate during the "time of ministry."

Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival seem well aware that people in crowds are prone to believe that the behavior of their peers is a standard that should not be questioned. They further reinforce this proclivity by intimating that to resist these manifestations is tantamount to resisting the Holy Spirit.

According to Larry Randolph, speaking at the Toronto Airport Vineyard, "the neutral ground is dissipating by the hour. You can't stand in the middle anymore and say, 'Well I don't know. Maybe it's God, maybe it's not.' You're going to get rolled over."³⁹ In Randolph's estimation, the song the Holy Spirit is now singing is, "I'm a Steam Roller, Baby. And I'm Going to Roll Right over You."⁴⁰

THE EXPLOITATION OF EXPECTATIONS

As proficient as leaders of the Counterfeit Revival are in using peer pressure as a means of psychological manipulation, they are equally expert in elevating the expectations of followers. Subjects are systematically programmed to believe they are poised to take over the sociopolitical systems of society.

According to Arnott, God is about to exact vengeance on His adversaries and restore the church to its proper place. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," he muses, "if the Lord would start to move in power and restore the church to its proper place and make us the head and not the tail?"⁴¹

Counterfeit Revival leader Bob Jones suggests that the star status of the leaders of this endtime church will be even greater than that of the apostle Paul. Despite the fact that Paul, under divine inspiration, penned two-thirds of the New Testament epistles, Jones tells devotees, "Paul will be more anxious to talk to the endtime apostles and prophets than the endtime apostles and prophets will be to talk to Paul, because what the prophets of this generation will do will be far greater than what he had done. The saints in the New Testament will wait in line to greet the apostles of this generation."⁴²

Subjects are led to believe that if they enlist in "Joel's endtime army" these promises will become living reality. Paul Cain claims that this army will be so potent and powerful that "no demon, no man system, no enemy will stop them or hinder or resist them."⁴³

Cain elevates expectations to a fever pitch. He assures devotees that they will be "invincible"; that God is offering them a "greater privilege than was ever offered to any people of any generation at any time from Adam clear down through the end of the millennium"; and that they are "gonna have more than just a little omnipotent surge — you're gonna behold that glory and become that glory."⁴⁴

What Cain prophesied as the "greatest revival of all times,"⁴⁵ Randy Clark claims is now reality. He tells credulous Christians that "people are being raised from the dead and temples [are] being hit by lightning or fireballs and knocked off their things [sic]. It's all over. Germany and Africa. It's everywhere. God's doing it."⁴⁶

More "Evangelastic" Stories

Clark and Cain are not alone in circulating "evangelastic" stories. Rick Joyner, for example, elevates expectations by telling the faithful that "an eight foot by ten to twelve foot size mist" suddenly appeared in one of their meetings. He claims that this experience was so vivid that one of the women present, Christine Potter, not only saw "this cloud of the Lord" but also felt "an intense heat, as though her clothes were on fire." According to Joyner, Christine was so hot it "looked like she was trying to remove her clothes in order to escape being burned."⁴⁷

The evangelastic stories used to enhance the expectations of believers are now becoming so bizarre that it is a wonder that anyone still takes them seriously. *Charisma* magazine, for example, has circulated a story titled "'Holy Water' Triggers Healing Revival."⁴⁸ Followers of the Counterfeit Revival were told that plain old bottled water, when "blessed" by a charismatic bishop, was suddenly transformed into "miracle water."⁴⁹ Those who drank this miracle water not only were so mightily touched that they "fell down under the power of God," but also were miraculously healed of such ailments as "cancer, tumors and heart disease." Millions are reportedly hearing about the miracle water from secular sources. Among them are "prominent politicians, celebrities and doctors," all attempting to acquire some of the miracle agua for themselves.

Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival seem to bank on the fact that expectations aroused by stories such as *Charisma's* "miracle water" or Clark's "resurrections" can give birth to a broad range of mystical experiences. When they "slay" subjects "in the spirit," they apparently understand that the expectations of their followers will give birth to the experience itself.

By way of illustration, almost everyone reading these words can successfully navigate the length of a common wooden plank resting on the ground. Suspend that same wooden plank between the twin spires of a cathedral and you have an entirely different proposition. The fact that you are now suspended hundreds of feet in the air naturally introduces the anticipation of a possible fall. The notion of falling easily gives rise to the fall itself.

Creating a Miracle

Another classic case of expectations giving birth to experiences can be found in the story of a young Bronx boy named Joseph Vitolo. In his book, *The Story of Hypnosis*, Robert W. Marks recounts that in 1945 nine-year-old Joseph was kneeling on a rock in an empty lot when he saw a vision of the Virgin Mary. Mary promised Joseph that she would appear on successive nights and that a miraculous spring would emerge from the ground on the night of her last appearance.

Following the announcement, crowds trekked to the site of the alleged vision. On one night 25,000 people surged to the scene with flowers, candles, and statues of saints. It was automatically assumed that Joseph had a special anointing. Thus a steady stream of cripples were brought to Joseph so that he would lay hands on them.

While Joseph was not able to accomplish anything out of the ordinary, the expectations of the crowd were such that they began to create their own "miracles." On one of the nights a light rain began to fall and a woman screamed, "It's pouring, yet Joseph doesn't get wet." Despite the fact that news reporters standing near Joseph observed that he was as soaked as anyone else, the expectation of the miraculous created the illusion.

Another woman claimed she saw an apparition in white materialize behind Joseph. In reality the apparition was nothing more than another woman protectively covered with a white raincoat.

Marks points out that the expectations of the crowd were such that "if imagination and hysterical contagion had been left to do their hallucinatory work, the crowd would have created its own miracle. And it is highly probable that Joseph could have produced some real 'cures' and real 'visions' if the hypnotic effects of the situation could have progressed far enough."⁵⁰ The expectations of the crowd had been heightened to such an extent that, as Marks says, they were "no more capable of resisting the proper hypnotic suggestion than Pavlov's dog was capable of resisting the stimulus to salivate."⁵¹

THE SUBTLE POWER OF SUGGESTION

The power of suggestion is incredibly potent. In an altered state of consciousness, this power is significantly magnified as people become hypersuggestible. Add to this potion peer pressure plus enhanced expectations, and people become willing to accept virtually anything that enters their minds.

Remember Twain? He was virtually boiled to death in his own bile as he watched Hicks "scamper and jump when Simmons the enchanter exclaimed, 'See the snake! See the snake!' And hear him say, 'My, how beautiful!' in response to the suggestion that he was observing a splendid sunset." Whether the suggestion came from Simmons or the subject himself (*autosuggestion*), the result powerfully enhanced the performance of "the professor."

Hypersuggestibility

First, it should be noted that some people are far more suggestible than others. Statistically, "one out of twelve Americans is susceptible to creating a memory out of thin air, then believing it."⁵² Such fantasy-proneness has been identified as the "Grade Five Syndrome."⁵³ While Grade Five personalities are generally very intuitive and intelligent, they also have vivid, visual imaginations. Thus they are highly susceptible to the power of suggestion. To begin with, they are very trusting. Second, they desire to please (particularly an authority figure). Third, they have the capacity to accept contradictory experiences. Fourth, they have a marked propensity for affiliation with new or unusual events. Fifth, they are apt to relate everything they experience to their own self-perception.⁵⁴ This complex of characteristics makes Grade Fives particularly susceptible to spiritual fantasies, "psychic and out-of-body experiences, and the occasional difficulty in differentiating fantasized events and persons from nonfantasized ones."⁵⁵

Subtle Suggestions

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Furthermore, the subtle power of suggestion can be brought to bear on an individual either directly or indirectly. An example of the direct approach is Rodney Howard-Browne's now famous phrase, "Fill, Fill, Fill! Let it bubble out your belly!" or John Arnott's mantra, "More, Lord! More, Lord!" (Arnott says, "I know how to say 'More, Lord!' in about fifty languages now."⁵⁶)

Indirect suggestions are far more subtle. They can involve "embedded suggestions and commands, paraverbal shifts of tone, voice directionality, enunciation, syntax, and pacing; the use of truisms, binds, double binds, and other semantic variations."⁵⁷

I have attended and analyzed Counterfeit Revival meetings with "performance professionals," including a stage hypnotist and an expert on sleight-of-hand/sleight-of-mind. They were readily able to identify numerous instances of these indirect suggestion techniques. They also pointed out that these techniques are not typically learned by formal instruction, but rather by frequent imitation. For example, Kathryn Kuhlman studied Aimee Semple McPherson; Benny Hinn studied Kathryn Kuhlman; and someone today is no doubt studying Benny Hinn!

Crowd Dynamics

Finally, as underscored by Robert Marks, "people in crowds are more easily influenced than people taken singly. This fact has been capitalized on by stage hypnotists as well as evangelists, political orators, and dictators."⁵⁸ In fact, as Marks points out, "the effect of suggestion on crowds seems virtually without limit. It can make black appear white. It can obscure realities, enshrine absurdities, and impel men pitilessly to cleave the skulls of their brothers."⁵⁹

While epidemics of sardonic laughter, sneezing, and even suicide can appear to be spontaneous, in reality they are often the result of subtle stimuli and suggestions. As noted by Charles Baudouin, "In the sphere of movement, suggestion by imitation is common. Immoderate laughter readily spreads through a crowd; yawning is contagious."⁶⁰ Once epidemic suggestion contaminates a movement, human beings can "behave like beasts or idiots and be proud of it."⁶¹ No one "is immune to the force of mass suggestion. Once an epidemic of hysteria is in full force it strikes intellectuals as well as morons, rich and poor alike. Its wellsprings are subconscious and biological, not rational."⁶²

When Rick Joyner's devotees sensed "nuclear fire," saw a glorious "cloud," and smelled the "fragrance of flowers," they may not have been aware that singing one song over and over for three hours had caused them to become hypersuggestible. That, however, does not alter the facts. The three-hour repetition of a spiritual song, being slain in the spirit, or even a spiritualistic seance have at least one thing in common — they all involve subjects becoming extremely susceptible to spontaneous suggestions. Charles Baudouin concludes that "in the first place, a condition of mental relaxation is imposed upon the participants. Secondly, an emotional state is invariably aroused by approximation to the mysterious. Thirdly, there exists an expectation that remarkable things will happen."⁶³

Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival capitalize on these expectations to create the illusion that they are endowed with supernatural powers. Rodney Howard-Browne dupes devotees into visualizing that his fingertips come off and a full volume of anointing flows from his hands; John Wimber conditioned constituents to believe a spiritual power emanated from his hands like electricity; and Franz Anton Mesmer promulgated the principle that a magnetic force pulsed from his hands.

What leaders of the Counterfeit Revival attribute to a dose of the anointing and Mesmer ascribed to the doctrine of animal magnetism, James Braid candidly acknowledged to be the dynamic of suggestion. Pagan religions and pseudo-Christian cults have long capitalized on the power of suggestion to promote their practices. Counterfeit Revival leaders have followed in their train.

Psychosomatic Symptoms and Sickness

Dr. William A. Nolen, Chief of Surgery at Meeker County Hospital in Minnesota, has spent many years investigating claims of supernatural healing here and abroad. He concludes that "when evangelical healers dramatically call on God to transmit His power through them to cure their patients' diseases, they are using the power of suggestion in the hope that it will so affect the patient's malfunctioning autonomic nervous system [the system that regulates such functions as digestion, heart rate, blood pressure, etc.] that the disease or symptoms caused by the derangement of that system will be cured."⁶⁴

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Like hypnotists and Hindu gurus, these "healers" use the power of suggestion to create placebos for psychosomatic symptoms and sickness. In truth, however, there is nothing supernatural about this kind of healing. Hinn and Howard-Browne can "heal" asthma, allergies, and arthritis, but then, so can mesmerists and medicine men.

The difference between the "magic" of mental manipulations and genuine miracles is dramatic. Christian apologist Dr. Norman L. Geisler has pointed out that when Jesus and the apostles healed people, the miracles were always one hundred percent successful and immediate, and there were no relapses:

God never performed a miracle "slowly" nor did an "80 percent" healing. Biblical miracles were 100 percent and immediate. In the case of the few immediate cures in the contemporary signs and wonders movement, most are clearly of the psychosomatic type and none are immediate healings of incurable diseases. There is nothing supernatural about these kinds of cures.

Such cures are done regularly by Hindu gurus and by many other false religions and cults. Even non-Christian doctors and counselors witness these kinds of cures in their patients. Both spontaneous remission and psychosomatic cures of the same nature as these "signs and wonders" occur apart from any pretense to the supernatural.⁶⁵

While leaders of the Counterfeit Revival can create the illusion of "lengthening" legs, they can't recreate an amputated limb; while they can create the illusion of slaying subjects in the spirit, they can't resurrect the slain; and while they can create the illusion that someone's vision has been restored, they can't replace a missing orb. In the end they create only disillusionment and self-deception. The power of the Spirit creates life and limb. The power of suggestion only creates a lamentable lie.

After Mark Twain failed to convince his mother of his con, he was left to contemplate how easy it had been to make someone "believe a lie and how hard it is to undo that work again." By God's grace, we will be empowered to undo what Twain could not.

NOTES

¹The entire account is found in Bernard DeVoto, ed., *Mark Twain in Euroption* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1922), 118–29.

²Rodney Howard-Browne and others claim to be dispensing the "new wine" of the Spirit.

³James Wyckoff, *Franz Anton Mesmer* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), vii.

⁴Vincent Buranelli, *The Wizard from Vienna* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1975), 110.

⁵*Ibid.*, 65.

⁶*Ibid.*, 110.

⁷*Ibid.*, 110-11.

⁸Albert Moll, *Hypnotism* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1982), 11.

⁹*Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁰Robert W. Marks, *The Story of Hypnotism* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947), 152.

¹¹J. Gordon Melton, Jerome Clark, and Aidan A. Kelly, "New Age Almanac," as quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 322. Mary Baker Eddy, once a patient of Quimby, took his system, modified it with her own ideas, and developed the Church of Christ, Scientist, commonly known as the Christian Science Church, one of the best known of the mind science cults.

¹²Charles T. Tart, "Transpersonal Potentialities of Deep Hypnosis," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 1 (1970): 37.

¹³Rick Joyner, "The Heart of David: Worship and Warfare," Conference Report, April 1996; audiotape transcript.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Elizabeth L. Hillstrom, *Testing the Spirits* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 79.

¹⁸Arnold M. Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness," in *Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Charles Tart (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1972), 16.

¹⁹Lynn Andrews, as quoted by Ankerberg and Weldon, 23.

²⁰John Arnott, *The Father's Blessing* (Orlando: Creation House, 1995), 182; also John Arnott, "Go for the Kingdom," Toronto Airport Vineyard, audiotape transcript; John Arnott, "Understanding and Responding to Moves

- of God Conference," Calgary Family Church and Downtown Full Gospel Church, 25 April 1996; audiotape transcript.
- ²¹Larry Thomas, *No Laughing Matter* (Excelsior Springs, MO: Double Crown Publishing, 1995), 48.
- ²²Rodney Howard-Browne, Carpenter's Home Church, Lakeland, FL, 9 March 1993; audiotape transcript.
- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, quoted in *Fear Is the Master* (Hemet, CA: Jeremiah Films, 1986); videotape.
- ²⁵Ankerberg and Weldon, 21.
- ²⁶Hillstrom, 120-21.
- ²⁷Arnott, *Father's Blessing*, 96, 167.
- ²⁸Mona Johnian, *The Fresh Anointing* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1994), 129-30.
- ²⁹John Arnott and Guy Chevreau, "Pastor's Meeting," Toronto Airport Vineyard, 19 October 1994; audiotape transcript.
- ³⁰John Arnott, Discovery Church, Orlando, FL, 29 January 1995; audiotape transcript.
- ³¹Wes Campbell, "Spiritual and Physical Manifestations of the Holy Spirit," Toronto Airport Vineyard, 15 October 1994; audiotape transcript.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Ibid.
- ³⁴Ibid.
- ³⁵Ibid.
- ³⁶Hillstrom, 122.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸John Arnott, "Catch the Fire," Midland and Wales, U.K., 2 February 1996; audiotape transcript.
- ³⁹Larry Randolph, "Renewal and Revival Today," Toronto Airport Vineyard, 18 November 1994; audiotape transcript.
- ⁴⁰Ibid.
- ⁴¹John Arnott and Guy Chevreau, "Pastor's Meeting," Toronto Airport Vineyard, 19 October 1994; audiotape transcript.
- ⁴²Mike Bickle and Bob Jones, "An Interview with Bob Jones" (Belper, Derbyshire, U.K.: Banner Ministries, 1989); audiotape transcript.
- ⁴³Bob Jones and Paul Cain, "Selections from the Kansas City Prophets" (Belper, Derbyshire, U.K.: Banner Ministries, n.d.); audiotape transcript.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.
- ⁴⁵Ibid.
- ⁴⁶Randy Clark, "Catch the Fire: Questions and Answers," Toronto Airport Vineyard, 14 October 1994; audiotape transcript.
- ⁴⁷Quoted by Richard M. Riss, "Impression of Morningstar Conference from Kent McKuen," 24 April 1996; e-mail communication.
- ⁴⁸Cincilla Grant, "'Holy Water' Triggers Healing Revival," *Charisma*, June 1996, 21-23.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., 21.
- ⁵⁰Marks, 150.
- ⁵¹Ibid., 150.
- ⁵²Jon Trott, "The Grade Five Syndrome," *Cornerstone*, vol. 20, no. 96, 16.
- ⁵³Gradations of hypnotizability range from 0 (almost no hypnotizability) to 5 (extremely hypnotizable).
- ⁵⁴This information was summarized from a variety of sources, including Dr. George Ganaway, "Historical Versus Narrative Truth," *Journal of Dissociation* 4 (December 1989): 205-20; and Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue, "Fantasy Proneness," *American Psychologist*, January 1988, 35-44.
- ⁵⁵Judith W. Rhue and Steven Jay Lynn, "Fantasy Proneness, Hypnotizability, and Multiple Personality," in *Human Suggestibility*, ed. John F. Schumaker (New York: Routledge, 1991), 201.
- ⁵⁶John Arnott, Discovery Church.
- ⁵⁷Vance L. Shepperson, "Hypnotherapy," in *Psychotherapy in Christian Perspective*, ed. David G. Benner (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 164.
- ⁵⁸Marks, 190.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., 191.
- ⁶⁰Charles Baudouin, *Suggestion and Autosuggestion* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1954), 80.
- ⁶¹Marks, 193.
- ⁶²Ibid., 195.
- ⁶³Baudouin, 82.

⁶⁴George Abell and Barry Singer, eds., *Science and the Paranormal* (New York: Scribners, 1981), 193-94.

⁶⁵Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 121.