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Post-Modern Merchandizing: Bringing In the Beast

By Wilfred Hahn

Every Christian who has given his or her life over to the lordship of Christ will be familiar with the dilemma that Paul describes in Romans 7. Why is it that the very thing that we do not want to do, we often end up doing? Most will identify with the well-worn saying, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."



Wrote Paul, "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Romans 7:17-20).

We see that mankind is "hardwired" to sin. This trait — the "sinful nature," mentioned more than 20 times in the New Testament — is coded right into our genetic make-up. That pretty much explains why the world today remains corrupted by the flesh. Apostle Peter identified this condi-

tion as "corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1).

To no surprise, this battle with the flesh has become all the more acute and difficult in these latter days. Where once society may have considered it a virtue to overcome the innate human vices, today it has become respected high science to exploit these very same sinful weaknesses. Just as there are precision bombs today that can thread their way through to a small target, the human's fleshly senses are being assaulted as never before.

How so? In recent years, scientists and psychologists have developed a major new field of study, generally referred to under the names of neuroscience and cognitive psychology. While having a number of specialities, the underlying premise of this research is the same: it tries to discover the



basic “coding” of the natural or “instinctive” man. In other words, these analysts seek to understand the basal nature that operates outside the area of thought and consciousness. Why? The better able to develop techniques that directly appeal to people’s base instincts. Even more sinister — though few will publicly admit to this — is the goal to better manipulate people’s decisions by bypassing their minds.



How is this being done? To explain, let’s review a few developments in this field.

The Sciences of Marketing

What’s the biggest problem facing marketers today? Apparently, it is the rational brain. Says Clotaire Rapaille, author of the *Culture Code*, “in a three-way battle between the cortical (our higher, thinking brain), the limbic (the home of emotion) and the reptilian areas, the reptilian always wins.”¹ This reptilian part of the brain, as he identifies it, is the home of the instinct and is only accessible through the subconscious. Therefore, herein lies the challenge for marketers, change-agents and scientists alike. How to appease the reptilian part of the brain through the subconscious mind. To do so, however, it is necessary to circumvent the thinking brain that might otherwise refuse to comply.

Researchers in this field claim that the instinctive and physical systems of the human organism are coded to respond in pre-set ways. The flesh, left to its animalistic, non-thinking mode will always opt for gratification, reproduction and survival no

matter the cost, moral or otherwise. Therefore, any proposal to these basal instincts is sure to be more successful.

Money matters are another key area that attracts much behavioral analysis. As might be guessed, the vast preponderance of this financial research is not to help make the average investor more successful, but rather for the financial industry to exploit human behavioral weaknesses. They too have made a high science out of studying the “biases of the flesh.” According to one author familiar with these techniques: “[Wall Street firms] actually prefer a market filled with irrational (Editor note: unthinking) investors. That way they can manipulate you easily without you ever really knowing it. [...] and has refined ‘mind control’ to a high art.”²

This field of study has a scientific-sounding name, “neurofinance.” There are great hopes for this research. “The brain scientists are the wave of the future in the financial world,” said one noted expert, Daniel Kahneman, a 2002 Nobel laureate for his pioneering work in neurofinance.³ Why should finance be such a promising area of study? Apparently, researchers have discovered that the human brain lusts af-

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ter money just like it may crave sex. Professor Brian Knutson, of Stanford University, made this “startling” finding by sending volunteer students through an MRI machine.⁴

Another way that marketers or change agents can circumvent mature, rational human responses is by targeting children. Children have a large influence over their parents, controlling a large portion of buying decisions. According to the estimates of James McNeal, an expert on the techniques of marketing to children, children under the age of 14 influence as much as 47% of household spending in the US.”⁵ There is a logical reason why this is happening. Many companies have discovered that it is a much more lucrative to market to the children of a household than a parent.

Why suffer the little children (Matthew 19:14, KJV)? Marketing experts know that children are much more impressionable than adults. Many of these children will not have reached the age where they know right from wrong (Isaiah 7:15-16). Children are by nature, uncontrolled hedonists and impulsive. This assault upon the instincts of vulnerable children in-

grains fleshly gratification at a very early age, thus further preparing the way for a world of hedonists who’s stomachs and cares for this world will easily trump any interest in the Gospel truth. Not heeded at all is the Bible’s warning that applies especially in the case of corrupting children. “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better

for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

A Buyer’s World of New Religious Values

Just what is the significance of this scientific focus upon instinctive, unthinking behaviors? It certainly aligns with conditions of the last days described in the Bible. While most of the research in cognitive sciences may have direct application to the world of consumer marketing, its influence actually goes far wider and deeper. It is shaping a world where basic human instincts and indulgence are idolized. Crucially, it paves the way for a new worldwide religion — namely the type that allows religion and commercial Babylon the Great to merge.

Apostle Paul’s account of a time of rampant individualism, indulgence and lack of control fits with the general direction being observed today. People will be “lovers of themselves,” “without self control,” and “lovers of pleasure” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

This connection may not seem readily apparent to people who live in the prosperous Western World. However, a per-



spective of Lord Saatchi (executive director of M&C Saatchi, a major advertising firm) will provide a bridge to this understanding. Writing recently, he bemoans the modern development of the “digital native.” He identifies these as the younger generation today who process information much differently, due to their upbringing connected to earphones and a diet of video. Their attention span is short and their recall ability has declined significantly, he argues. The answer? Directly quoting him: His counsel to companies seeking to be more effective marketers to this generation is to find one word — just one word only — that associates a value with this modern “fleshly” person. Using heavy religious allegory, Mr. Saatchi says, “In the beginning was ‘the word’ [...] discover it and you have the route to salvation and eternal life,” meaning commercial success.⁶

The crucial thing to see is that Mr. Saatchi is connecting “values” — not value, as in a good price, but as in a philosophy or meaning — with a commercial transaction. Since values are the domain of religion, then each brand or product that is associated with a “value” then becomes a mini religion. For example, Nike, the maker of sporting goods, has as its slogan, “Just do it.” This is a statement of philosophy, not a product attribute. It promotes an identity with a certain lifestyle.

It is crucial to see that spiritual and psychological destruction go hand in hand with an over-laden merchandise culture. Says another marketing expert, “The difficulty now is that every consumer need we have has already been satisfied by at least 20 products. That is why in the most successful businesses, innovations must be driven by marketing rather than product design.”⁷

What is being said here? Consumer brands are now a figment of strong “psy-



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chological propositions” ... in other words, “values.” And, if values rather than function are the appeal to sell merchandise, then we are already fast on the way to the apocalyptic Babylonish culture shown in Revelation 17-18. In fact, it could be argued that most societies already fit this description.

Unleashing the Beast in the Church

The indulgent consumer is the essential underpinning of the endtime ruling colossus comprised of commercialism and religion. To this end, they are unreasoning beasts rather than “people led by the spirit” (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18). However, to this point we have only discussed the ways of the world and its increasing sophistication at manipulating and exploiting the “sinful nature.” As we have shown, these techniques are well honed and now are merging into religion.

Unfortunately, this is not the full height of the corruption. The same techniques are being employed in the world of religion. Here we observe that instincts and fleshly desires are also being expressly

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catered to ... yes, even in evangelical Christian circles.

Religion today, like most products, is sold. Surveys are conducted as to what is wanted. Religious “products and goods” are then designed in terms of consumer benefits and the appeasement of “fleshly values.” Of course, this is not a new challenge for the Church. Back in New Testament times, such approaches were already evident, though not yet sanctioned by advanced science.

The difference today is that such techniques are the product of precise method and science. Significantly, too, this is prophecy being fulfilled. Jude records the apostles as saying, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.’ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit” (Jude 1:18-19).

It is the corrupt human instinct of these religious leaders in the first place that misleads many. “They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct [...]” (2 Peter 2:12). “[...] things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals — these are the very things that destroy them” (Jude 1:10).

Thoughts to Ponder

Where should be found the true and reliable leading during times such as now? Clearly, we are not to be led by instinct and the fleshly nature. And, forbid that anyone might prey upon such basal instincts in order to promote and popularize false gospels. Pleaded Paul, “Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one” (2 Corinthians 7:2). Yet, people ruled by their instincts readily ran after the false teachers who appealed to their fleshly senses.



Oh, but how to escape the dilemma that Paul describes, especially so in a time of a surfeit of temptation to the fleshly nature as we live in today? Apostle Paul says that we should live by the Spirit (Romans 8:12-14) and to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and [...] not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14).

While the world shouts its cacophony of temptations and hurls its “flaming arrows” (Ephesians 6:16), more than ever we truly need to be shut in with Christ. He is the only One that can satisfy.

“The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145: 13-16). (MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Clotair Rapaille, Marketing to the Reptilian Brain, *Forbes Magazine*, July 3, 2006, pg. 44.
- 2 Paul B. Farrell, Just Surrender to Wall Street's Weapons of Mass Manipulation. FoxNews.com, Jan. 30, 2007, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,248590,00.html
- 3 Daniel Kahneman, quoted by Bloomberg News, Neurofinance: cure or malarkey? February 2, 2006
- 4 Adam Levy, "Money drives us crazy: It's official" *The Australian*: 09 February 2006
- 5 Trillion dollar kids, James McNeal, quoted in *The Economist*, December 2, 2006, page 66.
- 6 Maurice Saatchi, The strange death of modern advertising. *Financial Times* Op-Ed, June 22, 2006
- 7 David Nicholls, quoted in *Financial Times* Special Report on Innovation, "The need to get under the skin of the consumer."