

THE IMPACT OF IMAGERY

The Bible says that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God [i.e., an intellectual or cognitive approach]” (Romans 10:17). Not so in the emerging church. Faith comes by seeing images, touching icons, smelling incense, and hearing chants and liturgical recitations; then the “word” follows. Leonard Sweet calls it “EPIC culture: Experiential, Participatory, Image-Driven, Connected.”¹⁸ Images of Jesus hanging on the cross are very common. So are icons of Mary and baby Jesus.

An article written by *Worship Leader Magazine* editor Chuck Fromm provides interesting background information with regard to the significance of imagery to our present generation. Fromm states:

We are now living in a “post *Passion of the Christ* world.” The extraordinary success of Mel Gibson’s landmark film, and the controversy that surrounded it, underscores in no uncertain terms how imagery shapes our cultural consciousness. The implications for the church and its service of worship, have been both profound and ambiguous.¹⁹

While Gibson’s use of vivid imagery may have had effects on the emotions, I wonder how truly effective watching graphic depictions and images is in changing the human heart? In addition, while the emerging church and many Christian authors promote the view that *mystical encounters and sensory engagements* are a more effective tool for evangelism, they are not supported by Scripture; however, these ideas *can* be found in *church tradition* as Chuck Fromm comments in his article:

In many ways, the Church is seeking a way back to its oldest and most sacred traditions: those in which all the senses are fully engaged in the act of worship from incense and bells to icons and vestments.²⁰

Apparently, justification for the return of these *ancient traditional practices* is based on the idea that our present generation is looking for such experiences. Fromm states:

The power of the preached word is being augmented, and occasionally outpaced, by the impact of the visual. The primacy of music as an essential expression of worship is being challenged by congregations hungry for more direct means of engagement.²¹

What is tragic is that the Word of God is being replaced with a sensual spirituality, and that means that millions of lost souls will miss the chance to hear the Word of God but will think they are getting truth because it makes them feel good.

And without that hearing of the Word, faith cannot come:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:13-17)

from Chapter 4, *Faith Undone*.

19. Chuck Fromm, "The Impact of the Image" (*Worship Leader Magazine*, January-February 2005).

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.