



## The Opium Den

*A parody is a comic caricature, a ludicrous likeness, an absurd analogy, a ridiculous representation which exposes a particular reality by comparing it to another of a different order. Parodies can be a useful literary tool to expose the “red herrings” of diversions which distract attention from real issues. By the use of parody one can be direct yet subtle at the same time.*

A distinctive air, or should I say “aura,” hung over the smoke-filled room. Perhaps it was my own subjective apprehension, but I felt a certain sense of spiritual oppression as I stepped into the opium den. Nevertheless, I was curious to know what went on in such a place.

My first impressions were of a rather typical social phenomenon—persons gathering together for a common purpose and fulfilling a need for community. As a rather monotonous music played in the background, many were nodding their heads in agreement with the beat. A conscious, or perhaps unconscious, desire for conformity was evidenced in both action and attire of the participants.

In certain areas they would gather in small groups to commune together. Such appeared to be the result of one individual having possession of a particular substance which he was willing to share with others, thus creating a following (for a price, I am sure!).

Further examination of even more dimly lit areas revealed less social structure. Caring less about the presence of others, individuals were seeking their own state of personal euphoria. With dulled sensitivity to what was transpiring around them, they would fixate on some particular object with a

glassy-eyed stare and lapse into a tenuous state of consciousness.

How did these people get into this condition? How did they join this fraternity?

Drawn in by a search for something more, what at first was promised to be an exciting stimulant later on turned out to be an addictive depressant.

Their dependence upon this controlling substance made its acquisition the supreme desire of their lives. They were living for that periodic fix to maintain their mystic “high.”

Their occupational pursuits and personal relationships became less effective as they required more time to get more money to acquire more of the now deified drug.

It was thus that they found their place in this den, lapsing into a lethargic stupor. The dilated pupils of their eyes indicated a drugged and dying state.

Pathetic, indeed, to see such misused humanity!

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Dare we suggest that the foregoing scenario has analogous parallels with religious activities? Are we to concur with Karl Marx in his oft-quoted statement that “religion is the opiate of the people?”

A participant in a support group for addictive recovery introduced himself by saying, “My name is... I am a drug addict, and my drug of choice was religion.”

I exercise some editorial confidentiality in refusing to divulge whether this group was Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Fundamentalists Anonymous, for their purposes here seem to overlap one another.

Is the need for such people:

- (1) a more restrictive enforcement of prohibitions?
- (2) increased encouragement to “Just Say NO!”?
- (3) a more effective recovery program?
- (4) a transference of their dependency to a more effective god?

Do not be controlled by “spirits,” but be filled with the Holy Spirit, advises the apostle Paul (Ephesians 5:18). □

—Jim Fowler

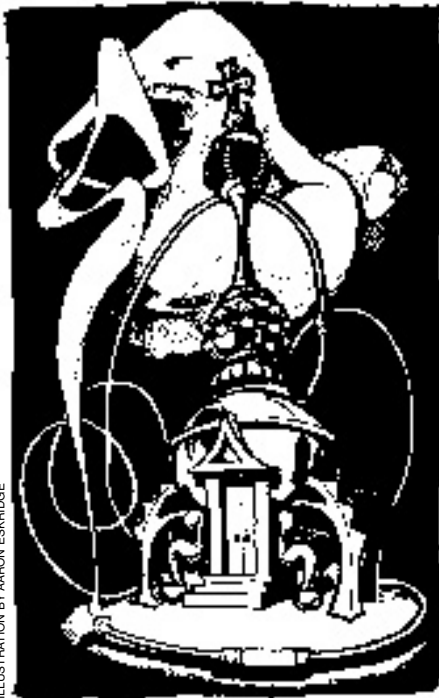


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