

Animate



The Benefits of Church

T.M. Luhrman

“Any faith demands that you experience the world as more than just what is material & observable.

This does not mean that God is imaginary, but that because God is immaterial, those of faith must use their imaginations to represent God. To know God in an evangelical church, you must experience what can only be imagined as real, and you must also experience it as good.

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I want to suggest that this is a skill & that it can be learned. We can call it absorption: the capacity to be caught up in your imagination, in a way you enjoy. What I saw in church as an anthropological observer was that people were encouraged to listen to God in their minds, but only to pay attention to mental experiences that were in accord with what they took to be God's character, which they took to be good.

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I saw that people were able to learn to experience God in this way, and that those who were able to experience a loving God vividly were healthier – at least, as judged by a standardized psychiatric scale. Increasingly, other studies bear out this observation that the capacity to imagine a loving God vividly leads to better health.

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For example, in one study, when God was experienced as remote or not loving, the more someone prayed, the more psychiatric distress she seemed to have; when God was experienced as close & intimate, the more someone prayed, the less ill he was. In another study, at a private Christian college in Southern California, the positive quality of an attachment to God significantly decreased stress & did so more effectively than the quality of the person's relationships with other people.”

The following slides are of a video of a sculptor shaping a human head with the various scriptures in blue throughout the sermon interposed over top. To watch the video while you listen click [HERE](#) in the PDF of the slides