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## Branding the New Breed

This is how you enlist in the Army of God: First come the fireworks and the prayers, and then 4,000 kids scream, "We won't be silent anymore!" Then the kids drop to their knees, still but for the weeping and regrets of fifteen-year-olds. The lights in the Cleveland arena fade to blue, and a man on the stage whispers to them about sin and love and the Father-God. They rise, heartened; the crowd, en masse, swears off "harlots and adultery"; the twenty-one-year-old MC twitches taut a chain across the ass of her skintight red jeans and summons the followers to show off their best dance moves for God. "Gimme what you got!" she shouts. They dance -- hip-hop, tap, toe and pelvic thrusting. Then they're ready. They're about to accept "the mark of a warrior," explains Ron Luce, commander in chief of BattleCry, the most furious youth crusade since young sinners in the hands of an angry God flogged themselves with shame in eighteenth-century New England. Nearly three centuries later, these 4,000 teens are about to become "branded by God." It's like getting your head shaved when you join the Marines, Luce says, only the kids get to keep their hair. His assistants roll out a cowhide draped over a sawhorse, and Luce presses red-hot iron into the dead flesh, projecting a close-up of sizzling cow skin on giant movie screens above the stage.

--Jeff Sharlet, "Teenage Holy War," *The Revealer*, 4/12/07.

Evangelical leaders like Ron Luce of Teen Mania ("Acquire the Fire") are using state-of-the-art marketing tricks to lure teenage audiences, copying "what works" from the pop culture and turning it into a method of merchandising the New Breed, a concept steeped in Latter Rain "Joel's Army" dominionism. According to Sharlet's story (cited above), which is definitely worth a read, Luce hired a "former producer of VH1's Behind the Music named Doug Rittenhouse" in order "to create pop-culture missionaries." The concept was to "start a production company and train up and raise a new kind of Christian media" -- one that would play off of "MTV's Headbangers Ball."

Teen Mania's unorthodox marketing campaign was the subject of a critical article entitled "Soap, deodorant and Jesus." Even though Teen Mania puts "advertising to teens" at the top of a series of examples of how teens are "targeted" and "threatened by pop culture," the Teen Mania solution seems to be -- more marketing! The article notes that three individuals who have held "important positions in Teen Mania" have "all worked for one of the nation's biggest advertisers, Procter & Gamble, in roles involving sales, advertising, marketing, promotions and product management." The article concludes:

"So when you watch Teen Mania attack those who advertise and market their products in the commercial/secular realm, keep one thing in mind. They aren't really attacking the reality of advertising to teenagers, since they themselves are marketers; many of Teen Mania's leaders, and now their hired secular advertising agency, were or are in the business that includes advertising to teenagers. They just want to influence and organize teenagers - for what is, over the long term, a political and social purpose - with their own set of advertised messages that frame militarism and conflict as virtues."

The New York Times article cited in the link in the paragraph above, "Christian Message, Secular Messengers" by Julie Bosman (4/26/06), explains the aggressive and high-tech media campaign:

"Tocquigny's first major project on the Teen Mania account was to take the organization's message to a national platform with a new Web site aimed at attracting teenagers. Teen Mania gave the creative planners at Tocquigny instructions to use whatever technology was needed, from text messaging to podcasting, to engage the youthful and tech-savvy audience.

"I think one of the key things that we're seeing is really an increase in the sophistication and scope of these groups,' Mr. Dampier said. 'What we used to think of as a small nonprofit Christian organization has really turned into savvy marketers with an appetite for technology.'"

One obvious concern with Teen Mania's marketing campaign is the militaristic message. This is the topic of the latest Discernment Ministries newsletter, May-June 2007, which links much of the New Apostolic Reformation's focus on youth

back to the Kansas City prophets' anticipated "elected seeds" that will "be the generation that's raised up to put death itself underneath their feet . . . a church that has reached the full maturity of the god-man!" (Bob Jones with Mike Bickle).

#### The Global Tribal Teen

It is no wonder neoevangelical leaders are copying secular teen marketing tactics. Teens and youth are a ready-made market. If a name-brand company wants to create an "army" of youth, they simply create a "movement" for their product. The intended result is changed lifestyles, uniform attitudes and collective buying behaviors. This is easy to do because the global teen market is already homogeneous and tribe-like. Naomi Klein devotes quite a few pages of her book *No Logo* (Picador, 2002) to explaining how teenagers have become "logo-decorated" into a "media-fabricated mold" (p. 118). A few highlights from the subsection "The Global Teen" are excerpted below:

" . . . he image of the global teen floats over the planet like a euphoric corporate hallucination. These kids, we are repeatedly told, live not in a geographic place but in a global consumer loop: hotlinked from their cellular telephones to Internet newsgroups; bonded together by Sony Playstations, MTV videos and NBA games. . . . The 'New World Teen Study' surveyed 27,600 middle-class fifteen- to eighteen- year-olds in forty-five countries and came up with some resoundingly good news for . . . agency clients, a list that includes Coca-Cola, Burger King and Philips. 'Despite different cultures, middle-class youth all over the world seem to live their lives as if in a parallel universe. They get up in the morning, put on their Levi's and Nikes, grab their caps, backpacks, and Sony personal CD players , and head for school. . . . he global teen demographic . . . 'one of the greatest marketing opportunities of all time.'" . . .

"he global teen. . . must exist as a demographic in the minds of young consumers worldwide or the entire exercise of global marketing collapses. For this reason, global youth marketing is a mind-numbingly repetitive affair, drunk on the idea of what it is attempting to engineer: a third notion of nationality -- not American, not local, but one that would unite the two, through shopping.

"Standing triumphant at the center of the global teen phenomena is MTV, which, in 1998, was in 273.5 million households worldwide -- only 70 million of which were in the U.S. By 1999, MTV's eight global divisions broadcast in 83 countries and territories, fewer than CNN's 212-country reach, but impressive nonetheless. Furthermore, the New World Teen Study found that the single most significant factor contributing to the shared tastes of the middle-class teens it surveyed was TV -- in particular, MTV, which 85% of them watched every day. Elissa Moses called the station 'an all-news bulletin for creating brand-images' and a 'public-address system to a generation.' . . .

"And the more viewers there are to absorb MTV's vision of a tribe of culture swapping, global teen nomads, the more homogeneous a market its advertisers have in which to sell their products. According to Chip Walker, director of the New World Teen Study, 'Teens who watch MTV music videos are much more likely than other teens to wear the teen "uniform" of jeans, running shoes, and denim jacket. . . They are also much more likely to own electronics and consume "teen" items such as candy, sodas, cookies and fast food. They are much more likely to use a wide range of personal-care products too.' In other words MTV International has become the most compelling global catalog for the modern branded life." (pp. 119-121)

The Emergent/Emerging and New Breed Teen leaders are capitalizing on this global joy ride. They have a ready-made target market of peer-driven, pop culture clones -- a teen army at its disposal, prepped and predisposed to soak up the alternative theologies of Latter Rain. The goal is to create an army for dominion:

"When you enlist in the military, there's a code of honor," Luce preaches, "same as being a follower of Christ." His Christian code requires a "wartime mentality": a "survival orientation" and a readiness to face "real enemies." The queers and communists, feminists and Muslims, to be sure, but also the entire American cultural apparatus of marketing and merchandising, the "techno-terrorists" of mass media, doing to the morality of a generation what Osama bin Laden did to the Twin Towers. "Just as the events of September 11th, 2001, permanently changed our perspective on the world," Luce writes, "so we ought to be awakened to the alarming influence of today's culture terrorists. They are wealthy, they are smart, and they are real."

#### The Truth:

"The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing." (Revelation 19:15)

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