

**JUST SAY YES:** ECSTATIC  
ESCAPES FROM SELF  
POWERLESSNESS

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This Thinksheet points to a religious-depth similarity between the Demo '88 Convention, which ended last night, and America's current drug-epidemic. Both root from the human hunger to escape from something experienced as unsatisfying and confining into Something Larger offering the certainty, or at least the promise, of delivering from self and from powerlessness. Such escape efforts do not exhaust the meaning of "religion," but neither can any of them escape association with religion: they are, instead of only some of them being, religious experiences.... And this assertion is not only occupational, an assertion of a clergyman, which could be discounted as "interested," or at least as psychologically "natural," penumbral to occupational awareness (as a lawyer sees politics and recreational drugs as il/legal realities).

1. The Greeks, including Michael Dukakis I suppose, have a distinction for it. Some unities are **gifts** (*henosis*), some are **achievements** (*henotes*, as Eph.43, "Make every effort..."--though Greek observes the distinction only in contexts demanding the differentiation). Note the empirical convergence: when you get a unity you went for, it feels like a gift. You snuff it or use a needle, and the chemo-bliss seems given. When Jn. Wesley rises from his knees where he's prayed knowing that all depends on God, he goes forth knowing that all depends on him, ie, JW, not God. The prayer-given-and-achieved union with God is lived forth humbly as, to use Paul's phrase, "Christ living in me."
2. Mystical union lifts you beyond, outside (Greek, "ec-stasy") yourself. You are delivered from your individual self's loneliness, transitoriness, and impotence into the bliss of communion, eternal life, and power. So great is this benison that vast human energies are poured into (to use a Jos. Campbell phrase) "**following your bliss**"--in jogging for endorphins (body-produced chemo-highs by individual effort), rallies (body-produced chemo-highs by joint effort--though that's not the only reason for rallies!), other-and-self-induced orgasms, "communion with nature," immersion in the arts, explorations in the occult (taproot of "New Age" religion), meditation, contemplative prayer (God as the ultimate high, which I believe).
3. Under "rallies," put revivalistic religion, and under that put **Jesse Jackson Night**, Tuesday of the Convention. Nobody knows better how to "work a crowd," and the job was made easier by the fact that at the Convention, all things were working together for--it's slogan word--UNITY! Dukakis' decision that there be, above all else, unity acted, for good or ill or both, as a tabu against dissension and even against the expression of differences. It remains to be seen whether the decision was oversuccessful, whether the public is turned off by the high-gloss ersatz amity.
4. As I write this, **Ted Kennedy** is just across from our beach in his mother's home for her 98th birthday, though he was in Atlanta last night--looking distracted, unedified, and certainly unecstasied there on the back row during Dukakis' acceptance speech. His unity speech made, for me, the most painful listening, for his personal style is adversarial. Many pundits believe that his persistent peppering-from-the-left of Jimmy Carter put Reagan in the White House. And now he was up against the universal conclusion that Demo disunity would put Bush in the White House.
5. We **love** (mysterium) and **fear** (tremendum) ecstasy. Several have said to me something like "I agree with most of Jackson's positions, but he'd be too dangerous in the White House." A preacher in the White House? But as Paul saith, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" The public's image of preaching is of something at least pallid if not also phoney; what a shock to experience it as something powerful!
5. Living our lives within severe **limits**, we yearn for the Unbounded, for God; and all our yearnings and strivings for boundaryless experiences are sacramental to our reaching out for God (which can inflate to the psychosis and blasphemy of behaving as though we were God and making God-like claims for ourselves).
6. NoNo, **negative** morality ("just say no") works only in partnership with YesYes, **positive** morality ("just say yes," as in the evangelist's invitation). Electioneering must be mainly positive, druggies must be offered higher ecstasies, societies must be protected against demagogues (Hitler, Khomeini, et al) who provide unbounded, oceanic feelings at the cost of binding soul and body in a nation become prison.