

Calvary Chapel, Bill Hybels, and Jesuit Mysticism

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While contending for the faith risks the chance of being ridiculed and scoffed at by men, the apostle Paul said we should stand up for Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word whatever the cost. Writing to the Galatians, he stated:

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. [\[1\]](#)

In order to qualify as a servant of Christ, Paul is telling us to beware of false teachings that can and will enter the church. Paul also indicated that false teachings can be introduced in a manner so cleverly devised by Satan that these *doctrines of demons* (1 Timothy 4:1) creep in unnoticed. He warned the church at Galatia with these words:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? [\[2\]](#)

These words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are not just for the church that was in Galatia in the past. The words should be powerful reminders of the danger of following men today who may be led by the words of other men who are led by doctrines of demons. This, of course, can happen without recognizing it has even happened. **This is what deception is.**

As a result, millions of undiscerning sheep are led away by men posing as shepherds who are not following the Good Shepherd. Instead, these “shepherds” are playing a very significant role in setting up a false ecumenical

belief system designed to reach the postmodern generation that does not believe God's Word is absolute.

Before you have a chance to read the rest of this commentary, I am going to predict the reaction there will be from some in the body of Christ. When one lovingly attempts to point those who are being deceived back on the right path, there will be those who will be cynical, sarcastic, and will lash out. Comments like this will appear: *There he goes again, another "old grumpy man" who is against everything. He is just like the Pharisees. We are living in a whole new generation, and he is out of touch.* I am addressing these issues before I present my case.

Recently, I was informed about a conference held this week in Budapest, Hungary where Willow Creek senior pastor Bill Hybels taught leaders. According to comments posted on Phil Metzger's Facebook page, the event was held at Calvary Chapel Golgota Budapest where Metzger is pastor. He is also the director of Calvary Chapel Bible College Europe (also located in Hungary). On Metzger's Facebook, Hybels was not only endorsed, he was praised. [\[3\]](#)



Phil Metzger standing with Bill Hybels in Budapest, Hungary 4

Perhaps most who read about this event will not be alarmed. But I was because I see the significance. I know that what Chuck Smith and Calvary Chapel once stood for is not at all what Hybels stands for. Bill Hybels was mentored by Peter Drucker along with Rick Warren to “reshape” Christianity for the 21st century. Hybels, from the famous Willow Creek Church located in South Barrington, Illinois, fathered the “seeker-friendly” movement.

When Hybels and his cohorts discovered that the seeker-friendly model produced spiritually illiterate believers, they said they “repented” [5] from this model of church; but in actuality, they delved right into teachings associated with the emergent church and contemplative mysticism, seeing those as the next “great” step. Interestingly, on Metzger’s Facebook page, someone defending Metzger’s promotion of Hybels said that it was irrelevant to talk about the emerging church because it was no longer an issue. But nothing could be further from the truth. While often called other names now, such as progressive, the ideologies of the emerging church are very much at work today (as you will see below).

So my question: How will Bill Hybels influence Calvary Chapel Golgata in Budapest, or the students at the Calvary Chapel Bible School Europe, or even the whole Calvary Chapel movement? Will they be drawn closer to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and follow His Word, or will they be influenced as Hybels has been by the mystical teachings rooted in Eastern Religion. Time will tell.

For now, some added information might be useful to those who are still on guard and aware we are living in perilous times. The documentation for what I am going to comment on can be found online. The program implemented at Willow Creek by Bill Hybels son-in-law Aaron Niequist is called ***The Practice***. Here is what you can find on their web site:

Kingdom Minded: Through the scriptures, story, and worship, we want to join Jesus in healing and redeeming this world.

Practice Based: The Practice is an experimental gathering where we immerse ourselves in God's dream^[6] for humanity, practice the historic disciplines that align us with His dream, and carry each other along the way. We are learning to live out Jesus' teachings in the world. Ecumenical: Our desire is to be relentlessly committed to humbly learning from other Christian traditions and practices. ^[7]

Eucharistic: Every gathering will culminate with communion to weekly anchor us in Christ's death, resurrection, and promise of return.

These descriptions are the epitome of all that is emergent. For those who do their homework, the "historic [spiritual] disciplines" of which Niequist speaks that are supposed to make practitioners more "Christ-like," are rooted in the spiritual formation agenda promoted by the Emerging Church and much of evangelicalism today. Sadly, a huge number of Christian colleges and seminaries have incorporated these spiritual disciplines into the lives of their students (our future shepherds).

These ideas have been fueled by Jesuit teachings. In fact, Aaron Niequist, the leader of this new Willow Creek program, has a mentor who is a Catholic priest.^[8] Niequist describes this program in the following article:

Aaron Niequist: We talk a lot about a gymnasium metaphor. Teaching is important for growth, but sitting in a classroom can only take you so far. When we look at what we do in most church gatherings it's centered on a lecturer. It's a classroom. But if I want to learn how to run a marathon, I wouldn't want to go hear a lecture about a marathon. I'd want to train with a coach. And so we asked, "What if a church was more like a gymnasium than a classroom? What if the church gathering was a time when we came together to practice rather than just listen?" It's a different kind of learning. That's why we're calling our experiment "The Practice." The focus is on the disciplines of the Christian life and the different practices that train us to go out and practice what Jesus said Monday through Saturday. ^[9]

Niequist has been influenced by Catholic priest Michael Sparough. On Aaron's blog, we read about an upcoming conference held at Willow Creek:

Hello pastor, *priest*, and worship leader friends. . . . If you are exploring the intersection of *ancient practices* with the modern world, please join us.

If you desire to live unforced *rhythms of Grace* and invite your church to do the same, please join us. If you often feel alone on this journey and long to meet others asking similar questions, please join us.

On February 14-16, The Practice Team, Fr Michael Sparough SJ, and Jonathan Martin are hosting a small retreat & conversation for pastors, *priests*, and worship leaders who don't just want to exhaust themselves building church programs, but who deeply desire to learn how *to align their lives* and communities with the eternal, redemptive *rhythms of God*. We'll practice together (*guided masterfully in a half day retreat by Fr Michael Sparough SJ*), engage meaningful conversation (lead by The Practice Team), gather around the communion table (pastored by Jonathan Martin), and spend all of Tuesday morning dreaming about how to tangibly invite our church communities into these *unforced rhythms of Grace*. [\[10\]](#) (emphasis added)

Fr. Michael Sparough SJ is a director at the Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House and the founder of Charis Ministries (a Jesuit retreat ministry). He is also a proponent of mystical prayer practices,[\[11\]](#) including the exercises of St. Ignatius (founder of the Jesuits). The Ignatian exercises are contemplative in nature and rooted in Eastern-style meditation. A little background information on the Jesuits might be helpful at this point.

While many believers in Christ during the Reformation period attempted to spread the truth that God's Word was truly God's Word and could not be squandered and kept hostage by the papacy and the Catholic Church, it was

not long before the Counter Reformation was founded to bring the “Separated Brethren” back to the “Mother of All Churches.”

This Counter Reformation was largely headed by Ignatius Loyola, the man who founded the Jesuit Order in the mid 1500s and launched an all-out attack against those who dared stand against the papacy and Rome. Today, the Jesuit order continues its efforts to bring back the “lost brethren” to the “Mother Church.”[\[12\]](#)

The fact that Fr. Sparough is both a Jesuit and an advocate of mystical prayer practices as well as a mentor to Bill Hybel’s son-in-law should make all Christians take notice. The fact that Calvary Chapel is now endorsing Bill Hybels should send shock waves through the church.

It would be foolhardy to not see how the dots are connected here. And some serious questions must be asked: Could Calvary Chapel’s newfound connection with Bill Hybels have an impact? What about the connection with “The Practice” and contemplative practices? Will this connect Calvary Chapel to the spiritual formation practices promoted by the Jesuits?

We have attempted to warn Calvary Chapels about this for over ten years. Only a few have taken the warning seriously.

This is another plea to wake up before it is too late.

[\[1\]](#) Galatians 1: 9-11

[\[2\]](#) Galatians 3:1

[\[3\] https://www.facebook.com/metzgerphil/posts/10208865589461194:0](https://www.facebook.com/metzgerphil/posts/10208865589461194:0)

[\[4\]](#) Phil Metzger, Pastor at Calvary Chapel Golgota Budapest and Director at Calvary Chapel Bible College Europe, standing with Bill Hybels (photo used in

accordance with the U.S. Fair Use Act, which allows the fair use of material for the purpose of review, education, and critical analysis).

[5] In 2007, Willow Creek and Bill Hybels “repented” from the seeker-friendly model, but an article written by Lighthouse Trails titled “No Repentance from Willow Creek – Only a Mystical Paradigm Shift” (<http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=2342>) provided documentation that Willow Creek was actually changing their focus toward contemplative spirituality.

[6] To understand the meaning of the New Age term “God’s dream, read Warren B. Smith’s article: “God’s Dream” or a Deceptive Scheme?” (<http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=1049>).

[7] <http://www.practicetribe.com/>

[8] <http://www.aaronniequist.com/blog/page/2> where Niequist calls Sparough his “spiritual director.”

[9] <http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2014/september-online-only/holy-experiment.html>

[10] <http://www.aaronniequist.com/blog>; also see

<http://bereanresearch.org/willow-creeks-the-practice-blends-new-age-catholic-mysticism>.

[11] See his audio cassettes titled “The Body at Prayer (Guided meditations using gestures, posture and breath)” (http://www.amazon.com/Prayer-Guided-meditations-gestures-posture/dp/B000U62T2G/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1455247461&sr=8-5&keywords=michael+sparough).

[12] These two paragraphs are from my article/booklet “A Jesuit Pope? Understanding The Jesuit Agenda and the Evangelical/Protestant Church” (<http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=6844>).