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Why I Left Hill\$ong Campus

Written by Lance Goodall

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Franchised:

I was an active member of *Garden City Christian Church* (GCCC) for 9 years from March 2001 to October 2009, under the leadership of Bruce Hills, pastor.

It was a great surprise to me, and to many others, that there was about to be a take-over by *Hillsong*.

After his return from 3 months leave, Bruce Hills was told by the board of GCCC in November 2008, that they wanted a pastor who was more of a CEO to run the church.¹

By his own confession Bruce was told to resign.²

This begs the questions, “How long had the board been thinking of changing the leadership?” And who contacted whom? Did Brian Houston contact GCCC, or did the current assistant pastor Steve Dixon (SD) pick up the phone and raise the matter with *Hillsong*?

Brian Houston became Brisbane’s senior pastor under the guidance, leadership and affirmation of assistant pastor SD and the board of GCCC. So called “campus pastor” Steve Dixon according to a report in the Courier Mail was at the time unsure how long he would remain part of the pastoral team.³

Another question that begs an answer is, “Why did the elders and board members of GCCC unanimously endorse the “takeover” by *Hillsong* and Brian Houston as senior pastor without investigating *Hillsong* for themselves?” On the day of the members’ vote, a number of the elders stood on stage and testified that they had never ventured south to attend even one *Hillsong* conference in Sydney, yet they were backing this change all the way!

Members and adherents of GCCC weren't given any opportunity to make any suggestions, nor was there any open discussion of leadership alternatives. The decision had been made. GCCC members were simply presented with one leadership appointment, and asked to vote.

There had been only one side of the story told. The information was always presented in a positive light, with little opportunity to question, or linger on doubts. Any questions raised were screened and well managed. I have since learned this is a technique used by the business world to manage change. There had been more spin over the pulpit in God's name, during these months, than found in your average Colgate commercial.

Once the decision was made, GCCC became an instant "franchise" of *Hillsong*. The Church is now market driven under the guise of being – "purpose driven".

Identity Crisis:

GCCC has totally lost its identity!

Without a moment to breathe, the leadership from Sydney suddenly arrived putting their stamp on this new way to "do church". We were presented with a spokesman for this, and a spokesman for that. We even had a special "Money Preacher" to encourage and remind us of the need to tithe and give generously. Such coercion from a "church" viz *Hillsong*, which is a juggernaut financially, with a turnover of of \$50 million plus a year⁴ is neither godly nor, in my opinion, acceptable.

We were no longer just affiliated with strong ties to *Hillsong*, we became *Hillsong*!

From day one everything had to change, and it did. For example – there was a fairly new coat of paint on the "church" walls from previous renovations, painted to a modern grey. Yet within days of the signs, and the optic fibre going in the carpark, the auditorium was repainted to the colour of the other *Hillsong* churches. Why spend the money?

As part of the takeover we had the celebrity gala feast; this one, and that one, from *Hillsong* Sydney visiting to give their counsel, and ideas. All the rich and famous were given a slot, and place of honour. For those who couldn't get enough of their *Hillsong* idols they could now have them visit here in

Queensland. With every guest appearance, Brian Houston became more like an *Amway Diamond*, than a pastor.

Hillsong is run as a Corporation not a church in its operation.

There is no New Testament precedent for this model and certainly not for its duplication.

The Church has taken its cue from Wall Street. It has been offered the kingdoms of this world, and yet instead of denying the flesh, it has embraced the path of least resistance, and in so doing, has denied the cross, and the One who bought us.

J. Edwin Orr pointed out that “seldom does God call one who ministers the Word to the ministry of money making. They are two separate callings.”⁵

By love for the world, we make ourselves an enemy of the cross:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him – [1 John 2:15](#).

Ambition and Success are the new golden calf.

Warren W. Wiersbe comments;

Few things taint our goodness like covetousness; a desire to be popular, and the ecstatic feeling that comes when we exercise power over the people who give us their idolatrous adoration. When our motives are wrong; our ministry is wrong; and the consequences are tragic for us, for those who follow us and for the whole church.⁶

This is now playing itself out at *Hillsong* Brisbane.

Seeking to be Sensitive:

The *Hillsong* way actually follows to the letter what is known as the *Seeker Sensitive or Church Growth Movement* model. This model is to help bring “unchurched” sinners into the meetings, and to make them as comfortable as possible with the experience.

- Dress down in clothing and style. Jeans are the new formal wear;

- Low mood lighting similar to a bar or nightclub. In Brisbane campus, it is so dimly lit it appears like night time, yet it's 10:30 am in the morning. Quite a contrast especially in Queensland when the sun is up at 5:30 am;
- Secular music is played as background music prior to the start of the service. eg The Verve – *Bitter Sweet Symphony*;
- Worship – now accommodates the excitability of the young and the unchurched;
- Music is now more about entertainment than the sole purpose of lifting up our God above all other gods;
- The lyrics (words) of the songs have progressively become “I, me, my” focused instead of Christ Jesus focused – e.g. *In Your Freedom I will live*;
- Worship is now limited to 20 minutes;
- Big screens are not there for the glory of God. It's not pictures of creation, but the names and faces of those on stage that are lifted up;
- *Hillsong* relies on the quality of programmes not the power of the Holy Spirit for transformed lives;
- Preaching is now a standard 20 minute sermonette;
- Preaching on the whole is “relevant” and topical. It is now a people based message to “help” the hearer with their felt-needs e.g. happiness, family, finances, relationships, job, career etc;

This type of pop spirituality effectively teaches:

- Every human being is divine or basically good;
- God's Word is not really the final authority, but is still useful as a moral guide;
- The goal of my life is centred on me;
- What I desire determines what happens in my life.

What this type of church model does, is nothing more than increase the numbers of adherents, and leaves the sinner in his sins. The church now has a flock of deceived sheep, or are they in reality misguided goats?

Massaging the Message:

- Messages lack any mention of sin, repentance, prayer, obedience, death to self, holiness, sacrifice, suffering, hell, even God himself.

- Preaching lacks sound doctrine. Closer analysis reveals it is more based around pop psychology, than biblical truth.
- The message has little challenge or need for personal self assessment.

Yet the scripture exhorts us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith
– [2 Corinthians 13:5](#)

The preaching frequently includes different Bible versions. This includes *The Message*, which is a perversion and not a true translation.

- Often this is quoted in church to expound or reveal a greater truth. It is normally thrown up on the big screen for everyone to read. *The Message* was produced by Eugene Peterson, as a simple paraphrase, not as a translation from the original texts. Yet without fail, not a Sunday will go by without this Bible version being quoted.
- To show the degree we have strayed, the KJV has over 700 references to “Lord” in the New Testament alone. *The Message* has just 23 verses which mention “Lord”. But the real concern is that “Lord” is never once associated or found linked to “Jesus” in any way in *The Message*.

Brian Houston frequently preaches a message that is a watered down gospel. He teaches from Bible verses that were never meant to say what he teaches. This is known as *Eisegesis*.

Eisegesis (from the Greek root εἰς, meaning into, in, among) is the process of misinterpreting a text in such a way that it introduces one’s own ideas, reading into the text. This is best understood when contrasted with Exegesis. While exegesis draws out the meaning from the text, eisegesis occurs when a reader reads his/her interpretation into the text. As a result, exegesis tends to be objective when employed effectively while eisegesis is regarded as highly subjective.

Verses are used just because they have a certain word or contain a truth that fits with his message.

Houston Heterodoxy:

Brian Houston lacks or is happy to ignore all forms of discernment;

Brian Houston’s preaching could be termed “Heterodox Humanism”

He happily accepts and promotes the following teachers most of whom have personally been at Hillsong Conferences.

You will also find these people's books as the only books available in the *Hillsong Resource Centres* (bookshop), along with Brian and Bobby's material of course!⁷

- *Joyce Meyer* – Prosperity Teacher/ Preacher. cf. Paul's instruction about women teachers – [1 Timothy 2:12](#).
- *Joel Osteen* – Prosperity Preacher and denier of the true Gospel
- *Jerry Saville* – Prosperity Preacher
- *T D Jakes* – Prosperity Preacher and denier of the trinity (advertised as guest speaker at the 2010 Hillsong Conference).
- *Rick Warren* – member of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) trained under Robert H. Schuller (a la – The Hour of Power)
- *Bill Hybels* – Pastor of Willow Creek Church – who has admitted getting it wrong with the Seeker Sensitive model. Hybels trained under Robert H. Schuller and is good friends with Rick Warren. According to Schuller — Self Esteem is the new reformation!! He defines sin as a lack of “self-esteem”.
- *Pearsons* – Jeremy Pearsons (wife Sarah) son-in-law of Kenneth and Gloria Copeland—visited Hillsong Powerhouse in Sydney in October 2009 for Encounter '09⁸
- *Hillsong United* band played for the Pope during his visit to Sydney in 2008.
- *Sisterhood* (a term widely used by Hillsong) is a concept borrowed from the Women's liberation movement, and the new age.

Darwin's Day:

Finally one of the worst instances of spiritual bankruptcy I've experienced was the live performance of the “Hillsong Creation story”, featured at Hillsong Brisbane on 11-Oct-2009.

Aspects can only be touched on here. The play was done in humour, and obviously aimed at a child audience. However the fun and humour ends very quickly, where the creation narrative turns into a sham and a circus. Plants and animals were various members of the congregation, dressed in costumes. More and more characters appeared on stage, and we had six or more of the cast from the pastoral team. Somehow we were meant to make

the mental leap, as a congregation, from the bouncing chicken and the freckle faced rat to God's act of creating our world and the Universe out of nothing!?!)

The seven days of creation were played out by various actors and God even created for us – “Superheros”, like Batman and the Incredible Hulk, both making a guest appearance. God is so “great”, that He invented superheros, can openers, and cars!

The Holy Spirit at one stage was taking too long to come – “*hovering over the waters*”. Towards the end Adam and Eve appeared clothed (minus the fall, sin and satan, and God's provision). The story ends

Steve Dixon then expounded for about twenty minutes the creation story as found in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

He touched on a few points expressing the view that we are not able to know the exact time frame of God's creation, whether it was a literal seven days, or a certain period of time which God took to make earth.⁹

Darwin would have been proud on this 150th Anniversary of his Origin of Species, and Richard Dawkins would be more than bemused.

The Church in the West for too long has sailed along in fair seas. The Zephyr has fluttered at our sails in the height of summer, and has blown comfort upon the people. Our ship has sailed below sapphire skies, the crew sleeps, while the current of the world, and tides of apostasy have taken us off course, and we barely know it.

The worst of it is, darkening clouds beckon on the horizon, bringing a storm of ecumenism and coming persecution with barely anyone to trim the sail of this wayward vessel.

Conclusion:

Since the introduction of Hillsong to Brisbane, this once truly relevant and purposeful church has been sideswiped. A church birthed in humility and zeal by its founders, who gave all to the cause of Christ, have now become a people who have lost their way, and now dance to the flute of the musician, whose song is not the song of the Lord.

The love of fame and fortune have been Christianized, and an unsuspecting flock now give their allegiance to a captain who cares “little, if anything, for their salvation”.

It must be said that they who began well have turned aside to follow a shepherd who is no shepherd. The hireling has crept in unawares. Paul complained in his day:

For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's – [Philippians 2: 20, 21](#).

The way once narrow, now abandoned, has become a broadened highway, opening up to the verdant plains leading on to the gates of a city that arises in the distance. It is that great city, clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! It is a city proud, that city upon seven hills – BABYLON.

about the author

Lance Goodall and his wife Norilyn have both served the Lord in the AOG movement for many years. They have since come out of the Church Growth Movement. They both have a concern for the knowledge of God and His glory. They carry in their heart, a love for Gods' honour, for His Word, and for the salvation of the lost....

Footnotes

- 1) Part of the transcript from a sermon preached by Bruce Hills at Legana Church in Tasmania – Easter – April 2009 – DVD can be obtained by ordering from Legana Church.
- 2) CWM has a copy of a transcript from a tape recording of Bruce preaching in which he make this confession.
- 3) The meeting was held on Sunday 26th April 2009 to determine the vote from the congregation. 80% of those present agreed to have Brian & Bobbie Houston as senior pastors
- 4) <http://tinyurl.com/242myr7>

5) J. Edwin Orr, Revival is like judgement Day (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, SBC 1987) p. 14

6) Warren W. Wiersbe – The integrity Crisis (Nashville; Oliver Nelson Publishers, 1988) p. 56.

7) I personally visited the store, and viewed the books all over the shelves in the resource centre (bookshop) at Brisbane Campus. I suggest you check out any Hillsong bookshop

8) <http://tinyurl.com/289qwxk>

9) This “play” was performed at the Garden City, Brisbane congregation in the 10:30 am service on the 11th October 2009.”

Source: Lance Goodall, Why I Left Hill\$ong Brisbane Campus, Franchised, Christian Witness Ministries, http://www.cwm.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148:why-i-left-hillong-brisbane-campus&catid=45:cetf52&Itemid=41,