The 2009 National Worship Leader Conference took place on July 20-23 in Leawood, Kansas and brought together a convergence of contemplative/emerging speakers.

Some will probably wonder though why popular trusted figures like Calvary Chapel’s Greg Laurie, 70s Jesus movement singer Evie, and Love Song lead singer, Chuck Girard, were part of the speaking/singing platform too. That’s a good question considering the number of speakers at the event who were hearty advocates for the contemplative new spirituality: some of those included Leonard Sweet, Chuck Fromm (founder of the event and of Worship Leader magazine), emerging leader Sally Morgenthaler, Brennan Manning proponent Michael W. Smith, the pro-contemplative David Crowder Band, contemplative/emerging Marva Dawn, Alpha Course leader and contemplative proponent Todd Hunter, and others.

Sally Morgenthaler’s pre-conference session was titled “Going deeper into the skills you need to serve your congregation.” By “Going deeper,” contemplatives mean to enter the silent space that is induced by contemplative prayer practices such as mantra-type meditation. Morgenthaler wrote the foreword for Dan Kimball’s emerging church book, Emerging Worship, and she resonates deeply with contemplative proponents like the late Robert Webber. Her own book, Worship Evangelism, carries an endorsement on the cover by New Age sympathizer Leonard Sweet as well as C. Peter Wagner. Morgenthaler is currently a “Visiting Professor” at the very contemplative George Fox University. In her book, Worship Evangelism, she references mystic Henri Nouwen as someone who can lead us into God’s presence. Nouwen believed that Christian leaders had to move from the “moral to the mystical” in order to be effective (from In the Name of Jesus).

Another one of the speakers at the worship conference, Leonard Sweet, a New Age sympathizer, teaches that a glorious “New Light” movement is awaiting birth, and New Age leaders and mystics are the inspiration for this movement. Warren Smith discusses Sweet extensively in his new book, A “Wonderful” Deception because of Sweet’s ties to Rick Warren and the new spirituality. In Sweet’s book, Quantum Spirituality (a manifesto for the new spirituality), he states that the literal reading of the Bible is lethal (p. 140) and that a “christ consciousness” can be obtained in a “small group” setting (p. 148). In a statement by Mike Erre (Death by Church), the emerging pastor who recently spoke at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa to several thousand youth, Erre referenced Leonard Sweet as someone who would help lead the way for the future of Christianity. 1

Michael W. Smith has most likely sent tens of thousands to the feet of mysticism proponent Brennan Manning through his endorsement of Manning. In light of Manning’s spiritual views, that is very troubling. For instance, in Manning’s book, Above All (in which Smith wrote the foreword), Manning echoes the words of Thomas Merton biographer and mystic William Shannon when Shannon (and Manning) rejected the idea that a loving God would send His son to a violent death: THAT God does not exist, they both insisted. 2 What’s more Manning actually teaches mantra-like meditation is his book, The Signature of Jesus.

David Crowder, also at the conference, is the author of the contemplative-promoting book, Praise Habit (referring to the habits worn by Catholic nuns). In an interview with LifeTeen.com (a web site for Catholic teens), Crowder admits: “Much of the Catholic traditions and writings have been influential in my formation of faith … I’ve found much inspiration there.” These Catholic traditions referred to are those emulated by monks such as Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating.
The conference offered numerous workshops interspersed with the above speakers’ lectures. Just as an example, a workshop taught by Reggie Kidd, professor at Reformed Theological Seminary and on faculty at the very contemplative Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, included instructions on worshipping through the “Eucharist prayer” and through “chanting the psalms.” Videos presented at the conference included those by emerging figures Shane Claiborne, Richard Twiss, and others.

Many of our readers may be wondering why Greg Laurie would be speaking at this clearly contemplative/emerging conference. Laurie’s head pastor, Chuck Smith, made it very clear a few years ago that Calvary Chapel would NOT be going in the contemplative/emerging direction. But, come to think of it, Chuck Smith also said at that time that Calvary Chapel had to reject the Purpose Driven movement, but on August 9th, according to Greg Laurie’s website, he spoke at Saddleback Church at a number of services.

Related:

Greg Laurie Connects Purpose Driven to a Move of God