Greg Laurie Connects Purpose Driven to a Move of God – Gives Financial Support

On May 6th, Greg Laurie, pastor of mega-church Harvest Christian Fellowship wrote a letter to pastors and church leaders in the New York region, announcing his Harvest Crusade 2008 in New York City on October 19th. This letter to pastors and leaders is causing confusion among some because of its content, and this Lighthouse Trails report will examine this issue.

Greg Laurie is best known as a Calvary Chapel pastor. His church is listed on the Calvary Chapel website, and Laurie often speaks at Calvary Chapel functions. And it is Laurie’s connection with Calvary Chapel that presents a great dilemma.

Two years ago, in May of 2006, Calvary Chapel issued a “Parson to Parson” letter, in which a statement was made against the emerging church and contemplative spirituality. The following month, at the 2006 Senior Pastor’s Conference, Calvary Chapel founder and pastor, Chuck Smith, told the senior pastors that Calvary Chapel as a whole was rejecting various movements and practices that have been taking place within the Christian church at large as well as in some Calvary Chapel churches. According to a number of pastors in attendance, who afterwards spoke with Lighthouse Trails, Smith asked that those Calvary Chapel pastors who were going in the direction of the emerging church would no longer call themselves Calvary Chapel churches. One week later, Calvary Chapel instructed its distribution center to immediately remove all of Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven Life books from its center. The statement read: “The teaching and positions of Rick Warren have come into conflict with us at Calvary Chapel. Pastor Chuck has directed us to discontinue this product effective immediately.”

Such directives coming from the founder of Calvary Chapel have caused an array of mixed feelings. There are many Calvary Chapel pastors who wholeheartedly support these decisions, such as John Higgins of Calvary Chapel Tri-City in Tempe, Arizona and Jim Jarrett of Calvary Chapel Redding in California. Both pastors have taken strong stands against contemplative and emerging spiritualities, as have other Calvary Chapel pastors. However, there are some who have ignored Chuck Smith’s directives and continued taking their churches toward these beliefs. And still others have been unsure in which direction to go. But one thing is for sure, Chuck Smith is one of the only well-known Christian figures today who has made public declarations against contemplative, emerging, and Purpose Driven. Just last week, at the 2008 Senior Pastors Conference, former New Age follower Warren Smith addressed the 800 senior pastors, at Chuck Smith’s invitation. Warren Smith is the author of Deceived on Purpose: The New Age Implications of the Purpose Driven Church. This invitation leaves no question that Chuck Smith is still committed to his earlier statements rejecting the Purpose Driven, emerging, and contemplative movements.

And now this brings us to the unpleasant task of reporting that Greg Laurie is giving a strong promotion of Rick Warren and Bill Hybels, which means he is indirectly promoting contemplative and emerging (which we will explain later in this article), and directly promoting Purpose Driven. And unfortunately, there is a twist to this story.

In Laurie’s May 2008 letter to pastors and leaders, Laurie talks about his upcoming crusade in New York City, saying, in reference to it, “God is on the move.” He then states that “[t]his move is also seen in the formation of the New York City Leadership group. Under their direction, a community-wide 40 Days of Purpose campaign with Pastor Rick Warren has been launched, and the significant services of Bill Hybels’ Leadership Summit.
conferences are also being organized to strengthen the local church.”

Because Laurie has publicly connected Purpose Driven to a move of God and calls Willow Creek’s conferences “significant,” Lighthouse Trails has no choice but to issue this warning to the body of Christ. For those who may find this rebuttal too severe, bear in mind that just last month Rick Warren had New Age sympathizer Leonard Sweet speak at his small groups conference. Sweet has stated that small groups are the means in which people can attain to a “christ-consciousness” (a New Age belief). And as for Bill Hybels, this spring Willow Creek featured Brian McLaren at one of their youth conferences. McLaren, who calls the doctrine of hell and the Cross “false advertising for God”, is one of the emerging church’s most prolific writers and a close associate of Willow Creek. And as Lighthouse Trails has been consistently showing for over five years, both Rick Warren and Bill Hybels are two of the emerging church’s most influential proponents, and both heartily promote the mystical contemplative prayer movement (see A Time of Departing, chapter 8). For those who understand the ramifications of the contemplative approach to spirituality this is disconcerting.

In addition to Greg Laurie’s letter to pastors regarding Rick Warren and Bill Hybels, Lighthouse Trails has learned that Laurie is also helping to finance Warren’s September event in New York. Lighthouse Trails contacted the New York City Leadership group this past week (contact person: Beverly Cook, Director of Communications) after we learned that Laurie’s name was on their website showing him to be a sponsor. The New York City office said that this sponsorship is in the way of financial support and is for Rick Warren’s September conference. There are two “Event Sponsors”: Greg Laurie and a legal firm in New York. Without a doubt, Laurie supports Purpose Driven.

And now for the twist: To make a long story short, in 2005 Lighthouse Trails issued a report titled “Rick Warren teams up with New Age guru Ken Blanchard”. Our report, while fully documented and accurate, brought on a barrage of response from Rick Warren and Saddleback, including a letter from Warren to Lighthouse Trails denying the connection, phone calls and emails from two Saddleback leaders, numerous letters sent out from Saddleback calling Lighthouse Trails evil and liars, and an accusation from Saddleback, saying that Federal agents believed that Lighthouse Trails may have broken into their computer server. In addition, there was an effort to discredit George Mair, a biographer who wrote a testament of praise in his book A Life with Purpose but who inadvertently connected Rick Warren with Ken Blanchard.

All this to say that Rick Warren and Ken Blanchard had made plans to work together to implement the global P.E.A.C.E. Plan (read transcript). But since our report and since Warren denied the connection, little has publicly been done between Blanchard and Warren.(1) But that has changed. On the New York City Leadership’s “National Advisory Team,” which incidentally is a brand new organization (according to the phone call we had this week), sits, among others, Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and Ken Blanchard.(2) We were told that Blanchard’s role is to help develop programming for area pastors and leaders. For those who are not familiar with Blanchard’s promotion of eastern style mysticism and numerous New Age authors, we encourage you to study the matter on our research site, in which we provide solid documentation. Blanchard, who claims to have become a Christian in the mid-eighties, has even up until recently shown a propensity toward mysticism; and his involvement with a process called the Hoffman Quadrinity Process (a New Age belief system), leaves no doubt as to where Blanchard stands on these spiritual matters. Of the Hoffman Process, Blanchard says, “The Hoffman Process brings forth spiritual leadership in a person” and “It made my spirituality come alive.” 2 In a 2007 book titled Little Wave and Old Swell, a book that is “Inspired by Hindu Swami Paramahansa Yoganananda,” Blanchard has written a glowing foreword!

This report will obviously be disheartening to many Calvary Chapel pastors and church goers who have believed that their movement was going to press forward into the future without these un-biblical movements. Laurie’s current promotion and financial backing of Rick Warren will cause many to wonder just which direction the Calvary Chapel movement will really end up going. Roger Oakland, a world-wide evangelist who has ministered to pastors and congregations for over twenty years had this to say about the situation:
of the Emerging Church, not all Calvary Chapel pastors are listening and taking his warning seriously. The idea that we need to find methods and practices to reach the postmodern generation by becoming postmodern is dangerous. I am deeply concerned for pastors who are moving in this direction.

It is ironic that on April 21st of this year, WorldNet Daily posted an article written by Greg Laurie titled “The Emergent Church: A dangerous counterfeit.” In the article, Laurie said that as a teen he “had been looking for something to believe in, something worth living or dying for, something that was genuine, real and authentic. But most of all,” he said, “I was looking for something that was true.” Laurie said he found this truth in Jesus Christ. He added, in referring to the emerging church: “And there are some pied pipers out there who are leading many young people down the wrong road.” And then he quotes Brian McLaren. In his article, Laurie correctly identifies the panentheistic overtones of the emerging church, but here lies the irony. While Laurie is right in exposing the false doctrines of Brian McLaren and mystics who say all paths lead to God and God is in all, by his promoting Rick Warren and Bill Hybels, he too is promoting these heresies. Indirectly yes, but nevertheless still promoting them. And this is going to confuse and mislead many people. Maybe it is time Greg Laurie goes full circle and comes back to that place of his youth when he said, “I was looking for something true.” He won’t find it in contemplative or in the emerging church; and that means he won’t find it in Willow Creek or Purpose Driven because both of these movements adhere to contemplative and emerging. It is our prayer that Greg Laurie will remove his financial backing from Rick Warren’s New York conference and send out a new letter denouncing what he previously suggested is a move of God.

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1. In the fall of 2007, Rick Warren invited Ken Blanchard back to Saddleback. As far as we know, it was the first time he had been there in over three years (see story).

2. Bob Buford also sits on the board. Read chapter 2 of Faith Undone for documentation on Buford’s significant role in launching the emerging church movement.