

HELLSONG

HELLSONG

The Music of Hillsong

– *In Praise of Folly* –

“These things have I written unto you
concerning them that seduce you.”

— 1 John 2:26



LANCE GOODALL

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To Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron who stopped the plague and stayed the hand of God,* and in memory of all those who have gone before, who have contended earnestly for the faith.¹

¹ Num. 25:1–9, Ps. 106:28–30, 1Jude 3

FOREWORD

My sheep hear MY voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

—Jn. 10:27.

I write this foreword to a highly critical book about Hillsong with a deep concern on two fronts.

Firstly, as a pastor of more than 55 years, I am always mindful of Peter the Apostle's clear enjoinder to church leaders (elders) in his time:

The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock; and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. (1 Pet. 5:1–4)

There are two things in this passage that stand out.

Firstly, those that are true pastors (elders) are NOT the head Shepherd. Jesus is. One of my catch cries throughout my ministry has been that I am only an unworthy errand boy for Jesus. The second thing that is emphasised by Peter is that reward for service is NOT now but later

when Christ appears. In my opinion and that of the author of this book, these two things are where Hillsong and its modus operandi reveal their true nature, what Jesus calls the hireling (Jn.10:12,13). The pastor is to feed, care for, and be an example to the sheep and not look to the allure of money that comes with position. Therefore I say Hillsong and most so-called megachurches are NOT churches in the true sense. They are corporations, enterprises that pursue money and the control of people. They are thieves.

Secondly, I have a deep concern for the people, some of whom are my relations, who are not hearing and therefore not following the True Shepherd, whose voice is drowned out by the raucous, worldly sound of what the author of this book calls – Hellsong. These people deserve to be rescued before the Chief Shepherd appears.

Recently I preached a message based on Psalm 23 entitled ‘A Day in the Life of a Sheep’, being a title that dropped into my mind many years ago and formed the basis for a message that I have preached in various parts of the world. When I revisited the ‘sermon’, I came across the following anecdote which I found to be most moving.

During World War I, some Turkish soldiers tried to steal a flock of sheep from a hillside near Jerusalem. The shepherd, who had been sleeping, awoke to find his flock being driven off. He couldn’t recapture them by force, so he called out to his flock with his distinctive call. The sheep listened and returned to their rightful owner. The soldiers couldn’t stop the sheep from returning to their shepherd’s voice.

I pray that this book will amplify the voice of the True Shepherd and that many will heed it and return from the fold of the corporate church to the fold of the Chief Shepherd before it is too late.

For the Record

In April 2009 Hillsong of Sydney took over Garden City Christian Church (GCCC) in Brisbane, Australia. This corporate-like “buyout” had never been done in quite this way before—one church completely swallowed up by another. Until the ‘takeover’, Garden City Christian Church had a sixty year history forged through the dedicated prayers and work of a membership that spanned two generations.

Hillsong was able to acquire the congregation’s property through the stealth management of the board, in particular through the underhanded instigation of Pastor Steve and “Pastrix” Joyce Dixon, who were stand-in leaders of the congregation at the time. When the deal was done, Brian Houston stood as the preferred and only candidate for senior pastor. The membership had a choice: it could vote for Brian, or it could vote for Steve. Steve Dixon threatened the voters with the ultimatum that if Brian was not elected, he and his wife would leave and head off to China to minister.

It was during this protracted takeover of GCCC by Hillsong United that Lance Goodall first attended Christian Witness Ministries Fellowship (CWMF) where I pastor, most recently in association with Jeff Pitman; and ever since, Lance and his wife have been loyal members.

As part of Christian Witness Ministries, we have for over 20 years regularly produced a magazine with the title *Contending Earnestly for the Faith*, or CETF. For this publication, beginning in the autumn of 2011, Lance wrote a three part series of significant articles on the subject of Hillsong—The Music of Hillsong. These articles were the catalyst for his writing this book, and my hope and prayer is that Lance’s book will introduce a measure of self-examination to and accountability for individual Christians and congregations mesmerized by Hillsong’s music, any discernment about which, until Lance’s writing, has been sadly lacking.

LANCE GOODALL

Hillsong United is having their own feature documentary produced that will be filmed on five different continents. The production will tell the story of Hillsong's worldwide rise to fame and notoriety. It is most unlikely that information like what is outlined here will be covered in Hillsong's Hollywood production.

So for a prelude to 'the rest of the story', read this book. We should all be disturbed by the godless entertainment mode of worship that has now become entrenched in churches worldwide. The church needs to heed the message of this book NOW!

Philip L. Powell

Pastor

Christian Witness Ministries Fellowship.

Ephesians 5:18–19

17 Nov 2014

INTRODUCTION

Where upon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan.

—1 Kings 12:28, 29

We see early in his reign: a king in Israel happened upon the idea of providing another worship centre for the people. They no longer needed to make the long journey to Jerusalem. King Jereboam made two calves of gold and set up one in the city of Bethel and the other in the city of Dan.

It seemed such a simple concept. They could incorporate their religious practice into their daily lives—a religion of convenience with little to no adjustment or change to their existing lifestyle. He even made a house of high places and made priests who were not of the sons of Levi (1 Kings 12:31). Jereboam brought a dynasty of departure throughout Israel and successive kings followed in his disastrous footsteps. Proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin.

In the Exodus, there in the wilderness, the children of Israel provoked Aaron to make them an idol made like the golden calf in Egypt. He cried out: ‘These be your gods, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt’ (Exod. 32:7,8).

What begins as a work of God can quickly become the work of man, which ends up corrupted and confounded. Leaders who consult human wisdom fail to put God first instead give into the desires of the people and fall into convenience, compromise, and contempt.

Therefore, our conception of God is important not only to our theology but also to our mode of living. Our failure in applying true Christian doctrine is based on a low and subjugated opinion of God. Our view of God, whether lofty or base, is the fountainhead from which all springs have their source. Perverted and twisted notions of God will by necessity mean a perverted religion. The deception in all this is we may have an orthodoxy that complies with the truth but outworked practically, betrays an unworthy view of God.

Like Jereboam, a new breed of ministers has given rise to an alternative form of worship. This delight in the downgrade is justified by the need to maintain interest in religion in an ever-changing contemporary world.

The long history of the children of Israel shows this gradual decline away from God, which always began with the apostasy in her vision of God.

This book shows the modern-day Christian church has taken this very same path.

1

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name.

—Gen. 11:4

After almost a century, the Anglican church of St Mary Magdalene in Brisbane, Australia, is closing its doors because of an ongoing decline in parishioners.¹ There are just a few faithful members left. God is dead and church is boring, right?

But only suburbs away, Hillsong's Brisbane congregation is flourishing!

Every Sunday, this modern church, full of hand-raising, heart-thumping, hipster-style Christianity, packs the house. As the rock concert begins, words are displayed on the large multi-media screens. The lights are dimmed, the excited crowd stand to their feet, all clapping along in time to the music. The hi-tech laser lights fan the auditorium, the fog machines spread their mist, and the lead singer shouts 'let's lift up the name of Jesus'. The pounding force of the music, and the crescendo of cymbals fills the room and intensifies the atmosphere. At Hillsong Church, you come for the Rock Concert, and soak in the sermon.

An article in the *Courier Mail* in November 2014 gave a glowing report of the incredible growth of Hillsong. Pastor Steve Dixon in Mt Gravatt,

Brisbane, said Hillsong's attendance rate has grown exponentially over the last four or five years. Hillsong Church is part of the megachurch phenomenon exploding across the globe.

'Our church is alive and full, and we've got momentum going where people want to come and check it out,' Pastor Dixon said.

'The life in the church, the size of the church, and the momentum—people find it all very attractive.'² Parking is at such a premium that two traffic officers are paid by the Brisbane Campus to direct traffic between Sunday services.³

This is the new gospel revolution—God is now made glamorous!

Hillsong has packaged together what other churches only dream of. While many grapple with a simple name change, Hillsong continues to climb the charts with success, numbers, and revenue. They have an uncanny ability to produce catchy Christian rock 'worship', year in and year out, charismatic energy, and a global expansion programme, which engulfs and swallows up many a church. This all-embracing (we don't condemn) approach has brought worldwide appeal, a winning combination in major cities around the globe.

On any given Sunday, children and adults are assisted to make church that much easier with a crèche or breakout area, coffee stations for the adults to 'mix and mingle', and enumerable volunteers in their uniform T-shirt who welcome you with broad smiles, 'welcome home' packs, and directions to the best seats.

The church has just celebrated a milestone of 30 years, one of the most globally successful and influential churches.⁴

On the surface, Hillsong appears similar to any evangelical megachurch, but this Pentecostal phenomenon has grown into a global sensation.

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The church has established locations in key cities across the globe, including London, Cape Town, Paris, Kiev, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, New York, and in recent months, cities in Argentina. And Ben Houston, the son of founders Brian and Bobbie Houston, now makes Los Angeles his home. Few churches in the U.S. could boast such global influence.

The New York location, co-founded by Brian's son Joel Houston, is one of the city's fastest-growing churches, attracting celebrities like singer Justin Bieber and Oklahoma City Thunder forward Kevin Durant.

Hillsong Church takes in \$100 million a year from its tax-exempt Australian operations as its weekly flock of 34,000 hands over their hard-earned cash.⁵

Having said all that, Hillsong is never far from controversy. With their 'trending on Twitter' theology, their vast financial tax-free stash, and child abuse rumours involving Brian Houston's father, Frank, the organisation is always in the spotlight. Even during their Hillsong Conference in July 2015, their guest Mark Driscoll was interviewed, a man of controversy who has made it his trademark to make 'off' comments about women. Since then his leadership style has brought an implosion to his ministry at Mar's Hill Church. However, Hillsong, this 'Jesus Juggernaut', keeps ploughing on regardless, mostly through the mass marketing of its music. The church was originally known as Hills Christian Life Centre back in early 80s, but the music became so popular they took on the Hillsong name. Senior pastor Brian Houston founded Hillsong 30 years ago in Australia.

"To be honest, when we started we had no idea that one day we would have campuses and churches all around the globe like we do today," Houston said.⁶

Young people are drawn to Hillsong's music. What once was a music ministry has become a music industry.

To date, the Hillsong United label has sold over 16 million albums. Its album *Zion* debuted at number one on iTunes overall albums chart in the United States and in seven other countries and was listed at number five on the Billboard 200. They also have *Hillsong Worship* which is the congregational expression of worship from Hillsong Church— a local church with global influence. More recently, they have a new arm to capture the tweens under the label *Young and Free*.

It has the largest Twitter following among any faith-based artists with more than 680,000 followers and more than 4 million Facebook fans.⁷

In the opening narration of the movie *Field of Dreams*, Ray (Kevin Costner) explains how he had a troubled relationship with his father, who was a devoted baseball fan. While walking through his cornfield one evening, he hears a voice that whispers, ‘If you build it, he will come.’⁸

Hillsong’s secret appears to be a combination of music, casual charismatic theology, and this kind of ‘build it’ philosophy. Hillsong frankly relies on its music, money, and marketing.

This success mantra is echoed by Marcia McFee, a worship consultant who coaches various churches on enhancing their services with light, sound, and motion. The idea is that today’s modern worshippers can’t sit still in the presence of God. This restless mob, must be doing something, whether it be responding with dancing or drumming or raising hands.⁹

What wonderful drawcards. Church filled with excitement, momentum, dancing, drumming, and rich visuals—what more could one want?

But the question must be seriously asked. Do we blindly follow this success? Do we just sit back and accept the giddy heights that Hillsong Church has reached and put it all down to God? Do we put it down to God’s blessing or perhaps something else? We see that many are coming, but coming to what?

As we shall discover, not all that glitters is gold.