

Connections

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: ANOTHER NEW DENOMINATIONAL BOOK: SPIRITUAL BODY BUILDING

THE NEW BOOK: CONNECTIONS

The title of the book is *Connections: The Right People, In the Right Places, For the Right Reasons*. The authors are three non-Adventists: Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels. Hybels is the pastor of the megachurch, Willow Creek, near Chicago, Illinois.

The original book title, as published by Zondervan, is *Network Kit*. *Connections* is an Adventist reissue, plus a few quotations from Ellen White or other Adventist writers. The only copyright is by Willow Creek Community Church. The reader is also told that “all Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version,” and that some Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible. Since there is no second copyright, this “Adventist edition” contains essentially what is in the Willow Creek *Network Kit*.

Monte Sahlin, Administrator, North American Church Resources Consortium, recommending the book, provides a brief *Foreward*.

Also at the front of the book is the Acknowledgements by Bruce Bugbee, President of *Network Ministries International*. An Ecumenical non-Adventist, like all the other authors of this book, Curtis Rittenour mentions that he is indebted to Ron Gladden’s willingness to be one of the first to use this material in an Adventist setting, as a replacement for “the traditional nominating committee.” Gladden experimented and found that he could eliminate the democratic voting process in our local churches, by, instead, appointing people to offices in accordance with what he thought were their “gifts.” Would you consider it safe to eliminate the normal voting process, whereby the members elect the leaders in their local church? As you may know, Gladden recently bolted from the organization and started his own “denomination.” Actually, Gladden’s idea of selection is reflected in the subtitle of *Connections: “The Right People, In the Right Places, For the Right Reasons.”*

Just after the *Foreward* is the *Preface*, by Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor, Willow Creek Community Church.

In it, he explains that this book contains the methods of instructing and molding church mem-

bers which have been developed over a period of time by Hybels and the staff of Willow Creek. A concluding paragraph has been inserted for this present “Adventist edition”:

“I consider the development of the Network [Connections] materials to be one of the most significant breakthroughs in the history of Willow Creek Community Church.

“We discovered years ago that believers flourish in their service to Christ when they are serving in the area of their giftedness and in conjunction with their God-given uniqueness. These materials grew out of our desire to help believers discover their spiritual gifts, and then determine where to use them in our church body . . .

“I’ve been privileged to meet many Seventh-day Adventists at our Church Leadership Conferences. And I am pleased these materials have been adapted for the Adventist community.

“May God bless you as you learn and grow through these tremendous materials.

“Bill Hybels

“Senior Pastor

“Willow Creek Community Church”

Who is Bill Hybels? You may be surprised to learn that his megachurch has trained large numbers of our leaders and pastors in Willow Creek techniques of increasing church growth by skits, more “popular” music, and celebration-style activities during church service. *Read the box on the next page. More about Bill Hybels and his church on page 3.*

WHAT DOES THE NEW BOOK TEACH?

Session One of the book, *Connections*, is concerned with instilling the concept that we must all be together, regardless of our individual differences in thinking (*pp. 1-12*).

Session Two is a 10-page “Passion Assessment” which the reader must fill out (*pp. 13-22*), to list all things which thrill him most.

Session Three is entitled, “*Why Can’t You Be More Like Me?*” and stresses the need “to become more interdependent” (*pp. 23-33*). The great need for each church member, regardless of differences in thinking, to become more interdependent, is strongly emphasized on *pp. 28-29*.

Session Four is quite lengthy (*pp. 35-88*). The participants are first subjected to “Huddle Groups”

The quotation below, from a 1997 *Review* article, is frankly astounding. *First*, it says that 2,200 local churches, representing 70 different denominations, are members of the Willow Creek Association (WCA). The WCA teaches those churches how to gear every church activity toward devising ways to increase attendance and membership. Any type of worldly religious activity that will achieve that goal is acceptable.

Second, the article says that, consistently, there are more Seventh-day Adventist workers and leaders in attendance at WCA meetings—than from almost any other denomination! This is truly incredible! And, showing how fearless they are of rebuke, our leadership is not ashamed to proclaim it in the pages of the *Review*!

Third, the article admits that three of the leading Adventist churches, which have totally separated from the denomination—were ones which had most deeply imbibed Willow Creek concepts of celebrationism, anything-goes-religion, and do-what-it-takes-to-bring-them-in-off-the-streets.

Since that article was written, the pastor of the Mountain View Church in Las Vegas, praised below, has left the denomination and is now pastoring a Sundaykeeping church. You will recall that was the church we wrote about (*Adventist Sunday Church, WM-937*), which the *Pacific Union Recorder* featured in a full two-page article (*February 2000, pp. 34-35*), praising it (!) for holding its church services on Sunday, in order to attract more visitors.

Fourth, although fully recognizing that the denomination is gradually losing some of its largest churches, because of Willow Creek celebrationism and worldliness, the article concludes that we always get “positive thoughts” there. So we need to “continue gleaning from Willow Creek”; for “we can learn from each other.” Willow Creek is doing the teaching; we are doing the learning.

Fifth, the reader is told that, not only are Adventists in Bible prophecy, Willow Creek is in there too! The writer obviously means that it is there in a very good and beneficial way.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is gradually destroying itself; and, surprisingly, the process is being helped along by leaders more anxious for increased membership than maintaining historic beliefs and standards. Unfortunately, the few among us who seem genuinely concerned about the increasing crisis—are declared to be troublemakers.

**THE DECEMBER 18, 1997
ADVENTIST REVIEW ARTICLE**

“What to do with Willow Creek?”

“Fact: America’s most attended church, a non-charismatic nondenominational church in suburban Chicago, continues to shape not only its immediate community but, more notably, the 2,200 member churches from 70 denominations participating in the Willow Creek Association. WCA endeavors to “help the church turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ.”

“Fact: Adventists, both pastors and laypeople, consistently make up one of the largest groups at Willow Creek’s half-dozen annual seminars—including church leadership conferences in May and October and a leadership summit in August.

“Fact: The three latest Adventist churches to divide or depart [separate from the denomination]—Oregon’s Sunnyside, Maryland’s Damascus, and Colorado’s Christ Advent Fellowship—were clearly influenced by Willow Creek’s ministry hallmarks (small groups, spiritual gifts discovery, friendship evangelism, contemporary worship), if not its congregational status.

“Fact: Many Adventists who haven’t been to Willow Creek are sick of hearing about it from Adven-

tists who have been to Willow Creek. In some cases **local members have divided over how “seeker-sensitive” their church services should be.**

“What to do with Willow Creek? . . . I’m grateful for Willow Creek. It was there that my former academy church, Forest Lake, got intentional about worship; that Adventist friends and relatives recognized their natural abilities—from drama to maintenance—as natural ministries . . .

“I’ve never exited the \$34.3 million [Willow Creek] complex without positive thoughts.

“From this perspective I offer these sentiments:

“Adventists should give Willow Creek a fair shake. As a people often prejudged, we should avoid prejudging others . . . **Adventists should continue gleaning from Willow Creek . . . Willow Creek has its place in prophecy too.** Granted, it’s a different place. But we can learn from each other . . .

“I think of Mountain View Church in Las Vegas; of the freshly planted New Community in Atlanta; of my home church, New Hope, in Laurel, Maryland; and of other churches mature enough to incorporate Willow Creek principles . . .

“We can learn from each other.”—“*On Willow Creek,*” *Adventist Review*, December 18, 1997 [*bold print and underlining ours*].

for the purpose of “Spiritual Gifts Matching.” This is followed by filling out lengthy sheets of “Spiritual Gifts Assessment” and then “Observation Assessment,” which you fill out to decide the capabilities of others around you.

Session Five (pp. 89-120) helps strengthen your self-confidence in the special abilities which are inside you. For example, one is the gift of “miracles.”

“Literal Meaning: To do powerful deeds. Description: The gift of Miracles is the divine enablement to authenticate the ministry and message of God through unusual intervention which glorify the Lord. Distinctives: People with this gift: Speak God’s truth and may have it authenticated by an accompanying miracle . . .” (p. 108).

As you can see, by the time you complete this training program, you have become quite self-confident about your abilities; for that was the purpose: to instill self-confidence. There is not one word anywhere in this book about repenting of sin, resisting temptation, repentance, putting away sins, overcoming, obeying God’s law, etc. But you would not expect it to have such notions—for this is a Protestant book, developed in one of the largest megachurches in the nation. The purpose is to flatter yourself with the marvelous abilities you possess.

Session Six is about what you would expect it to be: Not obedience to God’s law, but love as the greatest gift (pp. 121-128). Entitled, “What’s Love Got To Do With It?” on p. 121, it compares “*Servility*” (doing something because you are supposed to) with “*Servanthood*” (doing something only because you want to). The next page explains that such work for God, which the author called “servility,” always leads to self-centeredness and egotism; whereas “servanthood” is only doing what is right because you feel a loving thought to do it.

BILL HYBELS AND WILLOW CREEK CHURCH

Yes, just who is Bill Hybels? We discussed both him and his church in detail in *Going to Willow Creek [WM-1003-1004]*, which we released in January 2001. In order to understand what made his church one of the fastest growing churches in America, we need only review the special concept underlying everything he has done—which has consistently met with amazing success in “bringing ’em in off the streets.” The secret is worldly music, worldly theatricals, and worldly entertainment. *Here is a portion of what I earlier wrote:*

William (Bill) Hybels was a student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, during the only two years that Gilbert Bilezikian was a theology teacher there . . . Hybels had been leading a youth ministry called Son City which, in three years had grown from 25 to 1,200 in attendance. They used dramatic skits, loud way-out

music, and multimedia slides to impact their listeners.

In May 1974, Hybels and other Son City leaders began to dream about starting a church, but a different kind; this would be one to which people could come, amid all their problems and not feel judged. They realized that simple talks about daily living, along with lots of music and drama, would be needed.

One day in 1975, Hybels rode up on his motorcycle to Bilezikian’s home in Wheaton, Illinois; he ran up to the door and breathlessly told him that the two of them were going to start a church. When the older man asked what it was all about, Hybels told him the church would be based on Bilezikian’s idea of community. When the teacher protested that they lacked funds, Hybels just repeated, “We are going to build a church.”

Hybels resigned as youth pastor of the Son City project; and, on October 12 of that year, 125 people attended Hybel’s first church service, held at the Willow Creek Theater, a movie theater in nearby Palatine. Somehow, the people who arrived for the service managed to ignore the lewd title of the movie playing that week. Hybels was only 23.

To pay the rent and buy sound equipment, 100 teenagers sold 1,200 baskets of tomatoes door-to-door.

A year later, the Sunday morning church services at the theater were filled with attendees; and Hybels and Bilezikian began conducting two services each Sunday. Two years later, the services grew to three; all of them squeezed into the morning hours, with everything packed and gone by 1 p.m., so the movie crowd could come in.

Within three years, the two men were preaching to 2,500 people a week. They did it with jazzy music, theatrical skits, and excitable sermons about youth topics to audiences in shirt sleeves, sipping on pepsi. The two of them believed that, by doing this, they were reviving the Acts 2 Church. With an evangelistic zeal, they pushed onward, always figuring out new ways to attract seekers who could, by merely declaring they had accepted Christ, become full-fledged church members. Doctrine was never an issue; “being saved” at a meeting was all that counted.

Young Hybels and the older Bilezikian made a point of not bringing “theological jargon” into their sermons or counseling sessions. Just “get them to an acceptance of Christ.”

Oh, you think you have seen the end of this? Far from it. Now we are also sending our workers and leaders to Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, for more instruction. Oh, my brother and sister: How near are we to the end?

SPIRITUAL BODY BUILDING

The following letter was sent to us from a fellow believer in Florida:

"I was invited to join a small group to study the Adventist book, just out this year, entitled *Spiritual Body Building*. I had heard the president of the Florida Conference speak on this theme in one of his talks on 3ABN. The concept sounded familiar until I realized it was based on the same theories and ideas found in Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.

"The book continually drags God down to our level and devalues the sacred meaning of His holy Word. Nothing is sacred, nothing left unscathed. Love rather than holiness is said to be God's fundamental attribute. Many quotes are from secular and non-Adventist sources, including *Christianity Today*, *Institute for Motivational Living*, and Rick Warren (*Purpose Driven Life*), David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson (*Joining Together*), and Charles Colson.

"We are going to Babylon for our personal and group Bible study, and most don't even notice it. Unity in truth is the only true unity of God. This book has no sound doctrine, although there are Spirit of Prophecy quotes sprinkled throughout to keep people deceived and asleep.

"The author is Kim Johnson, an SDA pastor and one who has a personal 'vision' for the remnant church. This book is full of false truth and worldly visions to help us be Christians.

"Silly questions are proposed and worked into doctrine for us to follow, such as: Is it more sacred for a pastor to preach a sermon or for a Christian plumber to fix a leaky pipe? This particular sermon thought includes having some of the congregation participate by bringing their tools of the trade up to the communion table at the front of the church. A special 'dedicatory ceremony' is then performed, and they are asked to stay for a 'commissioning prayer.' The pastor then prays that all the power of electricity, etc., be transformed into a power for good.

"On subsequent Sabbaths, other tools are brought up. For example, barbers and hairdressers lay their brushes and combs and wigs on the communion table so they can be dedicated.

"Our people are being seriously side-tracked, so the Three Angels' Messages will be forgotten and we will become like the other Protestant Churches.

"The glorifying of self, instead of pointing others to the Saviour, is the way taught—but it is the way of death.

"Small group meetings are encouraged, so we can tell one another our special needs, our hopes and dis-

appointments. Group psychology is really group pressure to conform and not think for one's self. A person regresses to a primitive mental state. The atmosphere is not holy, sacred, solemn, and soul-searching,—but rather emotional; and a person learns to be controlled and directed by another mind.

"It is a ploy to convert SDA Christians to Jesuit spirituality, and we should have nothing to do with it. We must stand on the fact that Jesus is our example and the Spirit of Prophecy will help us understand the truths in the Bible. But those who hold to such values are labeled in this book as disruptive church members who hold extreme views. We have gone so far back to Egypt that we no longer recognize the truth. If we study the ecumenical movement theology of love and unity, the love gospel and the spiritualism which it teaches, we will be training our conscience in Jesuit 'spiritual formation' principles that will render us in total submission to Satan.

"Do NOT rest your trust in a familiar confidant or 'spiritual director' or 'soul friend.' Our only eternal soul friend is Jesus Christ! He alone can be trusted with our minds and hearts. We must look to Jesus, not relationships, to save us! People will let you down; Jesus never will! He will give you grace and power to overcome sin! He wants us to be sinless and spotless and ready to meet Him in the clouds of glory!

"The principles in this book are based on Roman Catholic natural law, which is the natural inclination of the heart. The cry is, 'Achieve your full potential! Contem-porize! We can do it ourselves, and God will learn from us!'

"But, instead, we must be humble, separate, and peculiar to the world. We must worship God in spirit and in truth. We must be dedicated to the truth. We are His witnesses; and as Christ is a faithful Witness, so we must be down here!

"We must be ready for every work that we can do for the Master, instead of catching up every new and fanciful interpretation of the Scriptures. We must cling to the messages in the Bible/Spirit of Prophecy, continue deep soul-searching, and return to primitive godliness! We must be motivated by true love for God and His truth, and not by 'the love gospel' or by coercion by guilt.

"We can do this, dear brethren, by reading the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy more than anything else! We have no time to lose; the enemy is in the camp and is in great disguise—and we are not detecting it! The foundation is being undermined by the termites of error and sedition. We must be watchmen and warn the sleeping saints!"—*Florida, December 2004.*