

Outline for New Spirituality for NPUC Retreat July 27-30, 2008

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Key text: "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

I. In the last 10 years, *New Spirituality* (or "*emerging church*"), by whatever name its followers choose, has flooded Protestantism, especially Evangelical churches. In the last five years, the waves are sweeping over many in the Adventist Church.

It is more than curious that many Adventist pastors and administrators are usually five to ten years behind other waves in Protestant circles. We think of the James Kennedy Evangelism Explosion in the 1960s-1970s; "Filled with the Spirit" movement in the 70s and 80s; Neo-Linguistic Programming in the 80s; Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, for much too long, more about Fuller later), Willow Creek megachurch training, from 1980s to present; then Saddleback, Lake Forest, CA, megachurch pastoral training to present, and now *New Spirituality*.

We all know well how, for the last 25 years, ministerial excitement and plenty of Adventist money has focused on Willow Creek in Barrington, IL, and Saddleback in Lake Forest, CA. Enormous numbers of Protestant pastors studied how to invigorate their churches with the seeker-friendly methods. "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."—*Adventist Review*, Dec. 18, 1997. After all, their methods do work, attracting tens of thousands weekly to their Sunday services. In addition, a hundred thousand or more ministers wait patiently each week on the Internet for Hybel's contributions or Warren's "tool box. Some of our Adventist preachers don't even change the sermon titles, as they advertise Warren-created sermons on their outdoor, church message boards! And most of Warren's generic sermons can be preached anywhere; logical, hearer-centered, and laced with illustrations, especially where Adventist congregations can't remember what a classic Adventist sermon used to be.

But in 2007, the mesmerizing balloon busted, at least for Hybel. His pastoral staff quietly and deliberately finished a four-year, self-evaluation as to what their highly acclaimed program was really doing for thirty years. In their book, *Reveal: Where Are You?*, they were honest enough to broadcast what they learned and it was

embarrassing. Hybel said that it “rocked my world” —that the findings were “earth-shaking,” “ground breaking,” and “mind blowing.” They now realized that their seeker-friendly programs were “a mistake.” The lesson Hybel and his staff learned is that “growing” a congregation goes beyond “attracting” people to church—they needed to restructure their church program to grow their members in their personal relationship with God. His new program is turning out to be another path into New Spirituality. *What will the hundreds of Adventist copycats now say to their congregations?*

Rick Warren’s Saddleback has been flirting with New Spirituality since 2004 as I outlined in *Truth Matters* in 2004. But much more than mere flirting has taken place in the last four years and if were updating that book, I would have to add at least four more chapters. Amazing what a few years of following a wrong presupposition will do, even to gifted men.

Prediction #1: Megachurches have crested; they are history, except for the charismatic megachurches and their TV audiences, such as Joel Osteen in Houston.

Prediction #2: Seeker-friendly churches, such as Willow Creek and Saddleback, will join the New Spirituality wave or fade.

Prediction #3: Adventist churches that have been copying the seeker-friendly model (we call some of them, “church plantings”) will either fade, as many have in this country and in Australia especially, or they will follow the crowd into New Spirituality.

If anyone in the past year has been following, *Christianity Today*, the flagship of Evangelicalism, he or she will have noted that it has become the standard-bearer for the Ancient-Future Movement, otherwise known as New Spirituality. It came out of the closet with the February, 2008 issue. We remember that our friend, David Neff, is the magazine’s editor in chief and a leader in advancing churches everywhere into New Spirituality.

Adventist churches, along with our various media sources, some imbedded in NAD, are flocking to the excitement of this fresh novelty. Everything seems noble, framed open-ended conversations (no sermons) but leaving a trail of “feel-good” confusion. Its salvation message is not found in doctrine, not in truth, but in *discussion*. The main point is to introduce its seekers to the experience of finding God within, the same God, they say, that is shared by everyone in the universe—He only has to be