The Bethel Church Upgrade

By Pastor Rod Page

“I dedicate this book to my children’s children’s children. Though we will not meet until we get to heaven, I wanted you to know that I had you in mind as I wrote every word of this book, and I continue to hold you in my heart. You will become the answer to my prayers and the fulfillment of my prophecies. By the time you read this book, I will be watching you from heaven (see Hebrews 12: 1).”[1]

This quotation above is the opening dedication to Kris Vallotton’s upgraded book called Heavy Rain. Its former title was How Heaven Invades Earth. At the outset it sounds like a way to soften, or even spiritualize, the more militant sounding “invade” language in his book from six years ago. I believe this change is part of a new effort to say the same thing in a more sophisticated, and yet more palatable, way in order to attract a wider audience.

In this day and age where everything is seen from a marketing standpoint, as far as publishers and agents and business in general, it is no surprise that this would happen from within the headquarters of a now worldwide movement—Bethel Church in Redding, California.

I am writing this from Redding as it is the closest city to where we live for groceries and doctors. It is also where I lived for several years. It’s a pretty typical town in most aspects, with a Costco and an old converted theater downtown, and a mix of working people and retired folks looking for the sun.... It is even sunnier in Redding than Phoenix!

But Redding is actually quite special in regard to what is happening in Christendom. A phenomenon has grown up here. There is something almost “magical” about the effect that Bethel has had on this community. The city has fallen in love with this “church”. Is this even possible in our day of hysteria over “separation of church and state”? It is not separate in Redding. Bethel bailed out the Civic Auditorium and is running it well from all indications. Bethel is also becoming a major property owner. They have bought and improved several commercial properties and hope to increase their School of Supernatural Ministry to 3000 students in the next few years. (It is currently around 1400.) They want to build a museum of revival in Americana and have spent around $40,000 to purchase one man’s memorabilia collection of articles from major “moves of God” going back into the 1950s.

Bethel is growing while the city of Redding has endured a decline in many facets. Crime is up. The housing market is flat at best. Homelessness is rampant. But Bethel is doing really well. I believe they know why. I think they have discovered a secret to moving forward at this time in their history. Before I get back to this subject let me tell you why I am writing this report.

Why I Write

Before becoming a full time pastor in 2011 I spent over 30 years being a regular Christian, with a regular secular job, raising a family with my wife of 37 years. Before we moved to Redding we attended a church for 10 years beginning in 1994 in Yuba City, California. We noticed after almost 7 years in that church that the teaching was changing. We heard things that shocked us, but because of intense loyalty to the leadership we tried to justify things we should have checked out immediately. We were told that spiritual warfare was calling out demons by name and defeating them in the atmosphere, and thus allowing our city to have a mass revival. We were told it was always God’s will for us to be physically well. We were told our children were a chosen seed to bring in the great harvest of all time—that they would do miracles greater than Jesus or the Apostles. These things came in slowly, like a steady drip. We were told that Christians have demons that need to be cast out. We were to go on “prayer walks” that would run the devil out of neighborhoods and out of families as we took dominion over our city.

The problem is it didn’t work, and we could not find a good Biblical reason to swallow all of this new teaching. Young people would go to the church’s new “discipleship” school and come out on the other end bewildered by a lack of power, not blaming the leaders who taught them but God, who they thought did not keep up His end of the bargain. We looked at our Bibles and saw texts that were clearly meant for the next world being brought into ours, with no concept for context or proper Biblical interpretation.

It took us almost 3 years to realize we needed to get...
back to the Bible. Then we found the Discernment Ministries’ Herescope blog (www.herescope.net). God led us to this small cadre of folks who had been writing for years about different new teachings, that were really old things wrapped up in new and upgraded lingo. As Solomon says, there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9).

Then, because of a job, and a ministry opportunity to take what we were finding about Satan’s schemes and warn younger believers, we moved to Redding to start a new job and work with a couple we thought truly were wanting to warn others. Sadly, within a year we found out we were not on the same page with the very people we were supposed to serve with. Shortly after this we began to attend a church where the Bible was taught by verse by verse. God put us away in His waiting room where we could get our thoughts and hearts in line with His precious Word.

We began to serve the Lord in humble but useful ways. We helped clean the church each week, emptying waste cans and vacuuming the carpet. Later we taught Sunday School. We truly had many glorious times with our 4th grade class teaching through the entire Bible line upon line. Eventually I was asked to teach in place of the pastor when he was out of town. We were asked to shepherd a part of the congregation and had a “home group” of over 40 people in our home each month. What I found in those days was that God is gracious. When we seek Him and His ways for His glory, He provides all we need. His Word has the answers we need to communicate. We don’t need to make up anything fancy to attract attention to it.

I had heard the Lord calling me to ministry when I was 12 years old. I had, because of fear, chosen not to follow His call for many years. Finally at 50 years of age I answered that call. I began to seek the Lord, and asked others to pray with me about going into full time work. I assumed it would be in a ministry to young people, as that was the reason I moved to Redding. I wanted to warn them of what the enemy was trying to do, both within the church and without it. After another year of waiting, just when I began to give up, an opportunity came as the Lord opened up a door for ministry. I have been serving as pastor at a small community church in Lewiston, California, ever since. I live within 35 miles of Redding in the mountains. God is gracious indeed. It is the hardest, and yet most fulfilling job, I have ever had.

But Bethel is still a thorn. I suppose it reminds me of what happened to us in Yuba City. But it is far worse. It is a leader, a worldwide and dominant leader, in a movement rife with error. This is grievous to me personally because it goes after, and actually targets, young people in a huge way. This is why I write. These young people (and old people, too) are precious to our Savior. This movement is swallowing them in ways I never could have imagined even 6 years ago when I lived within a mile of Bethel Church. This church is more sophisticated and more “excellent” in an alarming way.

The New Upgrade
A few weeks ago I listened to a message by Kris Vallotton, who is the number two leader at Bethel. Kris is known for saying things that are edgy and even shocking. What struck me about his “message” was the new angle of reasonability and normalcy that it seemed to emulate. Back when the “Toronto Blessing” was inundating congregations with outlandish barking and howling, and people falling out in gatherings, where “holy laughter” was taught as a new thing that the Spirit was doing, Bethel embraced it whole hog. (Pun intended.) At that time in early 1996 there was a mass exodus from Bethel church. They went from two services on Sundays to one. But within a couple of years they began to grow again. Like other churches they didn’t divorce themselves from the teachings behind the manifestations. Instead they changed the outward appearances to be more settled, more reasonable, more attractive. (Although I would say that there still are, and always will be, outlandish worship activities that are nothing but sensual in nature and do not bring glory to God within their meetings, it is just not as “out there” as it used to be.)

This new upgrade season, that is indicated by Kris Vallotton’s recent message, is just one in a series of attempts to bring legitimacy to a movement that I believe wants to be believable and acceptable, not only to their peers within the charismatic world, but even wider into the evangelical world as well. In the end, I think they want to impress the world around them. They believe they already are a “city on a hill” and that they are defeating the “religious spirit” of the old way of doing Christianity. If you would like to see the documentation and history of Bethel Church, and others they are connected to in the New Apostolic Reformation, there is much written on this movement on Herescope’s website. By the way, in Kris’ upgraded book titled Heavy Rain, C. Peter Wagner (New Apostolic Reformation) gives a hardy endorsement. For more information on Wagner search Herescope as well.

Let me illustrate my point with some quotes from Kris’ message, “God, Government, and Prosperity.”[2]

On Earth Now
Upgrade #1 - Being More “Biblical”
In his opening prayer Kris says, “God make a message out of this mess.” But in mixing together “God, Government and Prosperity” he begins in Matthew 28:18 where Jesus says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” We believe it is given to Christ alone in that passage. But Kris says, “In Heaven and on earth would have been a
revelation to the Hebrews, but not just in heaven, if he had left out on earth.” What Kris is implying is that we in our day have been restored to some kind of dominion over the earth in a physical aspect. We are now Lords of the earth, and we must take control of it, as if this is why Jesus came—not to deal with sin, but to restore our rulership over this planet. The evangelical church has always argued this is to be a reality, but only during the millennium after Jesus returns. Kris, however, is advocating for “Kingdom Now” type theology, but it seems kinder and more “reasonable.” In reality it is the same old thing.

He then says since we were made in God’s image we are already “like God.” In Kris’s eyes we were little gods, but through our failure in the garden, we lost our god likeness. He believes we lost our authority over the earth, so that Jesus had to go into hell sometime during the crucifixion and take back the keys of authority from the devil. Kris is saying that we have those keys, and that this somehow means we are not to make disciples of the people of the nations but we are to make disciples of “the nations” (countries). This is an astronomical jump in logic!

There is a big difference here from the plain teaching of the New Testament. Jesus said clearly, in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” He said this standing in front of Pilate. If the kingdom was coming in a physical form, why didn’t Jesus say, “But in a few hours I will take the elevator down to hell and steal those pesky keys from the devil and then you will see my disciples fight and win!” In fact, we are never told to fight in a fleshly or carnal way. In the Garden of Gethsemane Peter was commanded to put away his sword. Now the only weapon we have is the revealed Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. Even with ourselves we don’t sledge hammer the sin out of ourselves with whips or chains as the Romans Catholics are obliged to do. We take every thought captive with truth, making it obey Christ with the spiritual power and true authority we have, based on the Word and the faith once delivered to us, the saints. Our spiritual blessing in heaven is ours, but that leaves off many physical blessings that will be ours in the kingdom to come.

Kris loves to spin this old idea of us being little gods, and that being restored to dominion through the keys or the tabernacle of David equals us being restored to dominion in some mystical kind of way. And then, as a result of being restored, having a power ministry as we speak physical realities into existence—all the while calling this methodology “faith” and “power.” They call anyone who does not go along with it all an “another Gospel” proponent. (In fact, Bill Johnson has made the same allegation about all who don’t major in miracles and so-called power evangelism.)

Kris makes an upgrade claim right away in his talk. He says that the Muslims are running five nations and Christians are taking dominion over zero nations. All of my Christian friends and colleagues deplore what ISIS is currently doing. But we look at the situation from a totally different perspective. Jesus said that the world would hate us. In fact, He says that evil men would wax worse and worse, up to the very point when He returns. Those that “disciple” nations are bound to fail. Yet Kris demands (and is not below using shame manipulation) that we capture nations and governments for God, and that if we don’t we are failures and God’s hands are tied.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is blasphemy! Though I fully believe in man’s free will and responsibility for his actions, I believe that God, too, has a plan and is executing and using our free choices to bring out His glory-filled end to the existence of this planet and its inhabitants. We play a part, but that will never change God’s ultimate plan to bring about the completion of His prophetic Word.

Bethel Church has an outward form of power. They talk about power, write about power and blog about it all day. Their meetings are “powerful” in the realm of music and lighting, drama and artistic creativity. All these things are outward forms. This is the root meaning behind the exact description of the end times apostate church movement described in 2 Timothy 3. After describing perilous times where the culture is in deep bondage to sin, and is described as lovers of themselves (Kris loves to say about his own preaching, “That is a really good word”), lovers of money (Bethel is a money machine, as are most connected ministries and churches in their sphere), boaststers, proud, blasphemers, etc., the aging apostle Paul says in verse 5, “having a form of godliness, but denying its power.” True godliness has a spiritual power that defeats sin and brings about holiness, sincerity, humility, and an ability to powerfully proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. A holy life is a powerful life, not a life that twists the promises of God meant for a future time and holds the church hostage with a carrot of constantly changing new things, paradigms, methodologies, and new signs and wonders.

Bethel is saying the same things they and others have been saying since the Latter Rain movement was hatched in 1949, which was soundly refuted by leaders of the Assemblies of God who found it to be spurious and extra-biblical in nature. No “wonder” that Bethel Church broke away from the AOG ten years ago last January. They wanted no real oversight. Kris Vallotton is speaking the same message that other false teachers have been speaking for at least 68 years. It is nuanced now and made to sound more “biblical.” He quotes from Romans 4:17, saying, “Abraham is not the father of Israel, but the father of nations.” He says this means we are to be fathering nations—that if the church does not father, lead or commandeer (I suppose)
the nations, we are not following in Father Abe's steps, as he believes the New Testament teaches. (The New Testament does not, of course, teach this.) Missing the whole point of the reality, the beauty and the majesty of the revelation in Romans about the wonder of our salvation and the righteousness imputed to us by faith, seen in its root form all the way back to Abraham—having missed all that truth for a silly and obtuse vision of a mighty Joel's army now taking dominion by “fathering” nations, Kris devolves into error. But he is attempting an “upgrade” here. He is attempting to be seen as more Biblical so he can drag unsuspecting denominations and individual churches and precious people of God, along with weak-willed, unskilled and struggling Christians into his camp of error. Using Kris' perspectives, you will never come to a knowledge of the truth because you are being tricked by a “form of godliness” that has no power. (See 2 Timothy 3:5-9 please!)

I remember the first time I opened a book by a Bethel leader, titled When Heaven Invades Earth by Bill Johnson. I remember the tremendous emphasis, not on the Word of God, but on word of faith, on signs and wonders and so-called power ministry. Now, it seems, they are countering criticism for their neglect of the teaching of God's Word in their church, and are trying to gain acceptance by quoting more verses of the same Bible that they have seriously dissed for years. I have been to their meetings and seen firsthand that most attendees do not even carry a Bible with them because they don't need it very often. Usually they “worship” for an hour or so. Then someone comes and starts with the Bible, and then it is time to share the “new thing God is doing,” which includes testimonies of so-called miracles and signs and wonders.

I believe in the present work of the Holy Spirit in the earth. I believe in miracles and have experienced them. I believe some have a gift of faith and I have witnessed it being used for the glory of God. But I believe that anything we have or know can be turned into an idol or, at the least, an obsession. Bethel obsesses over miracles. Bill Johnson for years has modeled this emphasis. It is the modus operandi of his church. Kris Vallotton and all the other leaders of the movement have to fall in line or they are out. Nothing has changed at Bethel but they are talking slightly different now.... trying their best to put a Biblical stamp of approval on their tired theories and “new” ideas, many of which have more roots in the New Age movement than in the Gospel of Jesus.

I know these are tough words. They are not meant to be tough but to wake up some. One of the problems with Bethel saying the same thing over and over and over is that people get used to it, and are worn down, and then begin to accept it. Many have in Redding—the numbers don’t lie—Bethel is getting bigger and their influence is growing throughout the world. I am concerned and must warn the flock to beware. Do not listen to strung-together verses pulled out of their proper interpretation by those who don’t care if it is properly preached, but care more that their agenda is accomplished. Don’t be made captive to false teaching, no matter how normal it may sound, by those who use flattery or sophisticated behavioral techniques to deliver their message.

Kris Vallotton says that we are children of Abraham so that all the promises given to him are ours. Is that true in a physical sense? Does everyone who comes to Christ by faith have a baby of promise? God told Abraham he would have a son, but not everyone has a baby, and some have only girls. I know that sounds silly, but is it sillier to make such a blanket statement like Kris does at every turn in his message? Abraham was a rich man. Is every Christian blessed in that way? It sounds good to those who are anxiously wanting physical blessing to be poured out on their failing business, or their empty nursery, but it is false on its face. It is not good doctrinal teaching that accords godliness. I am reminded of this timeless truth from 1 Timothy 6: 3-6:

“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain.”

Years ago Bill Johnson was not content with his faith. He had been to John Wimber’s place and saw some miracles and realized all he had was “doctrines.” He spent the next several years trying to find the power. He ended up at Toronto and “found it.” It split his church in two as people began barking, howling and crawling on the floor, and calling it worship. But he says it was worth it. I don’t think it was. I think it possibly shipwrecked his faith. It certainly has done that for many. I have personally watched many young people be in this movement for a few years but come out so disgusted, and so let down, and so confused that they give up and fall headlong into the world. It has affected some who are very close to me like that. It is because of this that I cry out for discernment in these last days. I am not the only one. There are a few others, and though it is not
“cost effective” to speak out, we must. Some think we are just mean or old or jealous. Those are unjust charges. The Old Testament prophets had similar opposition. They were told to prophesy “smooth things,” but they could not because God had not told them to. They had to say the truth. It was a fire in them that boiled with holy zeal. That sounds exciting, but it is indeed a heavy burden to bear. God’s Word is being tampered with. It is being used to say things it was never meant to say. Far from being more biblical, though they may appear so to their following, Bethel church continues to move away from the Bible.

In the message by Kris Vallotton, he admits openly that he doesn’t like the book of Leviticus. All the killings bother him. Yet it is the death of the Lamb of God that is pointed to in that book. Every lamb points to Jesus and the atonement for sin. But that is not the point of Bethel. The Gospel of the precious blood of Jesus is not the focus of their outreaches or their expansions or or of their school. They call it revival, but can there ever be true revival without confession? Is redemption possible without teaching Christ’s blood being spilled? No. It is a waste of time. A biblical church teaches the whole counsel of God. Bill Johnson refuses to answer questions that come from the book of Job, as though sickness is not a reality in a fallen world, because he teaches it is always God’s plan to heal everything. This is not a biblical church at all. God’s Word deals with all of life, and all of the affects of sin, and still points us to Jesus who died for us a violent death so we may have life eternal. There will be a day when all will be made right but it is not this day.

The Bold Eschatology - Upgrade #2
Kris Vallotton has been saying for some time that he refuses to accept an eschatology that says things have to get worse in order for Jesus to return. To Kris’ credit he loves the story of Joseph. But what he likes so much is that Joseph “profited Potiphar’s house.” “If you put a prince in a prison it will become a palace,” he says. He then goes on to dreams and declares, “Pharaoh is dreaming again.” He says Joseph knew how to interpret dreams because “Joseph was raised in a dreaming family, having been taught the supernatural ways of God.” Then he says again, “Pharaoh is dreaming again and the world is dreaming again.” God is not lifted up, but the dreamer is. He says that the light is turned on in a room, but we don’t come in the room to look at the light, but you come in to “see.” Friends, the Light is what we are to look at. Jesus is the Light of the world. Kris is teaching that self-realization is the goal. Seeing what is around us is the most important thing to him—so we can “see” the dreams. He says, “If we don’t dream then the world dies.” In his eschatology, then, it is all dependent on us. We will save the world if we dream. You must hang with the dreamers here at Bethel, he is implying.

He then moves to the prophecies of Jesus being king in Isaiah 9. This is where he builds his “eschatology now” doctrine. He rips partial verses from the context of the Bible and declares that God’s government is on earth now, in our time. He also declares that God is not “ashamed of humanity” because “His shoulders” are us. Secondly, he says that the government now is increasing and we must advocate for this increase. You might think he means to advocate for a spiritual increase of God’s kingdom. But, there is a bait and switch coming. He leaps from God ruling in His people to talking about government that “actualizes your personhood.” This sounds like the liberal politicians and psychologists today, as though the government is responsible for making us fully developed people. That is not what Isaiah teaches at all. That is not even good American talk. He is emphasizing a New Age idea, right in the middle of a precious part of God’s Word. He has not studied prophecy apparently. He does not realize that God does things in different periods of time. There are two comings, not just one, Kris. Maybe that is why, in another book of the Bible that he does not like, he has not taken this to heart: Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 says:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;
A time to kill,
And a time to heal”

From here Kris continues to “build” an eschatology where he simply justifies the governmental take over, albeit in an altruistic sense, of the “spheres” of the society (i.e., dominion), by people and movements and churches like himself. His case in point is that Bethel is running the Civic Auditorium in Redding.[3] This sounds like it is just the beginning of many “good things” to come. “Great government empowers you,” he says, as though an empowered unsaved person is still a good thing. He then points to Korea as a great illustration of why government is the answer. It is a false argument because he holds up democracy in the south as some kind of an endgame for the
church’s mission. The only difference is “government” he says. But more government is what has doomed the north, not less. If South Korea is better it is because of “less” government, as we have proved in our own country. But he says, “Government is powerful and meaningful.”

Vallotton then goes on to twist his dominion theology into a misplaced understanding of Isaiah 61, going beyond what Jesus read as He began His ministry there in Nazareth. Jesus stopped reading at exactly the point where He intended to because the rest is for a later time. Read Luke 4:18-20 where Jesus closed the book exactly where it needed to be closed for now. In Kris’ eschatology, there is no need for heaven because through Christians taking dominion over the “spheres” of society we can bring it down now. Look at their website, www.ibethel.org: “Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven” is their motto. What they mean is for the Kingdom to come now, exactly in all of its fulfillment, NOW! It is not according to the timing that God has set forth, but according to Bethel’s understanding—ALL FOR NOW!

Is this a place we want to send our children or grandchildren in order to learn the supernatural ways of God? No, this is natural, fleshly, and is man centered.[4] Kris says, “I don’t know what your eschatology says, but mine says that ‘God cares about cities.’” Does He? Doesn’t He care about individual people in the cities? Isn’t it better to be accurate when we make blanket statements? Does God care about sidewalks or paths people take to class at the Shasta College, like Kris declares in his illustration about how we should be smart as we govern every part of our society? This is pragmatism and “kingdom now” theology married together! It is silly talk.

There is no Gospel here except the gospel of man. “Your job when you get well is to help everyone else get well,” Kris confidently asserts. The question is, “Well, from what?” If he were talking about getting well from sin through the shed blood of the cross of Christ, I would be all in for that. But he is talking about the ills of society, and that is just not deep enough to be called Bible! That does not go far enough. That is only scraping the surface and does nothing for the soul of man to be truly well. There is no cure for society in this age, but there is a cure for sin found only in the finished work of Christ at Calvary where He willingly poured out His precious blood for atonement for sin. God is angry with man and his sin but He placed that wrath on Jesus for our sakes. But if we don’t receive that gift we are under condemnation. That is the simple Gospel. It is a good news of love, but it cost our Savior His very life as foretold by all those sacrifices of old, in Leviticus.

1 Timothy 4 is an explicit warning for our times. It is opposed to the cozy picture that Bethel Church preaches that is couched in hope of their “kingdom now” type eschatology. I must end share this warning in hopes that some caught in this movement will hear its words:

*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. (1 Timothy 4:1-2)*

Years ago a friend of mine developed throat cancer. He had a family and a wife and was in the prime of his life. He loved to serve the church we attended by doing practical help for anyone who was in need. If a car needed repair, he would find a way to fix it. If someone needed a ride, he provided it. He loved the Lord and yet he got very sick. Our church at that time declared that he would recover—that God had told them he would beat the cancer. It did not happen that way. My friend died from the cancer, an agonizing death witnessed by his kids and wife and by all of us. A few months afterwards we were talking with some friends who happened to also be on the church staff. They told us that my friend had given up the battle and his lack of faith was the reason he died. Those words burned in me. They disgusted me. They maligned my friend’s memory and character. The church had lied.

Likewise, Bethel is lying today when it says the same types of things. If you look closely at the leadership there, they are living a lie. They are living a lie in hypocrisy because their current pastor needs glasses and the son of the pastor is still deaf. So whose fault is this in their scheme of things? People in Redding and at Bethel get cancer and still get sick, so is the problem with God or with their faith... or with Bethel’s defective teaching?

In 2016 Kris Vallotton rewrote a book from 2010 because he said it was now more relevant than ever. In this book he talks extensively about how the church has failed at transforming society, and how his church has begun to succeed at it. I want to conclude this expose of Bethel Church’s “upgrade” with a direct quote from Kris’ book and a screenshot (above) from their website. (Notice the advertisement for beer!) Upcoming events at the Redding Civic Auditorium are referenced in the quote below. My
question for the reader to ask is this: what does any of this have to do with the Gospel mandate that Jesus so clearly gave in Matthew 28? Is this the “new” goal of Christianity? What government role should the church “take over” next? What further compromises in content and marketing will the church make in order to win the praise of the public and government officials?

Here is the quote from Vallotton’s book:

“We wanted to run the Redding Convention Center the same way our students beautified our city. Our goal was to make it an excellent experience for everyone who came into the building. We spent $500,000 remodeling the building and installing a state-of-the-art ticket system. We replaced all the seats, installed a new sound system and remodeled the entire interior of the building. We hired an almost entirely new staff, employing only friendly people who had a heart for excellence. It took us two long years to learn the entertainment business, but we were passionate about getting it right. At first we lost money on many of the shows. To make matters worse, in our zeal to make sure the venue stayed secular and not “Christian,” we booked some acts that were pure filth... actually nearly porn. At times things were tough, but we knew we had to climb or die. For the first two years, the community (led by the media) scrutinized everything we did and cut us no slack. But as time went on, their fear of a ‘religious takeover’ evaporated in light of the obviously improved experience our community was having in the convention center. We were hosting as many shows and events as ever, while still meeting the needs of our school there. In our third year of managing the building, we finally began to win the praise of our community. In fact, many of the people who had protested against us that night at the city council meeting came back and apologized to our team. And our city manager and his team have since said openly, “This is the best the convention center has been run in 43 years!”"

Where is the truth in all of this?

It is found in God’s Word. It is found in the true God of the Bible and not in god we make according to our own dreams and desires. It’s found in the One who has given us His Spirit through the new birth in Christ, who will lead us into all truth. It is found in churches that, though they may be small and are certainly not perfect, are preaching and living the whole counsel of God in humility and by His power. It is found in the holy lives of the people of God who seek not the glory of an earthly kingdom but who are waiting for this one:

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:16)

Much more can be said about this movement that is Bethel Church. Though it is constantly upgrading its message to bring more and more people and churches into its orbit, please beware of the dangers in its teaching. The “upgrade” is really a downgrade—a sophisticated and well-marketed ploy to repackage the old Latter Rain heresy of the 1940s that has roots deep in the darkness of the old Gnostics that were plaguing the church at the time the New Testament was being written. Certainly the preacher of Ecclesiastes was right: “there is nothing new under the sun.”

Do not let anyone lead you astray to anything less than the glorious truths found in God’s Word, even if it sounds innovative and relevant, and has really good music high up on the iTunes charts (Bethel’s rock group Jesus Culture). Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith! Keep looking up for your redemption draws nigh! Beware, beware, beware and don’t settle for anything less!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5)

THE KINGDOM DOMINION (physically) WILL BELONG TO THE LORD at His glorious return!

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev. 11:15)

Endnotes: