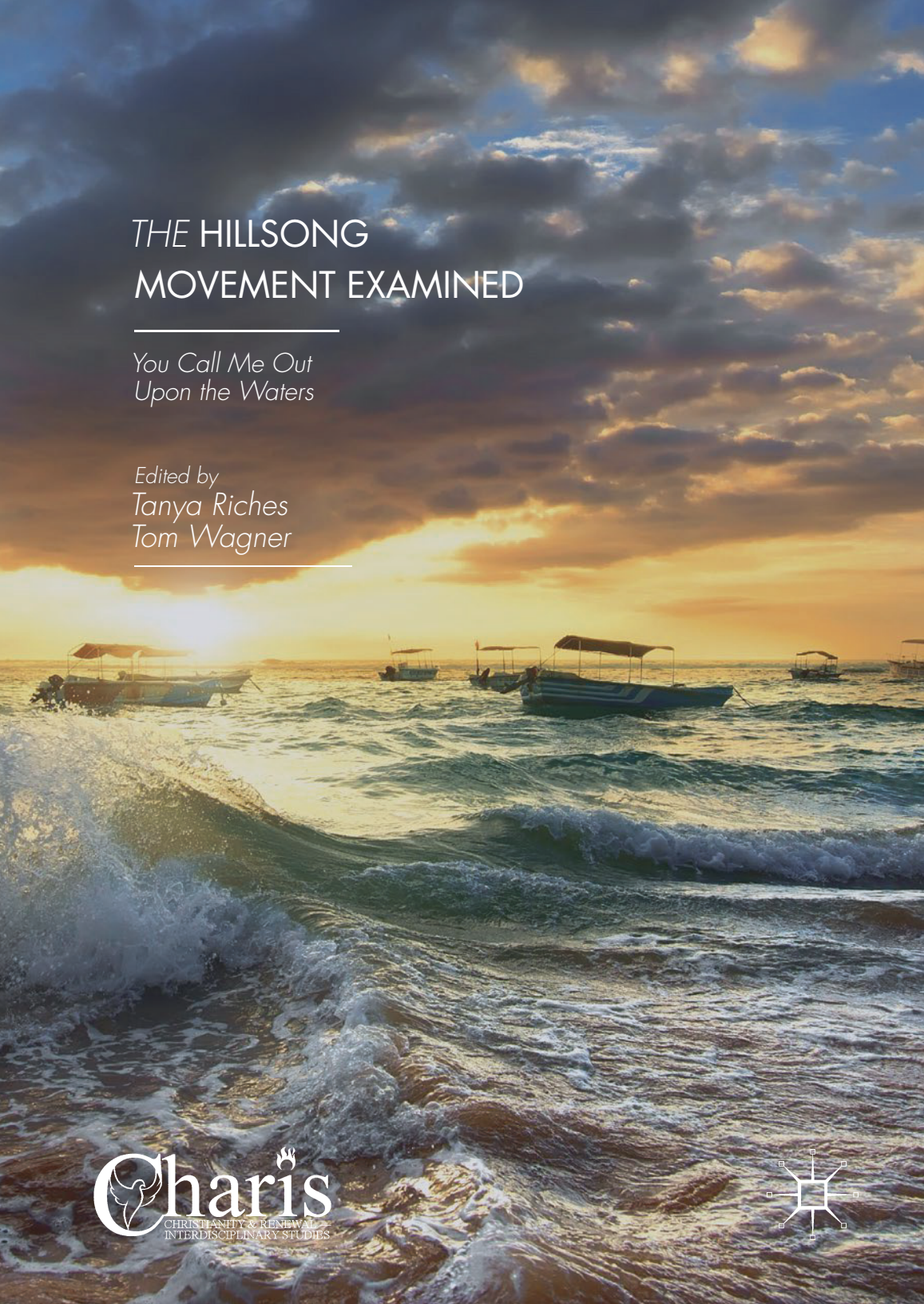

THE HILLSONG MOVEMENT EXAMINED

You Call Me Out Upon the Waters

Edited by
Tanya Riches
Tom Wagner

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Editors

The Hillsong Movement Examined

You Call Me Out Upon the Waters

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Foreword

Aunt Debbie texted my wife and I, saying a Hillsong concert was scheduled a few months away not far from where we lived. She wanted to go, and would we go with her…? It was curious because Aunt Debbie is not a pentecostal, "Spirit-filled" Christian, nor is she prone to flying out to events on a whim. She was raised in a strict, Bible-centered church where all the women wore veils and only men preached from the pulpit. She grew up to become a well-educated professional, succeeding in a corporate career while taking care of a husband and kids. She sincerely believes in Jesus and anticipates the resurrection, believing that prayer works and that the Bible is true. Her church was fine, mixing hymns and newer songs, all nice and orderly. Yet Hillsong captured Aunt Debbie's attention. She got a glimpse of a different type of worship when visiting churches on vacation, a taste of raw emotional ecstasy, and began seeking more spiritually immersive environments. She wanted a space where she could lose herself and raise her hands—yes, *raise her hands*—without worrying what others around her might think. That's what Aunt Debbie was asking for when she texted us.

So, one late summer evening, Aunt Debbie, my wife, and I joined 4000 other Hillsong ticket-holders at an open-air arena in the hills of North Carolina. We took our seats in rows facing three giant screens and several impressive boxes of stereo speakers that seemed three stories tall. The music started, loud and energetic, and she immediately recognized it, and we sang along, following lyrics projected for us, learning the melodies, lights moving and flashing all around, the swell of an enormous crowd of

voices rising around us. And Aunt Debbie raised her hands—one arm first, then the other as well. She raised her hands, and she worshiped.

For many in the United States like my Aunt Debbie, Hillsong represents a compelling musical pathway to an emotional one-on-one connection to God. Yet as a sociologist of religion, I knew that the Hillsong experience sought by my Aunt Debbie was more than just about a style of worship. Hillsong Church is part of an ongoing elaboration of evangelicalism, much of which has recently merged with a softer form of pentecostalism (often called charismatic Christianity), one that encourages sermons and songs to be more conversational, embracing a more therapeutic emphasis on emotional well-being (Martí 2008; Miller 1997). Worship is a guided, event-focused, corporate effort attached to a promise of immediacy to an intimate God, a God whose Spirit-filling empowerment energizes even the most mundane activities of work and family in everyday life (Martí 2010b). More than this, Hillsong is also a worldwide commercial enterprise, distributing music and related products to Christian consumers who are entrained to a particular rhythm of religious sounds. Hillsong is also a philosophy of ministry that represents a set of theological convictions, an approach to pastoral leadership and a type of ecclesial organization. In a short time, Hillsong has become a powerful congregational presence in cities and nations across the world and demands more focused attention as a distinctive religious phenomenon for a simple reason: Hillsong is more than just a church, a collection of music, a style of worship, an approach to ministry, and a set of corporate entities—it is an impressive ecclesial force, a global phenomenon that builds on a set of historical developments, a wave of understandings and practices zooming into our religious future.

Similar to other prominent churches—Willow Creek Church with its Seeker Orientation (Sargeant 2000), Mosaic with its focus on artistry and creativity (Martí 2009), and the Crystal Cathedral with its development of the Church Growth Movement (Mulder and Martí, forthcoming)—Hillsong is among those big-footprint congregations that become an exemplar and an influencer, a church whose contingent development in church history takes on a proactive agency, defining a way of doing "church" they believe is necessary for the world today. Amidst widespread reports of religious decline and secularization, Hillsong's astounding growth is taken as an implicit critique of the failure of so many other churches. The leaders of Hillsong are scrutinizing their own successes and strategically striving to put in place even more churches and

Hillsong ministries in ever-expansive circles, inspiring men and women to reinvent the spirituality around them, pave the way for others, calling people back to what they see as the simplicity of faith in Jesus, promoting a Christian identity they believe is both necessary for our time yet rooted in eternity.

One of the many things found in this book is that the original Hillsong Church, located in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia, always had a global ambition, and that the distribution of their worship music and their embrace of television broadcasting allowed them to experiment and eventually master the media that allowed them to penetrate global markets. The successes of the church encouraged them to essentially lobby their denomination to remove "outdated" geographic restrictions on local church ministries. Calling themselves "pioneers," the leaders of Hillsong were aggressive, their apostolic model of leadership placing the Senior Pastor as the primary driver, and throughout their development, there was the consistency of performance-based events to draw in and rally young adults. Christian rock concerts for youth in the 1980s became a template for success: create a self-contained event, guided by professionalized practices, taking cues from the triumphs of Contemporary Christian Music, and rallying individuals to join, embrace, and extend the Hillsong style of spirituality where spiritual empowerment can overcome just about anything. The event orientation of worship dovetailed into the event orientation of salvation: How are you responding to God now? What will you do with God in your life today?

Because the primitivist faith of Hillsong centers on a radical, "born again" revival agenda, Hillsong is filled with testimonies, stories about how people participate in The Story. Everyone is on a journey. The beginning is always there, is always offered, a starting point promised. The void in people—especially young adults—is filled by grasping the call of God on each person. Hillsong's Christianity is not based on perfectionism; people "fall," but they are encouraged to "get up." If they fall often, they are commended to get up just as often, an inspiring act of persistence, with the belief that, with Jesus, they can be empowered by the Spirit to break momentum, launching into a victorious life (Martí 2012). Amazing things happen through ordinary people because of an extraordinary God. Although Hillsong has a softer Word of Faith orientation (Bowler 2013; Martí 2008), it quickly moved from economic prosperity to borrow the language of positive psychology to a

"flourishing" mentality, directing people toward an emotive call for humility and surrender, the growth and enablement of emotional and relational health, with energies directed into ongoing activity in their local church. The church is not any one person's house, it's "our house," a place of family, intimacy, and connection.

With a promise that the denomination would not interfere in the workings of any particular local church, Hillsong rode the wave of their officially sanctioned freedom to pursue even more expansive initiatives. Viewing their local church as a free-standing apostolic entity that was enabled to do anything, anywhere, in order to accomplish and expand its mission, exercising greater autonomy, Hillsong insisted on its own independence—effectively freeing it from any boundaries (geographic, administrative, financial) that would keep it from finding new places to minister, to recruit, to plant, to expand, believing that any positive response to the Spirit they saw in their people further legitimized Hillsong's efforts ever-outward to newer and untested territories. With "local expressions" now in 14 nations (although they insist they are all part of "one house with many rooms" with Brian and Bobbie Houston at the head), God is clearly on their side. The irony is that Hillsong itself has become a globalized structure, more complex than its denominational roots, and, in his role as Senior Pastor, Brian Houston exercises leadership over a growing number of disparate, multi-pronged, financially ambitious sub-structures housed in the One House of Hillsong.

As a church, Hillsong cannot avoid needs—personal, local, global—that seek to be met. Hillsong does encourage social engagement, couching such work as giving hope, offering justice, healing brokenness. At the same time, Hillsong believes in interpersonal rather than structural solutions, and pushes toward conscious decisions by individuals encouraged to move, with God's help, beyond their personal suffering (see Emerson and Smith 2000; Markofski 2015; Miller and Yamamori 2007). Hillsong wants to bring help and solution; individuals must receive help and enact attainable ends for their own benefit. As such, Hillsong ministries rarely challenge the dominant status quo. Hillsong understands that in advanced societies today individuals are left largely on their own, that they are pulled in multiple directions simultaneously, and that they have to craft coherent selves of their otherwise disconnected lives (Martí and Ganiel 2014; Martí 2015). By simplifying the message of Christianity and tying individual biographical into a broader continuity (my story, His Story), the cogency of a modern ego finds a place. It's

a message that resonates with young people still in their 20s (especially single), locating themselves in the bigger world, struggling through newfound independence, whose financial means rarely match their outsized ambitions, and whose ambitions finally become more disciplined and ultimately fulfilled by fitting themselves into God's imperatives for the world (Martí 2010a). Women (*sisters*) are empowered as princesses, as daughters of the king who are warriors (Jenkins and Martí 2012); while women may have many private roles, but all share public roles of daughters, wives, and mothers, and their churches are helping them be prepared for that despite their disparate educations and career paths. The social quality of worship allows cosmopolitan urbanites to become part of a larger group, however anonymous a person may be, they are part of this group, this family, this house. Even the shape of the music—the power ballad, the war cry—provides individuals a basis for individualized action in the world apart from the group. Hillsong music also provides a sonic religious identity, one that is portable and reproducible, such that immersion in the tribe can be relived again and again. The message is a positive one, filled with a "winning" victorious attitude. This is a faith that doesn't bring you down; it lifts you up.

The many sub-Hillsong Churches now across the world follow the pattern set by their primary exemplar: they riff on evangelical-pentecostal liturgical structures, eschew denominational sponsorship or approval, localize their newly institutionalize meanings of church, appeal to the individualized needs of disconnected urbanites, advertise themselves with contemporary fonts and graphic-design logos, and use any available meeting space with the capacity for amplified sound, projected images, and sufficient accessibility. Doing church in a Hillsong way becomes learning how to mobilize and produce affect in a particular manner, one that is viewed as cosmopolitan, further affirming a transnational bond among their network of churches. Keep in mind, the set up for Hillsong worship and the architectural requirements for constructing a sacred space are minimal, which means that few people and little expense are required to duplicate a Hillsong-styled mystical-musical experience. Online files, which can distribute words, videos, and musical scores, allow for extensive and eclectic borrowing and reproduction. More broadly, these gatherings that create an atmosphere of immersive contemporary worship are finding resonance with people almost everywhere by dovetailing into the larger currents of church goers warmly

acquiescing to the pentecostalization or charismatization of worship occurring across the world (Christerson and Flory 2017; Ingalls and Yong 2015).

However we explain the expansive successes of Hillsong—the revivalist theology, the rave-culture aesthetic, the apostolic model of leadership—this book offers multiple starting points for analysis and reveals new lines of thinking. There's much to explore in the phenomenon of Hillsong—and the book you are reading provides a fantastic foundation. As the most extensive effort to grasp the breadth and complexity of all that Hillsong represents to date, this book is not an endpoint but a beginning, an invitation to an expanding dialogue. As a newer movement—and one that appears to have some persistence—Hillsong is certainly a vital arena of investigation. While the breadth of Hillsong has inspired a few investigations so far, I am confident many will be stimulated from the thoughtful reading of the following pages.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find you in the mystery
In oceans deep, my soul will stand

And I will call upon your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in your embrace
For I am yours
And you are mine

Spirit, lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever you would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger
In the presence of my Savior

Lyrical excerpt from "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)" (Crocker, Houston, and Ligthelm 2013)

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If worship songs are in fact the "primary texts" (Moore 2001) of evangelical Christianity, then Hillsong should be considered one of its most influential authors, as, over the past 30 years, successive waves of this Oceanian music have filled the global church. Hillsong's music, with its characteristic joyfulness, energy, and passion is astoundingly successful. Its website states that this music is now sung weekly by an estimated 50 million people in 60 languages (Hillsong Church Fact Sheet, accessed January 7, 2017).

The Hillsong phenomenon seems far from over. Today, at least three generations of Hillsong music resounds across the globe.[1] On 10 June 2015, journalist Kate Shellnut reported via the popular website Christianity Today that Hillsong United's hit song "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)" had remained on the Billboard Hot Christian Songs list for a record 50 consecutive weeks—longer than any other Christian single. In her article, United's YouTube lyric video had just hit 35 million views.[2] In 2016, United received the Top Christian Artist Billboard award. At the time of writing, one year later, the same video has had 73.5 million plays. An acoustic version, recorded at the Relevant Magazine studios, now has 38 million views.[3] In this time, Hillsong United has also sung "Oceans" live on The Today Show. Recently, it rerecorded a version sung from a boat, upon the Sea of Galilee, adding visual imagery evocative of the biblical text from which it was written, Matthew 14.

Hillsong Church is the congregation behind this music. This Australian congregation was founded in 1983 under the name Hills Christian Life Centre and over the years has transformed into a global assembly with over 100,000 adherents in 15 countries on five continents of the world. Its concomitant growth and influence upon global evangelical Christianity can be linked to a bewildering array of activities that range from media production to conferences, to social justice initiatives and participation within other religious bodies such as the ACC. They are also products of a myriad of sociocultural, economic, technological, and political currents, both local and global, that Hillsong has proven adept at navigating. As the world has moved, so too has Hillsong.

The Hillsong Movement?

Hillsong has undeniably been a major influence on evangelical Christianity over the past 30 years. So what are scholars to make of these diverse activities, when undertaken by a church? Many emphasize

Hillsong's consumerism (For example Connell 2005; McIntyre 2007; Maddox 2012, 2013). Certainly, Hillsong does use global market mechanisms to distribute its message. McIntyre (2007, 187) notes, "Hillsong music is an accessory that extends the initial God purchase into a complete Hillsong brand of Christian living." But, the question is, does this relationship with the market encapsulate Hillsong in entirety?

An increasing number of scholarly articles now contain a variation of the phrase, "such as the Australian megachurch Hillsong." This trend suggests that this church is emblematic of larger global movement(s), both contemporary and historical. Thus, any volume purporting to study Hillsong will run up against the problems inherent to studying megachurches more generally. Megachurches are relatively new, with many emerging in the 1980s (Thumma and Travis 2007, 79). They are often studied as a phenomenon via shared theologies and other characteristics (Patterson 2007; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Bowler 2013). But each congregation is, of course, very different. Emerging scholarship is beginning to promote more nuanced, and even multi-layered, insider views of churches—such as Los Angeles' Mosaic and Oasis Churches (Marti 2008, 2009), City Harvest Church in Singapore (Chin 2008), and Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea (Anderson 2003). This quest is assisted by anthropology of Christianity scholars pushing towards better ethnographic work of Christianity overall (Robbins 2004, 2006; Coleman et al. 2015; Bialecki et al. 2008).

One of the goals of this volume, therefore, is to contextualize Hillsong as a product of historical and contemporary trends both "sacred" and "secular"; to balance Hillsong's place within the Christian church ancient and modern; and to recognize that its global character is also unique within each local context. A second, related goal is to present "Hillsong" as an organizational entity while simultaneously acknowledging the diversity of people and ideas within it.

Starting with a discrete congregational group opens the opportunity for recognition of the ways in which the flows of global culture have intensified in recent times within local settings, often defying religious scholarship. The claim that our world is globalizing has been celebrated and contested. In discussion of the interaction of globalizing forces with religious communities, the church historian Jehu Hanciles (2008, 17) advocates grass-roots description to add better content to the ways that communities use the market to both accommodate and resist global forces, even as they experience a shrinking of distance and time,

or "widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness" (Held et al. 1999, 2).

The local, however, continues to prove notoriously difficult to define. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996, 176) uses the term "production of locality" to explain the ways that our local boundaries are carefully crafted in and through ritual. To illuminate the relationship between "locality" and culture, Appadurai maps out five dimensions of globalization, what he calls "scapes," that allow for movement, and therefore avoid scholarship that promotes stasis or "reification" of the local. Thomas Tweed from the University of Notre Dame draws upon this work to suggest a sixth category of "sacroscapes," in order to recognize the translocal nature of religious flows. Tweed invites "scholars to attend to the multiple ways that religious flows have left traces, transforming people and places, the social arena and the natural terrain" (2009, Loc 670).

The metaphor of movement also provides recognition of flows between exterior and interior worlds. "Flow" is an influential concept not only for anthropology and sociology, but also for psychology, and is implicated in the "optimal performance" of activities ranging from sports, to music making, to worship (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; see also Maslow 1994 [1964]). As Mark Porter highlights within his chapter in this volume, the types of flows that are promoted within the pragmatic work of Christianity, and the ways scholars analyze them impact the way Christians community-build and communicate religious activities to others.

Immanuel Kant argued towards intentional citizenship in both the *cosmo* and the *polis*. Since then, "cosmopolitanism" has become a popular framework for scholars to explain global flows in local space, and is used in discussions of the way music is both formed by and impacts upon nationality (Turino 2000; Rommen 2007). Indeed, this book provides various ways music both becomes representative of and also transcends place. Hillsong's music has tended to appeal to Christians moving in cultural flows that resist the traditional or local and, at times, even the nation state (See Kinga Povedak's chapter, this volume). The definitions of cosmopolitanism in use today range from an ideal global ethnic, racial, and religious interaction through to framing our new global elite (Roudometof 2005). However within this multiplicity Beck proclaims:

> The central defining characteristic of a cosmopolitan perspective is the "dialogic imagination." By this I mean the clash of cultures and rationalities within one's own life, "the internalized other." The dialogic imagination corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand, combine contradictory certainties. (2002, 18)

Hillsong Church is a highly diverse group of people contributing (both formally and informally) to produce both its local and global impact. Thus, in order to gain any insight into its impact upon local congregational worship, or global evangelicalism, there is a necessity to examine these people and the various internal and external debates that matter within the life of this congregation.

Overview of the Book

The title of this book, "*The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call me out Upon the Waters*," is a statement intended to make sense of this local/global duality. The first part of the title, "*The Hillsong Movement Examined*," indicates that we are interested in Hillsong as "movement" in at least four senses of the word.

First, the title invites us to examine what Hillsong "is" from the perspective of sociology. According to Williams Sims Bainbridge, a religious movement is "a relatively organized attempt by a number of people to cause or prevent change in a religious organization or in religious aspects of life" (1997, 3). From this perspective, and when read against the church's mission statement—"To reach and influence the world by building a large Christ-centered, Bible-based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact in every sphere of life"—we could say that Hillsong is a movement. But several questions follow from this: Does 100,000 people, while impressive, a movement make? (By comparison, at its peak, David Yonggi Cho's Yoido Full Gospel Church claimed over 800,000 adherents). What is Hillsong's relationship to, for example, the pentecostal or charismatic, movements? Is it a movement within a movement (See Austin, this volume)? As with all sociological definitions or "ideal types," the explanatory power in analyzing Hillsong as a "movement" is not where it fits, but rather where it doesn't. The troubles that arise when trying to define Hillsong as a social, religious, or even "new religious movement" help us to see the complexities of lived

religion, and particularly of a "word accommodating" (Wallis 1984) organization such as Hillsong.

Second, the title invites us to observe "Hillsong" as a product of global movement, more broadly understood. Movement in this sense evokes "flows" reminiscent of tides, waves, and electronic data transfers, of people, artefacts, and ideas, which allows geographical context to be engaged, but also transcended (Appadurai 1990; see also Heyman and Campbell 2009; Powell and Steel 2011). Hillsong seems a particularly mobile Christian expression, perhaps even transient. It seems to offer a religiosity suitable for migrating peoples in a fast-changing world. This may be because it is ever transforming. Even as this book was being written, Hillsong Church acquired a television station through the Trinity Broadcasting Network, and planted congregations in several new locations.

Historically speaking, of course, movement has always been at the heart of religious change. Christianity spread from The Middle East region over two millennia through global flows into Europe and Asia, and the rest of the world. In *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace*, Teresa Berger notes:

> Today, there are more than two billion Christians worldwide (roughly a third of the world's population), many of whom will be at worship at any given Sunday … To map the diversity of contemporary worship practices—and the migratory flows at the heart of them whether people, practices, ideas and materials—is impossible. At the same time, not to acknowledge this diversity and the underlying migratory flows seems equally impossible. Living in an "age of migration" as we do, liturgical practices have to be within this framework, not in occlusion or ignorance of it. (2012, xvii)

Undoubtedly, Hillsong Church has intentionally utilized all four areas Berger mentions ("people, practices, ideas, and materials") to expand and grow. It has captured the imagination of migrating cosmopolitan and diaspora cultures; transmitted religious ideas within its cultural products and multimedia; and drawn constituents into particular practices of the body that build solidarity among its worshiping members, promoting the materials of its faith, including, of course, the Bible.

Third, the use of "movement" in the title also invites readers to see Hillsong as representative of a particular kind of affective transformation that marks evangelical Christianity today. Many of the people who encounter Hillsong for the first time describe being "deeply moved."

The emotionalism of the contemporary worship experience is particularly critiqued within theological circles. Yet orthopathy, or gaining right affect, has remained an important yet perhaps under-acknowledged part of Christian conversion (Smith 2013; Vacek 2013). Indeed, within Luke 10:27, Jesus applauds the scholar who summarizes the commandments as "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Incorporating the affective dimension allows us to recognize the perception of many adherents that there is something unique about this particular strain of Christianity, with, as the authors within this volume show, much of the difference as *felt*.

Fourth and finally, the movement that is of principal concern to Hillsong members is, of course, that of the Spirit. The idea of "renewal" or revitalization is a central motif within pentecostalism and embedded within the foundation of Hillsong church. pentecostalism is truly a religion of movement. During the Asuza Street revival, the founding narrative of the pentecostal imagination (Cox 2001; Martin 2002; Yong 2005), the Spirit was seen to be doing something powerful within the church, bringing races and genders together to form a community that defied segregation laws, and which spread "to the ends of the earth."

This leads us to the secondary portion of our title "*You Call Me Out Upon the Waters*," drawn from the lyrics of the song "Oceans" to represent the challenge internalized by these Christians to continually trust the Spirit to lead them beyond the walls of their existing institution, even as disciple Peter was prompted to leave the boat and walk upon water by Jesus (Matthew 14). This type of movement, of faith, is harder to articulate or define. And yet, without acknowledging the role of the Spirit, scholars run the risk of something that has the form but not the substance of this religious community as perceived by insiders. Often, Spirit-led movements, it seems, are not defined by their essentiality, but their adaptability and mobility.

Spirited Conversations?

Recognition of the movement of the Spirit as central to the pentecostal experience provides a counter to the idea that it is the entertainment that draws seemingly endless flows of people to consume Hillsong music, attend conferences, or worship weekly in church services around the globe. But it is not the impressive lights or filled venues that bring

rock stars such as Justin Bieber to their knees in tears, as Taffy Brodesser-Ackner reports in GQ Magazine's December 17, 2015 edition. Rather, the subject of a conversion often articulates being deeply moved by the realization that something is missing without Jesus.

This book arose from a general feeling on the part of us, the co-editors, that there is something about the essential spirit of the church that is missing in the discussions of Hillsong Church that play out in the press, online, and in scholarly journals. Often, this lack of nuance appears in the form of sensationalistic reporting ("This isn't your grandfather's church!") or a sociological flattening of subjectivity and agency by scholars who fall into similar tropes ("Those happy-clappy Hillsongers!"). It becomes perhaps more problematic when it appears as, for example, the critical and non-constructive ways fundamentalist Christians can disparage theologies alternative to their own, or the way insiders seem to respond to these criticisms. We have found that discussion about Hillsong tends to be polarizing, and as in all of these cases, ideologies come to the fore. But this is, perhaps, inevitable. So with this book, we seek to inject our own philosophy, which holds that any deeper understanding of this topic requires nuance and dialogue drawn from multiple perspectives, into the mix.

Indeed, this volume is in many ways a natural extension of a more personal conversation between us, the co-editors, that is now over five years old and is informed by our "insider" and "outsider" perspectives. Tanya Riches is, as she writes in her chapter, a Sydney-based life long attendee of the church, who joined the Hills Campus with her parents at the age of five. Her initial involvement was as a songwriter and singer in the Creative department. After encouragement from her Australian M.Phil supervisor she adopted the role of scholar, and has worked both at the denominational training college AlphaCrucis in Sydney, and now Hillsong College. She has had seasons outside of Hillsong but approaches it primarily as a critical insider, or with an emic view.

In contrast, Tom Wagner approaches this topic as a sympathetic outsider with interest in religion, viewing it through an etic lens. Deciding to undertake his PhD in ethnomusicology, he participated in church life at Hillsong's Dominion Theatre location in London for three years, attending services, small group meetings, and conferences; participating on several teams within the church; and also interviewing church members, worship team members, and church leaders.

This conversation, which stretched across various continents and through multiple research and writing projects, has proved invaluable to us as co-editors, and so the idea was born that it be extended. The present book integrates select voices from a variety of academic and non-academic disciplinary perspectives, as well as from inside and outside the church, to represent the kind of continuing conversation we want to have—but also in acknowledgement of these insider/outsider (emic/etic) boundaries to our knowledge and the hermeneutic challenges they present.

Such a conversation, conducted across and beyond faith lines, is often categorized under the term "interdisciplinary" or even "inter-religious." It occurs in scholarship, but also in more ordinary everyday settings. Such conversations are not only occurring within Christianity, but also more broadly. British Muslim scholar Mona Siddiqui outlines limitations and possibilities for discussion as a method of building civil society in The Guardian on April 20, 2010. In her opinion piece explaining to non-scholars, she states, "…[interreligious dialogue] works best when there is both text and context." Her comment suggests that it is, in fact, possible to both speak analytically about faith and spirituality, and to represent our own faith commitments to others. We should, of course, remember that when we speak about faith—we are, after all, speaking about people.

The Book at a Glance

Part I: History and Approaches: Hillsong in Scholarly and Popular Imagination(s)

The first section contextualizes the growth of Hillsong Church, and its theological, musical, and congregational identity, linking this identity to its theology, media, and musical practice.

Since its founding, Hillsong Church's expansion has been unprecedented in Australia, and perhaps even globally. Denise Austin, an Associate Professor of history at the Australian Christian Churches' AlphaCrucis College, outlines denominational influences that led to its rise. Hillsong was birthed from Frank Houston's Sydney Christian Life Centre and a particularly denominational context within the Australian Christian Churches—ACC (formerly Assemblies of God in Australia—AGA). Austin's chapter describes how denominational forces flowed together to facilitate the

emergence of Hillsong Church by: releasing charismatic trans-Tasman expressions of worship and emphasizing "new" pentecostal leadership in the 1970s; smashing the "Cinderella State" syndrome and facilitating church growth in the 1980s; harnessing the energy of young people in the 1990s; and valuing Christian womanhood in the new millennium.

As it has grown in membership, Hillsong has transformed its own structures more than once. Thus, Mark Hutchinson, pre-eminent Australian historian, Professor of History and Dean of the Faculty of Education, Arts and Social Sciences at AlphaCrucis College, and a researcher with the Religion and Society Research Cluster at Western Sydney University, discusses not only the emergence of this congregation from Sydney's Western suburbs, with its lower socioeconomic status that initially offered little in the way of ethnic diversity, but its transformational stages. His complementary analysis of the "post- and post-modern, pluralizing 'soup'" that Hillsong has evolved in sheds particular light upon the challenges Hillsong's leadership has faced in navigating the complex emotional geography of a changing Australian cultural landscape that is shaped by gonzo journalism.

Hillsong Church has played a vital role in global renewal Christianity, most notably through the production of congregational music. Mark Evans, musicologist and Head of Communications at The University of Technology Sydney, discusses the way that individuals have developed, created, and expanded Hillsong's history but also the musical horizon of Hillsong Music Australia, and by extension, that of the global church. These celebrities include Geoff Bullock as the early pioneer of the musical endeavors and Darlene Zschech as the "face and sound" of Hillsong Music. In recent times, a large stable of artists has emerged that both capitulate and eschew the media's attempts to cast them as celebrity rock artists. Evans also discusses the changing sonic properties of the sound itself that transcend the individuals that create it.

Part II: Diversity, Dialogue, and Social Engagement

The second section discusses flows within the church and examines the biblical/theological themes that motivate engagement and dialogue beyond its walls and how they play out in real life. Chapters five, six, and seven discuss the initial congregation and the changes to various influential demographics within it. Hillsong Church's Vision Statement *The Church I Now See* describes itself as "one house, many rooms." And yet, there is an undeniable center in Sydney, Australia.

Tanya Riches' chapter sets up Sydney as the context within which debates about religious authority, and questions regarding the empowerment of women, arise. She then addresses lingering questions regarding whether Hillsong empowers women, by drawing the development literature relating to women's empowerment and gender together with studies on pentecostalism. She argues that a unique relationship with the women of Hillsong church generates Bobbie Houston's authority for ministry, and legitimates her sharing the role of Hillsong Global Senior Pastor with her husband, Brian Houston. Riches draws upon ethnographic interviews to outline how the women at Hillsong develop skills that facilitate their economic, political, and cultural participation in civic life.

Over the years, Hillsong International Leadership College has grown from its origins in training its own leaders, into a unique educational institution. Isaac Soon, a former Hillsong College staff member and student currently reading for his M.Phil in Theology (New Testament) at Oxford University, examines the Hillsong teaching manuals to illuminate the biblical concept of "religion" and "ethos" found within them, evaluating them in light of Pauline literature. He finds a synergy between the early church's understanding of ethnicities and the interactions of culture at Hillsong—while criticizing Hillsong's engagement with its religious "others" as perhaps lacking nuance.

Cristina Rocha is a Brazilian cultural anthropologist, a current ARC Future Fellow studying migration flows of Hillsong Church, and the director of the Religion and Society Research Cluster. Her chapter examines the Brazilian cohort in Sydney's City Campus, and the transnational connections that exist within the cosmopolitan members of Hillsong Church. This vocal group plays a role in addressing the challenges of migrant life by assisting Brazilians in finding jobs, learning English, and navigating the Australian immigration path to permanent residency. Rocha shows how Hillsong members retain their cultural practices, with Brazilians teaching the church how to samba, and staffing its cafes. This celebration of the diverse cultures of Hillsong is mediated by participation in the church's annual calendar and college life.

Part III: International Expansion and Spheres of Influence

As Hillsong's congregational "spheres of influence" have expanded, it is inevitable that flows also eventually return to and transform the church.

This chapter examines the interaction between those in Hillsong's current imaginary and the spaces outside of it.

Wen Reagan is a singer-songwriter and worship pastor from Durham, NC with a PhD from Duke University. His chapter highlights the important affective connection between the Hillsong sound and the vitality of American evangelical worship. He outlines the role of the American media in promoting Hillsong as music, contrasting this with a more critical approach from the Australian media, which has highlighted various controversies of the church and questions its financial structures. Thus he outlines two differing public imaginations of what Hillsong truly represents, via celebration of the Houstons in North America that contrasts scepticism and even derision within Australia's media. Things changed after Hillsong has planted the New York campus, with doctrinal concerns suddenly introduced into the media and its perception of the church.

Mark Porter is a post-doctoral researcher at Universität Erfurt, Germany. His chapter addresses how Hillsong plants its congregations, and its effects upon local churches, using the case study of the Oxford Hillsong campus. Although St Aldate's was known for its use of contemporary music, after a new Hillsong campus was planted, this Anglican congregation easily retained most of its members and developed a new sonic identity that distinguished it from Hillsong. He situates this historically to address the widely expressed views that Hillsong's expansion represents the subsumption of other local churches.

Kinga Povedák is a research fellow at the MTASZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture. Her chapter addresses how Hillsong music in Hungary produced a Christian ecumenism in the post-socialist nation. It outlines how, during the Kádár era, Christian music formed a resistance against socialism. Tolerated by the regime, this provided an alternative youth movement that rebelled against both church and state. Various denominations promoted their own Hungarian translations, but the designation of The Budapest Connect as licensing "official" Hillsong translations may result in a strengthening of this congregation and solidify its place in the Hungarian religious landscape.

Part IV: What Lies Ahead?

What are the crucial ethical, philosophical, and theological questions for the Hillsong Movement in the future? The eschatological is of utmost importance to the pentecostal imaginary. This section examines some

future movements and challenges facing Hillsong as a brand, an organization, and a church.

Andrew Davies is the Head of Department of Theology and Religion and Director of the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion at Birmingham University, UK. His interest is in the public discourse and the theological underpinning of its social activities. His chapter is a reading of Hillsong's public engagement, constructed via its most widely distributed texts—its official website and its song lyrics. His chapter makes explicit the theological underpinning for its extensive work in combatting human slavery, in caring for orphans, and in feeding the poor. This readily available information creates questions for those in the media who find little evidence that Hillsong is engaged in social justice activities.

Dreu Harrison is the Director for Strategic Innovation at Pivot, part of the Frost*collective, an independent strategy and design consultancy based in Sydney, Australia. His work in the areas of strategy, innovation, and organizational systems stretches across multiple industries and sectors. His chapter analyses the role of the charismatic gifts as seen in the "vision" at Hillsong Church. Harrison presents a "founding vision" as seen within Pastor Brian Houston's *The Church that I See* and recent revision *The Church that I Now See*, which hangs in the foyer of every Hillsong Church. Also, each year a "forward vision" is presented during the annual Vision Sunday event that outlines the charismatic word that directs and forms the church during the year. He outlines how, instead of the public outbursts of charisma for which pentecostalism was known, church members now internalize inspiration and direct it into institutional growth. He draws upon Žižek to note that even as these structures harness neoliberal processes, they become bound to them, and thus find their limits.

Hillsong undoubtedly leverages market processes to expand its vision, but it does not subscribe to the ethos of a "competitive religious market" as whole-heartedly as its detractors believe. While Hillsong has had many opportunities to become an independent, it has remained within the ACC movement. The continuing interdependence or cooperative relationship between the largest member congregation, and the movement within which it resides, is addressed in a reflection written by Christopher Parkes, a lecturer at Hillsong College undertaking his PhD at the Australian Catholic University in the area of theological ethics. Parkes' chapter outlines his participation as a Hillsong staff

member in writing "the position papers," a collection of guiding documents that collate the oral and uniquely pentecostal theologies of the ACC movement. He outlines the process by which church laity, staff, and denominational theologians together discussed biblical scriptures and contemporary events to produce the codes to guide the practices of pastoral staff, in this case regarding issues of human reproduction such as in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, and adoption. Parkes outlines the benefits and drawbacks of this model for Hillsong Global as a translocal congregation, which potentially allows its different national churches to form approaches that suit their context.

The final chapter of this volume, by Tom Wagner, uses perspectives from media ecology and critical marketing in an attempt to understand the power of experiential religious brands. Hillsong's success in leveraging the cultural codes and communication techniques of consumer/popular culture has been well established. Rather than champion Hillsong as an evangelical "magic bullet" or lament it as somehow "anti-Christian," Tom explores how the ontology of the brand relates to the phenomenology of religious experience. He begins from the assumption that marketing/branding is one dominant form of communication in the cultural context in which Hillsong operates. Wagner suggests that Hillsong's brand is more than just a series of clever marketing techniques; it is both a collection of media through which meaning is communicated and a medium through which meaning is experienced with both symbolic and sensorial properties. Hillsong's branded ecosystem is one in which participants make and experience meaning while simultaneously (re)producing not only the brand and its ideology, but also the larger ecology in which it is contextualized. When "used" in worship, therefore, the brand becomes what anthropologist Birgit Meyer calls a "sensational form." Therefore, experiential religious brands such as Hillsong have unique power because the worshiper's experience of the brand and the experience of God become self-reinforcing and, ultimately, inseparable.

In addition, a response is provided by the church by the Executive Vice President of Hillsong College, Lee Burns.

Conclusion

The presented volume outlines Hillsong as an Oceanian (or Australasian) Christian expression that has travelled into other contexts, changing and adapting as it has done so. The book thus addresses a

continent oft-neglected in studies of contemporary Christianity, in that it makes visible the local context that has formed and that still works on Hillsong's music, conference, and church culture. It also, however, illuminates ways that the Hillsong products have been used in surprising or unexpected ways and that transcend this context.

It is the intent of this book to facilitate a dialogue between new and pre-eminent, Australian and international scholars regarding the church's theology, practices, and worship products. The hope is that this collaboration is ongoing and results in future exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies. It is also the intent of this book to intentionally amplify pentecostal voices within the Hillsong staff, placing them in dialogue with knowledgeable outsiders. This was an exercise in trust for these staff members, and the organization as a whole, as it moves into the production of scholarly, rather than only popular, writing. It is, of course, only a contribution to a dialogue that will continue to evolve, but we hope (and believe) it is a contribution to a conversation that will enrich global pentecostal studies and also Hillsong Church itself.

Notes

1 Hillsong, United, and Young & Free are the three main bands of the church, with the historical development explained in Evans' chapter, this volume.

2 "Hillsong UNITED Oceans (Where Feet May Fail) Lyric Video," *hillsongunitedTV*. Published to YouTube on February 22, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy9nwe9_xzw.

3 Hillsong United—"Oceans" (Live at RELEVANT). *Relevant*. Published to Youtube on December 13, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m_sWJQm2fs.

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PART I

Historical Approaches

CHAPTER 2

"Flowing Together": The Origins and Early Development of Hillsong Church within Assemblies of God in Australia

Denise A. Austin

The history of Hillsong Church is often told from a Hillsong/Houston-centric perspective, missing key aspects of the church ecology from which it arose. The origins and development of Hillsong Church occurred during the tenure of Andrew Evans as General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Australia (AGA)—later renamed Australian Christian Churches (ACC). These pivotal 20 years (1977–1997) saw a substantial growth within AGA from 152 churches and fewer than 10,000 constituents to 826 churches and over 115,000 constituents (Clifton 2009, 150). The number of Australian pentecostals increased from about 15,000 people in 1979 to more than 250,000 in 1999, a growth rate virtually unprecedented anywhere in the world (Author unknown 2000, 19). In fact, by 1996, over 10% of all church attenders in Australia were pentecostal, overtaking Anglicans to become the second highest church attenders behind Roman Catholics

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(Kaldor et al. 1999, 16). Regarding the noteworthy expansion of AGA, Evans (1996, 3) explained: "Our belief is still that we flow together in love and unity, not because we are forced to by any rules, but because of the common vision to preach the gospel to this nation and that each church has a right under God to use whatever methods it may choose." His successor as the movement's National President (1997–2009), Brian Houston, reaffirmed this sentiment, stating: "The AOG in Australia is the best model I know of churches working together for common vision and purpose" (McQuillan 1997, 4). Through the use of oral interviews with key church leaders, supported by archival research and analysis of secondary sources, this chapter argues that, rather than arising out of a vacuum, denominational forces flowed together to facilitate the emergence of Hillsong Church by: releasing charismatic trans-Tasman expressions of worship; emphasizing "new" pentecostal leadership; smashing the "Cinderella State" syndrome; facilitating church growth; harnessing the energy of young people; and valuing Christian womanhood.

Releasing Trans-Tasman Charismatic Expressions of Worship

The historical foundations of Hillsong Church's freedom of expression in worship emerged out of the trans-Tasman charismatic renewal flowing between New Zealand and Australia. As Mark Hutchinson (2010b, 272) argued, the charismatic Latter Rain movement in New Zealand was "a renewer of renewal," distinguished by contemporary music and demonstrative worship practices. In 1960, Latter Rain preacher Rob Wheeler of Auckland conducted a campaign in Queensland which profoundly impacted students at AGA's Commonwealth Bible College in Brisbane, notably Andrew Evans, David Cartledge, and Philip Hills (Hutchinson 2010a). Lloyd Averill, principal of Christian Life Bible College (CLBC 1971–1976) at Lower Hutt in New Zealand and regular guest lecturer at CBC, insisted: "We must be done with 'pentecostalism' and its little features, and go for a real Pentecost in all its fullness" (Averill 1964, 5). Understandably, those who had felt the full brunt of ruthless discrimination from mainline Christians for decades felt cautious. Nevertheless, another New Zealand Latter Rain proponent, Robert (Bob) Midgley, also brought renewal teachings across the Tasman

Sea. His 1971 tour greatly impacted David and Marie Cartledge, who were pastoring Calvary Temple in Townsville (Midgley 2013, 73). They did away with the traditional AGA hymnals, switching instead to the New Zealand-based *Scripture in Song* and introduced the radical practices of free worship and dancing (Cartledge 1971, 11; 2000, 125). In 1972, the AGA Commonwealth Executive (following the lead of the Assemblies of God in the United States) stated that: "Dancing before the Lord … should not be promoted" in assemblies (1973, 5). However, it was such a contentious issue that the 1973 AGA Commonwealth conference was pressed to concede, "that dancing should be neither promoted nor denigrated within our Fellowship but that each Assembly's position be respected" (Hutchinson 2006). Clearly, renewalists were exerting influence.

The April 1977 AGA Commonwealth conference at Dallas Brookes Hall in Melbourne was the turning point that ultimately led to the emergence of Hillsong Church. Guest preacher, David (Paul) Yonggi Cho of Yoidi Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, although reportedly surprised at the dancing during worship, did not condemn it (Duncan 1978). Indeed, Cho threatened to leave when attempts were made to suppress this public display of joy (Hutchinson 2006). After much heated debate surrounding charismatic practices, eventually Andrew Evans was elected as the new AGA General Superintendent (Austin 2017, 113). Andrew and Lorraine Evans had pastored at Flinders Park and Elizabeth in South Australia, before serving in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for seven years, then taking on Klemzig (later renamed Paradise Community Church) in Adelaide. Under their leadership, the church grew from 200 to 4000 attendees (Evans 2012). As Shane Clifton (2006) points out, Paradise was one of several rapidly growing assemblies that enjoyed an influx of charismatic "switchers" from mainline denominations. Through the church's television broadcast, Evans was preaching to over 10,000 people a week. Utilizing this important medium, Evans (1981, 4) wrote: "So often we have had an inferiority about the media. We have been thinking we aren't good enough. But God can use you!" This reflects the global impulse of charismatics to penetrate the media through television, radio, movies, literature, and mass evangelistic campaigns (Barrett 1988, 119). Evans' enthusiastic endorsement of contemporary worship practices, gleaned from New Zealand Latter Rain preachers, led the AGA to embrace a freedom in worship that later encapsulated Hillsong Church.

Emphasizing "New" Pentecostal Leadership

A crucial factor that opened the way for Hillsong Church was the emphasis on "new" pentecostal leadership. As Shane Clifton (2007, 231) found, growing local assemblies morphed from democratized Congregational ecclesiology to Presbyterian structures with vested governmental authority in the senior pastor and church board/eldership. Pro-renewal AGA pastors, such as David Cartledge in Townsville, Andrew Evans in Adelaide, Philip Hills in Melbourne, and Reginald (Reg) Klimionok in Brisbane were already being influenced by the teachings of Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner at the Institute of Church Growth, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California who promoted pastor-led structures (Clifton 2009, 147). So, just as the turbulent 1977 conference was winding up, inspired by Cho's faith messages, the newly elected Vice-General Superintendent Philip Hills suggested that, for the first time ever, a faith goal be set of 50% membership increase by the next conference. This was a bold move considering, over its 40-year history, AGA had only seen a new church open every 97 days (Bartholomew 1985, 7) and the previous conference period growth rate had been just 5% (Evans 1987, 26). To add impetus to the vision, the Cartledges arranged for 240 AGA pastors to travel to Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul and to Jerusalem in July 1977 (Evans 2016). By the next biennial conference, the AGA had grown by 68% and then 128% the following period, continuing on a distinct upward trajectory (Addison 2008). Having gained a mandate in the 1977 Commonwealth conference, these new leaders forged ahead.

In order to facilitate this growth, Evans completely transformed the AGA national and state leadership structure, encouraging visionary rather than administrative leadership. The Commonwealth Executive was reduced to seven members and the secretary/treasurer became the only full-time position (Smith and Smith 1987, 62). As a lynchpin in "new" pentecostal leadership, Cartledge joined the Commonwealth Executive and became one of its longest serving members (1977–2003). He comments: "This move to an apostolic model cut out the crossing t's and dotting i's, and every bit of nonsense you can imagine … literally a blockbusting, shattering re-alignment of the church, and the whole pentecostal movement in Australia has profited…" (Brookes 2000, 54). In Townsville, Cartledge's further progressive initiatives included: moving the Sunday service time from 11 am to 9 am; more relaxed dress

codes; de-emphasis on holiness; shorter faith-based preaching with an altar call; developing a Yoido-style cell group system; employing pastoral care pastors; recording church attendance; appointing a full-time female church secretary; publishing *Destiny* magazine; pioneering welfare programs for the homeless; founding Rhema Bible College, the very first AGA Bible College outside of CBC (1978); launching the first of the new Christian schools (1978) in Queensland; and opening a 92 acre church campus facility (1979)—the largest evangelical church building in Australia at that time. During the next 10 years, over 4000 people were saved in the church, of whom David Cartledge personally baptized 2200. Little wonder that Mark Hutchinson (2006) stated: "What was later seen at Hillsong and Paradise was first seen at Townsville." The emphasis on senior pastor-driven leadership allowed for the emergence of charismatic leaders of Australian megachurches.

Smashing the "Cinderella State" Syndrome

Another key to the rise of Hillsong Church was that the pentecostal "Cinderella state" of New South Wales (NSW) (McFarlane 2004), with Sydney as a fortress for conservative Anglican evangelicalism (Hutchinson 1994, 1), was transformed into a pentecostal epi-center. In July 1977, three months after Evans was installed as AGA leader, Frank and Hazel Houston moved to Sydney to establish Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre (Houston 1982, 12). Given the later exposure of his predatory paedophilia (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2014), Frank Houston's long and successful ministry career is now difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, the facts remain. Having pastored Lower Hutt assembly (1959–1976), founded CLBC (1967) and led as AGNZ National Superintendent (1966–1977), Frank Houston was already a well-known preacher in Australia. A total of 14 people attended the first meeting, in the Double Bay home of CLBC alumni Chris and Beverley Aiton, where Frank Houston announced his grand vision that the church would have thousands of people and attract the best musicians in Australia (Aiton 2016). He believed his church would "put God on the main street of Sydney" ("A Man Sent by God" 1978, 26). This claim was also recapitulated within the vision of his son, Brian, of: "A church so large in size that the city and the nation cannot ignore it…" (Houston 2003, 2). Frank Houston's motto was "church is all about God and people," also later adopted as the mantra of Hillsong

Church (McFarlane 2004). The following week, Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre commenced officially with 30 people, renting Sherbrook Hall, Double Bay for $15 each Sunday and within six months attendance was over 150. By the time Brian and Roberta (Bobbie) Houston arrived from New Zealand, in 1978, to join the ministry team, the church had already outgrown two locations and soon the renamed Sydney Christian Life Centre (Sydney CLC) joined the AGA (Aiton 2016). While some AGA leaders still harboured suspicions regarding the Latter Rain vestiges of Sydney CLC as a "movement within a movement," Frank Houston was elected to the AGA Commonwealth Executive and became NSW State Superintendent (McFarlane 2004). In fact, according to Cartledge (2002), Sydney CLC became "the church to visit" if travelling through Sydney. In 1980, Sydney CLC leased a 13,000 square foot premises at 200 Goulburn Street in the semi-industrial inner city Darlinghurst and completed a $48,000 renovation (Assemblies of God in Australia 1980, 12). Evans led the dedicatory prayer before a congregation of 750. Although now a disgraced figure, evidence demonstrates that through his leadership of Sydney CLC and AGA in NSW, Frank Houston was key in transforming the state into a new nucleus of Australian pentecostalism.

Contemporary worship music and effective leadership were signature trademarks of Sydney CLC. Confirming Frank Houston's original vision of attracting the best musicians in Australia, the long-haired Trevor King of the Andy Gibb Band apparently walked into the church wearing a pair of board shorts and a singlet—and was converted the very first night (McArdle 2005). He was soon appointed as worship pastor. Other professional musicians involved in the church included: David Moyes, lead guitarist for Top Ten pop group, Air Supply; Jeff Beacham from hard core New Zealand band, Black Feather; Peter Kelly who had studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music; and George McArdle from the world renowned Little River Band. McArdle recalls: "we didn't talk about the music industry much at all. There was such a move of God going on … that all [we] could talk about was Jesus" (Austin 2009, 123). Sydney CLC grew rapidly with charismatic pastoral leaders such as Paul De Jong, Sean Stanton, and David Johnston; well over 1000 people each Sunday; around 50 home groups; a 40-strong choir; an active deaf ministry; a full-time printing department; street evangelism programs; Sunday evening meetings in the Sydney Town Hall; nine outreach churches, including a Chinese congregation led by Gordon and Susannah

Lee; and Sunday services aired on national television (Houston 1982, 12; Author unknown 1983, 8). As with most "new" pentecostal leaders, Frank Houston preferred the more corporate form of governance, vesting sole authority in his eldership, with the senior pastor holding decisive influence regarding church mission and vision (Tangen 2012, 54). In January 1987, the church purchased a converted warehouse at 188 Young Street, Waterloo for $1 million (On the House 2016). In 1990, Robert Fergusson (2016), formerly of Christian Centre Nottingham, migrated with his family to Australia to become the principal of Sydney CLC's International Institute of Creative Ministries (IICM—later Aquila College of Ministries), also serving as a church elder. Now a part of the core leadership team at Hillsong Church, Fergusson's teaching ministry has attracted international acclaim. People from all walks of life found salvation at Sydney CLC, including Melbourne Cup winning jockey, Darren Beadman (1998, 50). Duncan Corby (2016), later Hillsong International Leadership College Academic Dean, describes how, as a sceptical university student atheist, he was converted the very first night he attended Sydney CLC, being deeply impressed by the earnestness of the believers. He decided: "If whatever Christianity was on about was true then this is what I figured church should look like." Through directive leadership, dramatic conversions and the nurturing of high profile professional musicians, Sydney CLC smashed the NSW Cinderella stigma and provided an opening through which Hillsong Church emerged.

Facilitating Church Planting

One of the most revolutionary post-1977 AGA transformations was intentional facilitation of church planting, which provided Hillsong Church with the opportunity and flexibility of self-creation. The 1979 AGA Commonwealth conference endorsed a substantially revised constitution (Evans 1997, 3). The by-laws were rewritten to ensure "the right of the local Church to full sovereignty of its affairs in all matters local, and not subject to limitation or interference from any outside bodies with respect except where it affect the united Fellowship" (Bartholomew 1979, 15). Previous territorial restrictions were lifted, allowing new church plants "anywhere, anyplace, at any time" (Evans 2016). The AGA catchcry, "a church planted in every Australian town of over 1000 people," saw such a tremendous response that, between 1982 and 1983 alone, an AGA church was started somewhere in Australia every nine days

(Bartholomew 1983, 2). In June 1983, Reg Klimionok's new 2000-seat Garden City Christian Church (later Hillsong Brisbane campus) auditorium and extensive property were opened (Author unknown July 1983, 11–13). CBC, which had relocated from Brisbane to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains (Austin 2013, 128), prepared many faculty members and students to build AGA churches across Sydney, including Tony Hallo, John Spinella, Pasquale (Pat) Mesiti, and John Iuliano (Iuliano 2012). International Church Growth Seminars (1980, 11–12) were held with guest speakers, such as Yonggi Cho and Don Teck of Haggai Institute. This promoted fashionable North American pentecostal megachurch role models like Bill Hybels and Rick Warren (Eagle 2015, 589). David Cartledge (1994, 39) also developed a national church planting strategy that fostered "church planting churches" as centers of influence. Evans (1987, 25) asserted: "We are a fellowship of churches and not a denomination. We believe very strongly in the autonomy of the local church." This laissez-faire approach cemented Evans' leadership position, being re-elected unopposed for an unmatched 20 years.

Amid this culture of expansion, Brian and Bobbie Houston were released from, although not financially supported by, Sydney CLC to pioneer Hills Christian Life Centre (Hills CLC) in 1983. One of the well-documented defining moments came during the first month of meetings when Brian Houston swung out on a Baulkham Hills High School Hall gym rope while preaching. His energetic style resonated with the local young people and "a revival of passion" saw scores more join the church (Houston 2015, 64). Each week, CBC student Darko Culjak travelled down from the Katoomba campus to lead the Hills CLC youth group, called Powerhouse, and it grew rapidly to around 120 during the first five years (Austin 2013, 157; Crouch 2016). The first music pastor, Geoff Bullock, received support and training from Sydney CLC staff (Riches and Wagner 2012, 22). Hills CLC was also involved in pioneering or supporting other CLC churches during this time, including Central Coast, Liverpool, St. Mary's, and Vineyard (Crouch 2016). The rapid expansion of Hills CLC was not an anomaly at this time. Between 1976 and 1981, pentecostalism grew a remarkable 87% and, by 1985, AGA was the fastest growing Christian denomination in Australia (McQuillan 1985, 20). Reporting on Evans' 3000-seat Paradise Assembly of God, built in 1982 and paid off in just one year, a newspaper columnist writes: "Thousands of South Australians are swinging away from conservative church worship to a new 'born again' revival which is changing the face of religion in the State" (ibid.). In fact, between 1980

and 1986, AGA was planting a church in Queensland every 13 days—the longest sustained church planting effort of any denomination in Australian history (Peterson 2012). Although Hillsong Church later chose to follow the American multisite model (Frye 2011, 54), initiated in Australia, in 1994, by New Zealanders Phil and Christine Pringle of Christian City Church (C3) (Jagelman 2016), the strong AGA church planting drive facilitated the early origins of Hills CLC.

Harnessing the Energy of Young People

Arguably one of the most strategic AGA initiatives that opened the way for the Hillsong story was harnessing the energy of young people in a national movement. Rather than being locked into their denominational heritage, young people had begun to "shop around" for the right congregation in which they felt comfortable (Kaldor et al. 1994, 225). In 1986, the same year that the first Hillsong conference was held with 150 people in attendance (Price 2004), the antiquated AGA youth ministry, Christ's Ambassadors, was rebranded into the more upbeat Youth Alive. Mal Fletcher, the National Director and Victorian State Director, focused on large, exciting, performance-based rock worship concerts with evangelistic preaching and multimedia presentations. Clearly supportive, Evans (1986, 1) wrote:

> For years our youth movement … seemed to be very much in the doldrums around our nation. However, God is placing His hands upon young people in a new way and there is a new surge of youth enthusiasm that has resulted in the formation of "Youth Alive." Thousands of young people are gathering at rallies in the major cities with many being saved and baptised in the Holy Spirit. It's exciting to see God fulfil Joel Chapter 2 with the outpouring of His Spirit upon the young men and women of our assemblies.

Danny Guglielmucci, youth pastor at Paradise Community Church and South Australian Youth Alive State Director noted: "It's all up-tempo, entertaining stuff" (Author unknown 1989, 6). Wayne Alcorn (1994, 30), Queensland State Director for Youth Alive (and later ACC National President, 2009-current), explained: "Our 'shop window' is undoubtedly our rallies … highly professional and delivered with lots of energy and colour." The strategy was so successful that in just one decade, Youth Alive grew from a few hundred to over 40,000 young people attending

nationwide rallies (Alcorn 1994, 30). Youth Alive provided a model for large performance-based conferences and the culture of harnessing the energy of young people to build a national movement.

Hills CLC worked closely with Youth Alive, providing musicians for both state and national rallies. Pat Mesiti (1987, 16) who was an itinerant evangelist, part-time NSW State Director for Youth Alive and Hills CLC adherent, wrote: "Christ called us to a battlefield not a playground … Let's … use the media, hold more youth rallies and great crusades…" Youth Alive's major annual conference included internationally renowned guest speakers, attracted young people from across Australia, and aimed at "mobilising effective youth ministries." There were daily sessions, evening rallies, and practical workshops dealing with topics such as street evangelism, leading in worship, home groups, leadership development, programming, and promotions. Advertising for the 1987 national Youth Alive conference at Stanwell Tops described guest speaker Brian Houston as: "a dynamic young man with a message to young men and women in our nation" ("Shake This Nation" 1987, 9). One attendee at that conference, Donna Crouch (née *Quinn*), had converted to Christ in 1982 through a ministry of Sydney CLC and had been assistant youth leader at Hills CLC since 1985. She was called to the altar by Fletcher who prayed: "Lord you know what's ahead for her. Anoint her for it" (Crouch 2016). A week later Brian Houston appointed her as full-time youth pastor. Geoff Bullock convened the Hillsong Conference in 1987, where he acted both as Hills CLC's worship pastor and Youth Alive NSW's music director (Assemblies of God in Australia 1994, 22). Youth Alive NSW also released several albums through Hillsong Music Australia (HMA). By 1995, Hills CLC had grown to around 4000 people in the hired Hills Entertainment Centre with five services across the day in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Filipino. Hills CLC featured a wide variety of activities, largely aimed at young adults, including home groups, creative ministries, visitation teams, prayer groups, marriage counselling, youth, sports teams, and sign language—even a Star Trekkers club—as well as a thriving men's ministry led by Sydney CLC convert Michael Murphy (Author unknown 1995, 45). The mutually beneficial relationship between Hills CLC and Youth Alive helped propel Brian Houston to prominence across the AGA movement and fashioned the concept of a major annual conference to reach an audience of thousands.

Valuing Christian Womanhood

The final important feature of the 20-year ascendancy of AGA, which enabled Hillsong Church to flourish, was the valuing of Christian womanhood. As Bobbie Houston (2016, 23) rightly noted: "legendary women … had given heart and soul to break down barriers … and we cannot forget the suffragettes … who gave their all for women to emerge from the shadows which contained them." There had always been localized AGA women's groups focused predominantly on raising money for mission. However, at the request of the AGA Commonwealth Executive, in 1985, Marie Cartledge created a National Women's Ministry Department and her vision was to equip women for leadership (Cartledge 2016). In 1988, the very first AGA women's conference was held at Sydney CLC, with guest speakers such as Marie Cartledge, Margaret Court, Lorraine Evans, Ruth Harvey, Edith Averill, Jackie Leesment, and Wendy Migchelse (Austin and Grey 2016, 216). With 1500 women in attendance, it was an immediate success and became a bi-annual event, hosted across each state. Marie Cartledge stated: "Women's Ministries for Christ shall be recognized as an integral part of the fellowship" (AGA Commonwealth Conference 1991, 5). A champion for female ordination, she challenged senior pastors to promote more women into "areas of dynamic reconciliatory ministry" (AGA Women's Ministries 1993, 8). This was at a time when all 22 AGA national and state positions were held by men, excepting Marie Cartledge and also Betty Greaves who managed AGA General Insurance (Evans 1994, 3). Seminars and retreats were held at state and local levels "to inspire, challenge and teach our women" (Cartledge 1994, 35). AGA Women's Ministries became known for "colourful" advertising; donating millions of dollars to missions; establishing a Crisis Prayer Chain; developing a Bible study series; and publishing a quarterly *Women with Impact* magazine. As strong advocates of the tremendous social force of Christian women, Cartledge and others forged a path for the next generation to follow.

The AGA celebrated pentecostal womanhood and opened an opportunity for the Colour Conference phenomenon. The 1994 Women's Ministries conference was held at Merroo Christian Retreat Centre, Kurrajong, NSW. Marilyn Hickey's preaching was reportedly "accompanied by outstanding signs and wonders" and Marie Cartledge spoke about being "the kind of women who will touch this nation, overcomers, believers in miracles, deliverers, risk takers and those who have touched

Jesus" (Neale 1994, 32). The following year, an experienced church pastor Wendy Megchelse, became full-time National Director of AGA Women's Ministries, funded from pledges raised at the national conference (Cartledge 2016). She gathered around 3500 attendees for the conference in Adelaide, South Australia (Author unknown 1996, 4). The conferences continued to make an impact, raising $18,000 for Youth Alive and honoring Queensland attorney general, Denver Beanland, for his stand against pornography. In an article entitled, "The River Will Flow," Queensland State Director of AGA Women's Ministries, Joy Graetz (1998, 21), enthused: "The Women's Ministries department has never existed for frivolous reasons, and never will! We are about the king's business and will continue to rise and advance in his anointing which resides in each of us, for his glory." Bobbie Houston's first Colour Conference, in March 1997, was advertized as "an initiative of Hills Christian Life Centre women" and mostly featured Hills CLC women (Hills Christian Life Centre Women 1997, 1). However, she was soon promoted to National Director of AGA Women's Ministries and Colour Conference became the denomination's national women's event (Houston 2014, 14). Despite the blinkered approach of some scholars who criticize Hillsong Church's stance on the empowerment of women (Maddox 2013, 16), as Shane Clifton (2016, 312) argues, Hillsong Church has promoted the value of womanhood and provided avenues for social contribution. Donna Crouch (2016), long-term Hillsong Church pastor and now member of the ACC National Executive, notes that of the approximately 3200 ordained ACC pastors, at least 225 are within Hillsong Church, including a strong representation of women. Several Hillsong pastors, such as Darlene Zschech, Christine Caine, Lucinda Dolley, and others, now lead significant global ministries. The "suffragettes" of the 1977–1997 era turned the tide on male dominance within AGA and pioneered a large annual women's conference that unapologetically promoted the value of womanhood.

Conclusion

The 20 years of Andrew Evans' leadership of Assemblies of God in Australia reveals the continuous denominational flows in which Hillsong Church emerged and developed. Out of the early inspiration of charismatic preachers from New Zealand, freedom in expression of worship became a hallmark for which Hillsong is now famous. The 1977 tipping point saw Andrew Evans installed as AGA General Superintendent

and the introduction of innovative practices. With the launch of Sydney CLC, NSW became a new drawcard for many pentecostals. Key structural changes within AGA at national and state levels saw a rapid expansion of autonomous local church plants, including Hills CLC. Finally, the reinvigoration of youth and women's ministries injected new energy and life, forming two of the most important foundations for the Hillsong network.

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CHAPTER 3

"Up the Windsor Road": Social Complexity, Geographies of Emotion, and the Rise of Hillsong

Mark Hutchinson

In 2005, Hillsong's founding pastor, Brian Houston, described his reasons for choosing to establish a church in Sydney's distant northwestern suburbs as follows:

> … in those days, there used to be a guy [Tony Packard] who was famous—or infamous, whatever—who used to be on the TV and sell Holdens. And I thought to myself that if you could build a Holden dealer like that, the largest Holden dealership in Australia, surely it must be somewhere where you could build a church. (Jones 2005; see also Houston 2015a, 63–4)

This is a shorter version of a much longer paper, out of which much of the theoretical apparatus has had to be removed in order to fit the book's target audience. Resulting lack of precision may relate to such editorial requirements.

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To Houston's supporters, this is a story of innovative frontiersmanship; to his detractors, it is a reflection of "the problem" of individualism and materialism that has attended the decline of traditional churches. It is a widespread critique often made personal in public interactions between the "establishment" and Hillsong. Religion just doesn't "play" in post-Christendom Australia the way it does in "big tent" American exceptionalism.

Ironically, the criticisms directed at Hillsong and Houston also illuminate the reasons for their success. As noted by Berger and Luckmann (1966), all realities and positions move from being subjective to objectified "activities" which are determinative of social, class, and power relations. The reflexive nature of Hillsong's growth highlights both the *unreflective* nature of inner city-based "new knowledge classes" which dominate the Australian public square, and the processes of globalization which have become the new framework for religion in and between nation states across the 30 years of Hillsong's existence. The Church's growth arouses intense "passions." Rationalizations range from urban planning (in which megachurches are urban "problems" to be solved, e.g., Beer 2009, 435–446), to "suburban disease" (the contradictory humors of decaying capitalism, viz. Barnes 2013, 180; Wilford 2012, 200); to semiotic theories unpacking the ethos of the "mega," the dynamics of performativity (Goh 2008). In short, the analysis is often a reflection of some other discussion: sustainability, or the crisis in neo-Marxist analysis, for example (Pha 2006). For most of these observers, interested analysis proceeds to the background sound of head scratching.

A number of explanatory approaches will be helpful in unpacking the "almost hysterical" responses to a church like Hillsong (Williams 2015). First is the crisis among "hard secularization" theorists, who hold that in a rational, modern society churches should be declining (Rundle 2006). Second is the work by Albrow and others on geographies of emotion (Morrison 2009). The outward-pressing "passion" associated with exurban megachurches is not an emotional geography easily understood in the bureaucratized inner cities where the informing emotion tends toward "rage" or "indignation" (e.g., Jeong 2016; Visentin and Smith 2016). Third, as Bowman and Willis note, fundamental changes in Australian society have sparked culture wars, mapped via media onto Australian responses to the Church (Hirst 2011, 3). Marginal interests in a "singularity" culture "accelerate their way from the fringe to the mainstream with increasing speed" (ibid.). Responses to Hillsong thus

range from "Inside the Hillsong Church's Money-Making Machine" (Snow 2014), to Brian Houston being lauded as an innovative religious exporter (Coleman 2000, 5). Will the real Hillsong please stand up? Each of the passions that Hillsong generates has a geography, a demographics. As one viewer noted of the treatment of Hillsong by "investigative journalists" (such as that on the TV program "A Current Affair"), such coverage is "wrapped it up in distortions, sensationalism, half truths and 'expert' opinions,"[1] semi-authorized by their detachment from place via broadcast or digital publication.[2] There is no neutral space. These discourses shape Hillsong's self-presentation to the world, and so affect how its leadership "read" and respond to culture. They may not be "true," but they are often *affective* on church practice. They illustrate the post- and post-postmodern, pluralizing "soup" within which (over 30 years) Hillsong has grown.

Hillsong 1.0: The Context-Driven Local Churchplant

The "Tony Packard" story noted above was built around a number of overlapping "negative spaces," interactive "moral orders." Greater Sydney is in fact not one, but a number of "places" (Hutchinson 2013a, b). Outside the East and Inner City, religion has mattered much more in the (more Catholic) Southwest and the (more Protestant) Northwestern suburban sprawls (Burchell 2002). Suburbanization is, in its nature, a negotiation between older (often rural) traditions and the "engulfment" of development (Salamon 2003, 22). Houston's initial compass point in the Northwest, Tony Packard, was thus both "famous" and "infamous," depending on who was doing the reading. A privileged English-born migrant Packard became Australia's largest car dealer, before entering politics only to flame out on the tail of a conviction (in June 1993) on charges relating to "the unlawful use of listening devices at his car dealership."[3] During his short term in Parliament, he represented "The Hills," transforming himself from an indulgent used car salesman "famous… for his permed curls [and] shiny pink suits" to "a member of a parliamentary prayer group and stressing family values and a desire to help people in need" (O'Neill 1995). Packard was aware that he lived at the northwestern tip of Sydney's "Bible belt," and so created a public persona that captured its Protestant, philanthropic, aspirational values. His electorate (created in 1962) was an ideal place for a car dealership. The Labor-controlled NSW government had ensured that the safe Liberal seat

on the margins of Sydney was underserviced in terms of public transport. The ironically named "Carr Government" had, in its 16-year reign, expanded roads, but very little else, in the rapidly growing northwestern suburbs (Kerr 2003; Parry 2003). Its monuments were "the M5 extension and the Eastern Distributor, as well as progress on building the cross-city tunnel, the Lane Cove Tunnel and the Western Sydney Orbital" ("Sydney's Transport Balancing Act"). Not, however, a train line. The white collar Liberal voting, car driving constituency in the northwest were now not just closer "Up the Windsor Road" to the emerging second CBD of Parramatta, but also to the lower socioeconomic status (SES) Labor-dominated suburbs of Toongabbie, Seven Hills, and Blacktown. Its "aspirationals" (disenfranchised both by the Labor machine and social opprobrium) were mobile social capital and community-seekers. They lived on the edges of Sydney's "respectability" games, where the "famous" and the "infamous" could be interchangeable terms (Davison 2004, ix–x).

The "rise and rise of Hillsong" was built on the ability of the Church's founder to recognize these shifting geographic and demographic moral orders. In the early 1980s, Brian Houston was making choices and observations about where his "passion for the lost" would most likely bear fruit. The spatial and plurality problems associated with his father's Christian Life Center (CLC) in inner city Darlinghurst were the inverse of the "Tony Packard" opportunity. A number of CLC church plants had been founded since the organization of Frank's first mission in Double Bay's "Sherbrooke Hall," but CLC Darlinghurst was still the main hub, a growing, internationally linked charismatic church with a distinctly "urban" vocation. Brian turned first to the Central Coast, and then to Liverpool (in Sydney's Southwest), before trying again on the edges of suburbanization in the northwest, demonstrating both an ability to, first, read cultural "flow," and then, second, the ability to try things and allow them to fail (Houston 2015a, 63). The former, as Anthony Giddens (1991, 81) points out, is definitional of a globalizing, reflexive social identity ("reflexivity involves self-consciousness on the part of the individual and an ability to monitor the ongoing flow of social life when deciding on a course of action"), while the latter (low-cost, rapid-cycle failure) is widely explored in the organizational management literature as a key to continuous innovation (e.g., Farson and Keyes 2002, 65). These terms—a continuously innovating, globalizing,

reflexive social identity—are a pretty good description of the Church which became Hillsong.

It is not a synthesis immediately apparent to those who see charismatic churches as mechanisms for inwardly turned, transcendental worship (Hull 2006, 27). The message from the Hillsong 1.0 experience was that local church context matters. Type of worship, the available *resources,* and member flows were all key localizers. The "Hills Christian Life Center" (HCLC) planted in the Baulkham Hills Public School hall in 1983 was an intensely "local" institution—but "local" in the sense that the Hills District itself was a place in flux. HCLC's initiation was linked to broader charismatic and pentecostal attitudes to mission, calling, and opportunity, and its founding team was drawn from a variety of places. In this, they were like many leaving the inner city suburbs to resettle in the former semi-rural settings of the Hills District. The church's growth depended on its address to the social and moral imaginary of the place that was coming to be, rather than that which it was replacing. These experiences led Houston out of his father's founding revivalism into a broader missional address to culture and the whole-of-life aspirations of his new flock. Duncan Corby remembers the surprise with which Brian's approach hit the city campus in the early 1990s, when he began to address the CLC Darlinghurst staff meetings. Here was a vision quite at odds with Frank's "tarrying," Holy Spirit oriented, revivalism, one which would create considerable personal and organizational angst when, in 2000, the two churches were merged. An increasingly sterile technology of waiting on (forcing?) Revival was traded for a tightly aligned vision of "The Church I See."[4]

At about the same time as Brian Houston was heading northwest, the charismatic movement in the mainstream that had been organized around the Temple Trust's conference form was entering crisis. Here too was a negative space: the Temple Trust, like the Fountain Trust in England, began to fold in on itself in 1980 (Hutchinson, n.d.a). The choice to respond to "big event" youth culture and the "conference" assumptions of floating charismatic Christians (many of them dechurched through the responses of their own traditional affiliations to the "new thing God is doing") gave HCLC a language to speak into the city's "flows." There was however a key difference. The old conference form was conceived of as a materialization of a broader global revival of the work of God; at HCLC, conference, evangelism, worship, and all other elements were re-aligned inwards, toward "reach[ing] and

influenc[ing] the world by building a large Christ-centerd, Bible-based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact in every sphere of life."[5]

Hillsong 2.0: The Culture-Driven Regional Worship Church

Some of the cultural flows that influenced Hillsong's growth were "out." In the mid-1970s, the mainstream churches (which had been declining as relative percentages of the Australian population since the 1950s in the midst of post-War mass migration) began to feel the pipeline effects of the collapse (in the 1960s) of Sunday school membership and engagement with broader social mobilizations (particularly among youth cultures) (McAllister 1988, 256; Powell 2011, 15; Chilton 2015, 4). Some (such as the Methodists, Congregationalists, and some Presbyterians) reacted by merging their operations, others (such as the Sydney Anglicans and some Presbyterians) by seeking a purer form of their tradition, and others (such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance and Catholicism) rode on the waves of migration from former mission-receiving areas. These were approaches to survival in an increasingly secular and rationalizing Australian public square marked by growing regulation and restriction on what was "permissable difference." Articulated by television into the average suburban lounge-room, the "long dark tea-time of the soul" attended by economic malaise of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then the cyclical boom and crash insecurities from 1987, created a paradoxical fragmentation of the opinions of "the bald-headed man at the back of the omnibus."[6] In the 1980s, these people could still be seen puzzling their way through the increasingly shrill, class-segmented Sydney press on the train from Springwood to Town Hall. Within two decades, their opinions (like their sources of income, digital news, share exposures, mortgage providers, and clothing retailers) were highly individualized, mobile, and "for sale" to the most effective pundit with the most authentic marketing pitch. The entry into the global marketplace, attended by the recession Australia "had to have," left Australians in search of alternate, self-constructive modes of belonging.

These flows were paralleled in the church world. As noted above, those transitioning out of mainstream churches didn't simply jump

to other religions, agnosticism, or atheism. The HCLC parent denomination, the Assemblies of God, began to grow rapidly on the fraying of the organized charismatic movement. As I noted back in 1999:

> Significantly, the big bump in AOG numbers comes in the period 1979 to 1981, during the decay of charismatic forms and membership-between 1973 and 1979 (i.e. 6 years), the fellowship grew by 3,552 members. Between 1979 and 1981 (i.e. in two years) it grew by over 13,000 members, a growth rate it has sustained in absolute numbers through to [the time of writing]. (Hutchinson 1999)[7]

As the NCLS data showed, pentecostal churches acted as a clearing house for many transitioning out of their traditional settings: often, as the "end of the line," but sometimes as a continuing spiritual alternative (Hutchinson n.d.b). A particular influence was Yoido Full Gospel Church, the "cell group" structure of which provided a form of graduated and elective de-anonymization. People, often bruised from the mainstream backlash to charismatic experience or other marginal church identities, found in HCLC the ability to regulate the depth and intensity of their involvement in the organization.

The reaction to this sort of transfer growth was predictable. There grew up a vocabulary when enabled the traditional churches to explain to themselves why their people preferred to leave often long-standing church relationships (including pentecostal ones) and go "up the Windsor road" to this burgeoning young Church. Such people were "spiros," "flakes," "church hoppers," or "happy clappy" people singing "Jesus is my boyfriend" songs…. HCLC was "sheep stealing," attracting people by bright lights and loud music, the spiritual and liturgical equivalents of fairy floss. These are the sorts of accusations that often found their way into the press, as slightly puzzled journalists ran through their contact lists, and approached the equally puzzled religious "experts" as to their opinions. Most were publicly polite, but it was their inevitable reservations that were selected out for coverage. In some cases, such as David Millikan's comment that there was "not much room for melancholy" at HCLC, there were echoes of disappointment as to the collapse of the mainstream charismatic movement.[8] Many of those attending HCLC would have agreed with them, but saw the church that would become Hillsong as a solution rather than a replication of the problems of hyper-charismaticism.

It is often now forgotten—in the coverage of Hillsong's "charismatic leader"—that neither Brian nor Bobbie Houston were considered (in the broader pentecostal world of the early 1980s) to be particularly charismatic. Brian was still under the shadow of his high profile father, and was considered a capable (if not outstanding) preacher, and a good "reader," gatherer and releaser of people. In his own writings, Brian notes the self-crafting processes that took him from the "blinking," insecure young preacher to the vision-led regional network facilitator that marked the transition between Hillsong 1.0 and Hillsong 2.0 (Houston 2015a, 5). Still, after the establishment of Hillsong Conference in March 1987, it would not be too much to say that the Church's worship team leaders, Geoff Bullock and Darlene Zschech, became better known abroad than its Senior Pastor. The comparison from a standpoint of 15 years later, at a time when Brian Houston is seen as a dominant, "apostolic" figure, suggests that his rise and rise should not be discussed so much in terms of *personal* charisma, but in Weberian terms of the work on *organizational/institutional charisma* which has emerged in business/management disciplines (Albrow 1994, 98). As an organization grows, it both aggregates to itself emotional associations and develops a dominant affective palette into which its members (along with the more formal elements of membership) are introduced. These palettes are often "felt" but misunderstood by outsiders, and then led by the broader rationalizing tendency to reinterpret "individual feeling … as constrained and trapped, as opposed to being enabled or realized, in organizational structure" (Albrow 1994, 99).

It is an interpretation that explains much about the shifting authority of Brian Houston as HCLC moved from Hillsong 1.0 through 3.0. Brian became an "apostolic figure" precisely as the Church grew, attracted emotional responses, and grew increasingly effective in articulating an affective palette and style of its own. This is everywhere in the language of HCLC/Hillsong, and in the language of those who critique or who have moved beyond what Tanya Levin has called "the warm feathered nest" of the Church (Levin 2007). The bigger the church, the more it needs to be able to call upon a charismatic leader, the charism of which is constructed precisely to meet that need. Several key narratives illustrate this gathering of *affect* around the role of the leader as the institution grew. By 1994, Hillsong Music (HCLC's music label) had successfully broken into the emerging retail networks distributing the largely American Christian material subcultures which had emerged at the confluence of

"the seeker service movement, the 'praise and worship' movement, the Christian worship music industry, and the Liturgical Renewal movement" (Redman 2002, xii). Key Australian outlets (Koorong Books, CMC Australia, etc.) proliferated in many aspirational church foyers and local bookshops (viz. Loveland and Wheeler 2003). In that year, HCLC's live worship album *People Just Like Us* became Australia's first Christian gold record. Led by Geoff Bullock, Darlene Zchech's *Shout to the Lord* from the album would become one of the most widely sung church songs of all time (Jinman 1996). HCLC's affective bubble was now spread far more broadly than either its organizational structure or its leadership authority. Bullock certainly "felt" the disconnect—he would later say it was like being a member of the Labor Party, the culture of the group erasing the sense of personal authenticity which had fuelled their engagement with the worship culture in the first place (Bullock n.d.). Not long afterwards, in a swirl of speculation, he left the Church to pursue a solo career and a reconstructed personal life. The "turn" represented by Bullock's departure, and the appointment of Donna Crouch to leadership was a critical relocation of the purpose of the Church's music culture. At the heart of this was a divergence of aesthetic—a conflict of moral orders surrounding symbols such as "freedom," the location of the experiential sublime, and other aesthetic categories—with implied authority structures. Leadership in this setting was an art rather than a matter of regulation. It was an art that was learned rather more quickly at the creative end of the church than in its organizational core, an art that would be definitional of the shift to "Hillsong 4.0." In the meantime, in 1997 Houston had an opportunity to reinvent the leadership culture of the broader AGA as its first "President" (a term coined to replace the older "General Secretary"), and through the rebranding of the AGA under the less sectarian title "Australian Christian Churches." It was not so much a matter of Hillsong overtaking the AGA—the charismatic megachurch form had effectively already achieved that by the mid-1980s (Clifton 2009, 164). The expansion of leadership training through "product" (books, CDs, and increasingly podcasts) and linked seminars (e.g., Maximized Leadership, Hillsong Network functions, etc.) essentially replaced many of the functions of the traditional denominational form.

By the mid-1990s, then, the Church found itself having to catch up to its reputation. In a remarkable tacit recognition of this, Brian Houston rebranded the Church under the title of its music label,

Hillsong Church (so associating the organization with the broader opportunities in its emerging market) (Jones 2005), and moved the internal culture of the Church toward leadership training. Within five years, a significant emphasis on social care arms and outreach began to emerge. The effect of this, and the Church's increasing involvement with transnational media (such as CBN), began to create "drag" for the Church to spread beyond its locality. There was a ready source of "rhizomation" in the expanding youth movement that had emerged from HCLC's Youth ministry. Founding Youth Pastor of Powerhouse and the Youth ministry had been (then Commonwealth Bible College student) Darko Culjak, whose Croatian background caused him to "look East" in Europe. He took advantage of HCLC's mission arm, Nation Builders, which mobilized church giving, the students in its leadership training college, and international missions connections, to assist in the planting of churches around the world. In 1992, the CLC movement gathered people from the CBN mailing list, and sent Culjak to commence a church in 700-seat movie theater in downtown Kiev, Ukraine. In the same year, the Commonwealth expatriate network provided fuel for a lounge-room prayer meeting, which would eventually grow into Hillsong London.

Hillsong 3.0: The Personality-Driven Transnational Network Church

By the 2000s, the self-talk of Australian public elites was hardening into outright hostility to religious positions which were not easily conflated into the categories of ethnicity entrenched in official multiculturalism. At the core of it was a declining middle class that was more polarized in their opinions, besieged by declining affordability of housing and the seeming disappearance of "the Australian dream." Along the same arc, there was a steady hollowing out of the political center in Australia, with declining membership of traditional sodalities such as the Trades Union movement (Cranston 2000), Freemasonry (Edmonston 2011), and class-defining organizations such as football clubs, service Clubs (such as Lions and Rotary) (Mackay 2008, 76ff), leaving the major actors increasingly co-dependent on fringe groups and extremist politics.[9] Lobbyism, public corruption trials, the decline of local elites in favor of state and federal elites, moral panics, and the rise and then debasement

of a politicized public service, were all contributors to and reflections of a growing lack of trust and meaning in the public square.

All of this, of course, manufactured news, in the midst of which Hillsong received its share of unfavorable attention. Hillsong's tactical repositioning in response to the presence in Australia of *real* prosperity preachers, such as Kenneth Copeland Ministries, produced ephemera which were later seized on by media outlets to argue that it was "all about the money" or that it was "naked, pragmatic, political ambition" (Ferguson 2005, 34; O'Loughlin 2004, 20). Houston's *You Need More Money* (1999)—aimed at creating an evangelistic bridge into a local constituency for whom mortgage stress was a defining factor—elicited a storm of protest. Australian secularists such as Max Wallace (2007) and Byrne (2014) used Hillsong as a stalking horse for attacking the tax benefits of the much larger traditional denominations. Structurally, the point of interest is that the megachurch which was now "Hillsong" (having absorbed Frank Houston's founding Darlinghurst CLC in 2000) had migrated from the margins into the public eye, an eye which did not look kindly (aesthetics again) upon its self-expressions. Houston's response indicated, first, the degree to which the post-1996 reinvention had created internal organizational flexibility around the organizational charisma of its leader, and secondly, the ability of the Church to take criticism and reflect (albeit often instrumentally) upon the lessons to be learned. After all, while numbers of successful business people associated with Hillsong, most of those within its structures were acting out of a relatively uninflected biblical theology or limited education. The big developments in the Church were largely decided by intuitive native religious entrepreneurs close to the coal-face.

Houston was to publicly regret *You Need More Money*. The terms are interesting: he felt his intention (evangelism) was "pure" but that the book had provided opponents of the Church with "too many free kicks." It had too much Cho and Hagin, and too little gaol-visiting "methodism,"[10] and even if it had more of the latter, would have failed the anti-charity criteria for approval by the public elites. Houston backed down. His later *How to Flourish in Life* indicated the development of a more nuanced (though still aesthetically aligned) approach to materiality (Clifton 2008, 164). More importantly, the local welfare and outreach work that had commenced in the late 1980s (and expanded to include charities such as *Shine*, Hillsong Emerge, and Hillsong Citycare) began to look more broadly in terms of humanitarian work. On the one hand,

the decision to connect to Christian children's ministry Compassion International was logical. In 2004, as *For All You've Done* hit number 1 in the Australian music charts, Darlene Zschech's involvement in a Compassion trip to East Africa linked "fame" to "influence." The aesthetics of the Church shifted rapidly, from "You need more money" to the faces of starving children. The "contingent" careers of the Church's musicians, such as Brooke Fraser with her album *Albertine* (2006), and its evangelists, such as Christine Caine (with A21), took off along the lines of transnational NGO work. As white South Africa sold up its material goods and moved to Perth, Auckland, and Sydney (Hyland 2011, 58; Campbell 2016, 83–84) Camp, Hillsong followed the global charismatic flows (of South African expatriates, moving between London, Sydney, and Africa) to plant a church with strong social outreach operations in Cape Town. As Riches and Wagner (2012) note, there was a parallel shift in lyrics and branding.

The shift in focus not only followed the emerging sacriscape, it expanded operations outside the increasingly contested and antagonistic Australian welfare space. While Hillsong continued to expand in Australia, the real expansion was now transnational. It was not a transition without its costs. The global "third sector" was also a site of contested meanings, politics, and aesthetics (Levin 2007, 250ff). The "look," the "feel," conflicting senses of what was an "appropriate" way of representing, of appropriating symbolic agency for or with others, became common points of conflict. Hillsong was a material feast for "bogans,"[11] its Princess Theology a form of oppression of women (Riches 2014), its fundraising events a form of hucksterism. The resonances of location, class, ethnicity, and profession ran just under the surface of all such clashes.

Hillsong's forays into the public sphere also drew criticism over two further crises. Mercy Ministries saw the church run into victim's lobbies and the Australian medical establishment. The underlying issue was rising public concern with the impact of the "fame" culture on women's body image, a concern which reflected the deeper currents surrounding the affordability and effectiveness of the welfare state. The medical establishment, which the Australian Psychology profession was working hard to join as a full member, was rallied by the press against the idea that prayer groups and bible passages could be deployed as an effective response to deep psychological issues. Emotive headlines set off a full-fledged moral panic, leading to Mercy Ministries' eventual

collapse. Though not directly tied to Hillsong, the involvement of many of its members meant that collateral damage was inevitable (see Hutchinson 2013c). For the Church, it was a learning process about the transferability of privatized spiritual disciplines to the public square, the problems (as was the case with prosperity preaching, and would be again with public protests over the invitation to Mark Driscoll—see Houston 2015b) associated with adopting international models into the highly ideologized and regulated Australian public space, and a realization that, at a certain size, "private" functions effectively became the concern of the "public" and its watchdogs.

The second critical decision point, as noted above, related to Hillsong's plan to resolve the space restrictions caused by growth at its downtown Waterloo campus and "to revitalize the area by creating a high quality, architecturally designed church and community facility" (Bennett n.d.). A cosmopolitan and multicultural congregation of young professionals, long-term inner city dwellers and mobile international students, the City Campus plan was not discontinuous with other developments in the area. To the City Council's existing $13 billion renewal of the area, the Hillsong plan would add a 2700 Seat Auditorium, a 10,000 m^2 commercial office and a public park. Though supported by the local member (future Premier of the State, Labor Catholic right faction member Kristina Keneally—see Wendt 2010; Keneally 2006), the politics of the situation sparked the formation of a resident's action group around local trades union members. Their complaints received a warm reception at Sydney Town Hall, where power was in the hands of a long-serving broad center-left coalition of "minority" groups. The press played along, portraying the opposition as one of "the little people" against Hillsong as corporate "bully." The plan was rejected on "traffic" and "height" concerns. One wonders what the response might have been if, for instance, the vastly larger Uniting Church Property Trust or even a commercial developer, had made the proposal? It is an interesting "alternative" question, demonstrating the fact that the rapid mobilization of marginal interests toward the center of public consciousness is highly politicized, and subject to mediated mobilizations of localized interests against one another in the service of "the linear march of progress" (Vale 2012).

The decision to withdraw from the project was not readily understood by the activists on the other side. The Council's invitation to redesign and resubmit was really an invitation to spend hundreds of thousands of

dollars, re-enter the bureaucratic approvals process, and face more years of public harassment in the press. The ironically named co-founder of the Rosebery Residents Action Committee, Graeme Grace, claimed that "Hillsong withdrew its DA, despite describing it as defensible … If they truly believed the DA had merit surely they would have put it to the vote and, if defeated, appealed to the Land and Environment Court" (McCallum 2008). The transmutation of the term "believed" in this politicized development space in the inner city was indicative of the gulf that separated the Church (which had been "resident" in the area for longer than some of RRAC's own members) and the legal-bureaucratic local mobilization represented by the "community activists." The sort of *belief* that caused the church to withdraw (a bible-based wariness about court actions, a belief in effective stewardship of congregational funds, a "faith" construct which pressed on "doors" as a form of divining the Divine Will) was not accessible to Mr. Grace. The decision to back out of the project, however, marked not the end of the Church's aspirations, but a definite redirection toward the opportunities wrapped up in "Hillsong 4.0." There were lessons learned about transitioning between localities, with the limitations and charged nature of material subcultures (including those denominated as "Christian"), about involvement with the politicized and segmented "public," and about the shifting nature of doing mission in the postmodern city.

Hillsong 4.0: The Brand-Driven Global Church

Pragmatically, withdrawal from the Rosebery project left Hillsong with its three prior "selves" intact (Hillsong 1.0 within its ongoing leadership structures; Hillsong 2.0 at its ever growing Baulkham Hills campus, Hillsong 3.0 in the "One Church, two worship centers" and network of local campuses), but with a large unspent war chest. As Rosebery grumbled to an end, the news of the launch of Hillsong Cape Town projected the Church on a different path. No longer replanting over a legacy system, the first Cape Town service drew 3000 people, and was held such that a live video link between Sydney and Cape Town left "many" in the video-linked Baulkham Hills congregation "in tears" at this "moving and historic moment" (Christian Today 2008). This was a fundamental shift from Hillsong 1.0, where 45 people gathered in a school hall (a pattern replicated in London), or Hillsong 2.0 where local network campuses aggregated to the conference form "mother ship" (more akin to Kiev).

Hillsong 3.0 bore some resemblance to Cape Town, in the use of transnational flows (migration, media, common sacriscapes, all converging on a white settler society) to build (after some time) a familiar conference center-type building in a business-parklike space (Century City). Cape Town, however, was purely intentional, and on a massive scale compared to its scattered cultural forerunners. It asked questions as to how the Senior Pastor (Houston) related to the new (and emerging) campuses, and how culture development worked. Organizationally, the position of "lead pastor" emerged, with Brian as continuing Senior Pastor of the whole, effectively repositioning the Church as *sui generis* a global church. The deeper question was less easily answered: who would dictate culture once (across two decades) the inevitable generational change came about, and when Hillsong was not three or four major campus centers, but a global denomination located in a large number of influential cities. The problem was not long in emerging: New York went from a "kind of cool" thought to a reality in 2010 (Phan 2011) and was rapidly embroiled in managing hyper-mediated fame culture while steering through the doctrinal minefields of that country's cultural Protestantism (Merritt 2015). As one journalist noted, if you attended, "maybe you'll end up in Justin Bieber's Snapchat that day, or Kendall Jenner's Instagram" (Bennett 2015). With the establishment of the Los Angeles Church [2014] around a small group of "around 20 people in a small airbnb apartment" (Ben Houston 2015c), the launches around the world began to chain and multiply around mutual support and the lead pastor model. At the time of writing, the list of formal locations (those noted above, plus Amsterdam, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Copenhagen, Germany, Moscow, Phoenix, and Sao Paulo) was eclipsed by the much larger number of local offshoots in dozens of localities, and expanding rapidly.

This was now a global flow, wherein Hillsong has become a self-sustaining sacriscape. Part of this is its ability to glocalize, so as to address in separate spheres both the good burghers of the Baulkham Hills Bible Belt *and* the mobile students of the Sydney City campus; the expats in Paris via London alongside those from the French Caribbean; the rockstars and the homeless rubbing shoulders in LA and the Big Apple. None of this is without friction. Managing the transition to the francophone reality in Paris (and Lyon and Marseille) in the midst of public suspicion of *les sectes*, or the manufactured "news" around "naked cowboy-gate" (which revealed the lines separating continuing American puritanism from New York popular culture) (Kumar 2016), strained the

adaptive edges of church glocalization. For all of these people, coming from hugely diverse backgrounds, the common outcome is access to a globalized "techne"—a way of managing confusing flows through provision of a consistent, transportable, transmutable personal identity.[12]

There were, of course, risks. Increasing spread (such as the establishment of a TBN-based Hillsong Channel in 2016 indicated—see May 2016) also mobilizes globalized opposition on the basis of shared emotional outrage. Just as a localized emotional palette of "passion" could fuel a global chain reaction as it found parallel geographies connected by globalizing flows, so anti-globalizing consensuses have formed around perceived and shared grievances. The emergence on the streets of London and Sydney of protesters during the visit of Mark Driscoll to Hillsong Conference demonstrated the overflow of protest cultures into the concerns of the Church. The placarding by a tiny agitation group organized under the name "people against fundamentalism," and the attempts to stir a moral panic around the national Royal Commission into institutional child abuse, blew up, and blew out, over a couple of weeks.[13]

Conclusion

By the time of writing, Hillsong had negotiated a variety of cultural phases across more than 30 years of existence. As Houston notes with regard to pain and loss, some of these were profoundly personal, and resulted in adaptations to the spiritual *techne* which stands at the core of the Church's teaching about how to "do" life (Houston 2015a, 92–94, 99). At the core of these negotiations have been a leadership group remarkably committed to one another, in part because of Brian Houston's ability to read culture and adapt, and key administrators such as George Aghajanian, Donna Crouch, and others to provide a continuous, nimble, focused organizational culture. The tell-tale, rather than the cause, of this has been the rise and rise of Brian Houston's organizational charisma: at each crisis point in the organization (the Bullock departure, the Toronto Blessing, the defrocking of his father and merger of the Churches, the departure of Darlene Zschech, and so on) Houston has led into, and out of an organizational crisis in a way which has both grown the Church on multiple dimensions and reinforced the leadership culture. Houston's depth, intuition, and charisma, and the aesthetic/organizational strength of the Church itself, have proven (so

far) to be effective responses to wider attempts by powerful secularist elites to contain and asset-strip churches.

Hillsong is no longer just "up the Windsor road." Rather, it has successfully managed change so as to develop both alongside what was happening in the Hills District, and then to inflect its experience there by growing across many of the connected "Hills Districts" around the world. As I have noted elsewhere, this is an attribute of many transnationalizing grassroots pentecostal movements (e.g., Dalit theology,[14] the Indian diaspora,[15] etc.), the "productive" nature of which is seen in their natural connection to trans-ethnic, international domains. These movements have been able to escape the "cold death" of self-enclosure and/or the "hot death" of majority culture repression by escaping into the global (Hutchinson 2018). Despite (or rather because) of this sort of escape, Hillsong has maintained a remarkable coherency, becoming a self-fuelling sacriscape that is "more a way of thinking" than a particular musical, leadership, or theological style. A primary factor in producing this convergence of social, organizational, and ideational scripts has been the ability to find, negotiate, and embed itself in resonant geographies of emotion around the world. Its "way of thinking" is, in fact, a way of "feeling," a powerful adaptive aesthetic that fuels an attractive form of globalizing spiritual *techne*. For this reason, the interpretation of critics such as Robbie Goh have been closer to the mark than conservative American Evangelical revanchists or wishful thinking among the Green-Left alliance, each sitting within their own demographically defined geographies of emotion (Berger et al. 2008, 2).

Notes

1. Scott Turner, on Channel 9's Facebook site, https://www.facebook.com/Channel9/posts/10151461246557608, accessed June 27, 2016.
2. The archetypical "hard man" and "unfinancial Catholic" Graham Richardson, referred to Hillsong founder Brian Houston as "a walking phenomenon" on his Sky News program (albeit more as a form of religiously led Australian export booster than as a spiritual leader). "Richo," Sky News.
3. "Anthony Charles Packard (1943–)," "Former Members," NSW Parliament, https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/pages/member-details.aspx?pk=1997, accessed June 28, 2016.
4. Interview, Duncan Corby August 4, 2016, project archives; Houston dates the writing of "The Church I See" Vision Statement to 1993 (Houston 2015a, 14).

5. http://hillsong.com/vision/; Interview, Duncan Corby August 4, 2016, project archives.
6. A phrase of Walter Bagehot's, quoted in Thompson (2013, 36).
7. One study indicated that the "mother church," CLC Darlinghurst, benefitted from approximately 60% transfer growth (compared to 40% entry into membership via conversion).
8. See his "The Failure of the Charismatic Movement"; see also Emilsen and Emilsen, 1997.
9. See Aaron Martin (2012) on youth involvement in electoral politics, and the impact this is having on mediated political behaviors in Australia.
10. viz. John Wesley, "The Use of Money (Sermon 50)," in Jackson (1872).
11. "Megachurches," https://thingsboganslike.com/2010/01/21/69-megachurches/, accessed September 20, 2016.
12. As discussed in Hutchinson (2013d).
13. Many of those involved, like Patheos commentator, psychology academic Warren Throckmorton, are connected to the evangelical left, and the incorporation of therapeutic approaches to theological positions: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/2015/06/30/hillsong-church-campaigners-feel-betrayed-by-brian-houstons-interview-with-mark-london-protest-planned/, accessed September 20, 2016.
14. For example, British Anglican writer, Keith Hebden (2011), links Dalit theology to Christian Anarchism and the broader struggle of Christianity to being coopted by the state and the "powers of this world." See also Rajkumar, (2010); Clarke et al. 2010.
15. See, for instance, Raj and Jacobsen (2013), G.K. George (2009), 28–29.

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CHAPTER 4

Creating the Hillsong Sound: How One Church Changed Australian Christian Music

Mark Evans

Hillsong Church is now a worldwide phenomenon and dominant producer of global Christian congregational music. To date, Hillsong has sold over 20 million albums and Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) confirms that over 50 million Christians sing Hillsong songs worldwide every weekend.[1] Hillsong Church is Australia's largest megachurch (Riches and Wagner 2012, 18), but this has not always been the case. This chapter maps out the growth of Hillsong Music from its humble beginnings as a small suburban church in Sydney, Australia in 1983. It follows the path of the music from the Church's first album in 1988, to the ground-breaking albums of the 1990s and genre defining releases of the 2000s and beyond. Throughout the history of Hillsong music, two separate but related facets are of particular interest. The first relates to the provision and propagation of people to represent Hillsong music. In many ways it was a cultivation and construction of celebrity, yet it was also premised on the musical nuances of the individuals and their understanding that something new was happening within Australian congregational music. Furthermore,

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this understanding was always intimately connected with the vision of the church, and Senior Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston. The second facet was the creation of the "Hillsong sound." What is it musically, theologically, and culturally about these albums that cemented a sonic identity for Hillsong, one that would go on to resonate around the world? Tom Wagner (2014) has extensively detailed the Hillsong sound as a "social construct, a constantly evolving negotiation among participants" (144). What this chapter aims to do is connect that more explicitly to the sonic identity itself, and understand how that identity has been shaped since the first days of Hillsong music.

Part 1: Hillsong Music—the People

There is a growing body of work that has paid attention to various aspects of Hillsong's musical oeuvre (Evans 2002, 2006; Riches 2010; Nekola 2009; Wagner 2014; Hartje-Doll 2013). The most complete map of Hillsong's musical development is contained in Riches and Wagner's (2012) "The Evolution of Hillsong Music: From Australian Pentecostal Congregation into Global Brand." Here Riches and Wagner divide the history of Hillsong music into five discrete phases, and among many things, demonstrate that personnel changes during five distinct periods were accompanied by changes in imagery associated with album releases and "theological emphasis (not necessarily beliefs)" (2012, 33). A complementary way to cast the history of Hillsong Music is to consider Hillsong's reliance on key figures that have been at the heart of the Hillsong story. Often talented and visionary, these people have risen up at the various phases of Hillsong's history to develop, create, and expand the musical horizon of Hillsong, and by extension, that of the global church. Their resultant celebrity has afforded Hillsong's continued exposure and expansion around the world. Though notions of celebrity within pentecostal circles are more contested (Wagner 2014) than in popular music generally, it remains that the propagation—or more accurately the multiplication—of celebrity among its songwriters and musicians has facilitated Hillsong becoming a globally dominant producer of congregational music.[2] Some aspects of these biographical accounts are well known while others have remained more hidden. Less articulated is the direct connection between these individuals, the Hillsong sound and the church's ethos as it exists today. As more research engages with contemporary instances of Hillsong's musical success (Thornton 2015; Hartje-Doll 2013), it is important to begin at the conception of the phenomenon that is Hillsong music.

Geoff Bullock

The first key figure in the development of Hillsong Music Australia was Geoff Bullock (b1955). Somewhat forgotten now in Hillsong's global brand, Bullock was pivotal in the establishment of chorus writing in Australia. Bullock learnt piano from a young age, and despite dabbling with other instruments during high school, it would be piano that remained his dominant instrument. Bullock's strong chordal style of playing, with improvised melodic figures, would become the dominant feature of early Hillsong worship music.

Bullock's involvement with Christianity began with Sydney Christian Life Centre in 1978, then run by Brian Houston's father, Frank. The start of the Christian Life Centre (CLC) movement, and precursor to Hillsong, the church had already locked on to the power of the creative arts to reach people. As Bullock noted:

> Music was a fundamental part of the ethos of the church. Even then they were starting to use the music as an attraction. So I got involved almost immediately … and starting writing little evangelistic songs—instead of whatever I wrote songs about before. (Interview with the author, 1998)

However, the deliberate writing of worship songs would not start in earnest until Bullock took up a full-time ministry position with Hills Christian Life Centre in February 1987: "I'd been with them since the first service, looked after their music programme and watched it grow and was encouraged to write choruses" (Interview with the author, 1998). In this well-told history other sources (Evans 2002, 2006; Wagner 2014), note this encouragement came from Pastor Brian Houston. Houston's vision had already begun to connect the importance of relevant, contemporary music to the future growth of the church. Houston recognized Bullock as the individual to help deliver that future. Though Houston had a strong vision for the church even then, the first commercial forays into contemporary praise and worship were "quite free" (Bullock, Interview with the author, 1998). There was no distinctive style or voice, no definitive sound, and a variety of approaches to writing worship music, with a view to seeing Christian music more as art than congregational product. Perhaps for these reasons, the first two Hillsong albums—both recorded in studios rather than as live congregational worship—*Spirit and Truth* (1998) and *Show Your Glory* (1990), have largely been forgotten.

By the early 1990s, any uncertainty about the direction of Hillsong music dissipated and was replaced by a unity of purpose, as Bullock explained:

> The teaching … was that everything that came out of the church needed to reflect its methodology and its ethos—so you wrote [songs] to the vision. You wrote to the ministry. And everything you did supported the vision of the leadership. (Interview with the author, 1998)

In conjunction with this unified purpose, everything expanded. The services were bigger (both in attendance and production), and the music became louder and more vibrant (Bullock, Interview with the author, 1998). By this time "the song was sufficient, like a war-cry" (Bullock Interview with the author, 2002), and the congregation rallied behind it. Indeed the analogy of the "war-cry" is useful in numerous ways when considering how the songs of Hillsong went on to break down denomination barriers and ultimately, to cross geographical borders globally. The change to live recordings actuated an inclusivity built on commonality and the relevance of cultural forms, perfectly inferred by the title of Hillsong's fifth album, *People Just Like Us* (1994).

During Geoff Bullock's involvement with Hillsong Church, the church released six albums (two of them the studio albums mentioned above). In 2001, HMA released the *Millennium Worship* compilation CD, designed to showcase the great songs from nearly 10 years of production. The compilation includes two Bullock songs: "The Power Of Your Love" and "The Great Southland," both of which featured on the very first live congregational Hillsong album, *The Power of Your Love* (1992).

"The Power Of Your Love" was one of the most popular contemporary Australian choruses for several years after its release and helped establish signature features of the Hillsong style.[3] Lyrically, the song is a blend of confessional and dedicatory statements, with the singer/author seeking renewal and forgiveness. Bullock would later reject his own lyrics based on changes in his own personal theology (Interview with the author, 2000), yet similar themes were present for decades in Hillsong worship releases. Musically, "The Power of Your Love" would introduce elements that were innovative and fresh for contemporary Christian congregational music of the time. For example, the sensory word painting on the phrase "I'll rise up like the eagle" coincided

with the melody rising to the highest note (Eb). Similarly, "By the power of your love," would be underscored by a leap of a minor seventh from "the" to "power," adding melodic intensity to the words. The vocal range of the verse (11 notes) was quite large for congregational music of the time and, combined with the conjunctive and disjunctive movement within that range, would test congregations to push themselves musically. History shows that congregations responded positively to this challenge, with Hillsong music becoming only more rhythmically and vocally demanding (Evans 2006; Thornton 2015). The power-ballad styling with strong, predictable accents and descending tonal bass lines, would also become standard fare for the slower songs within the Hillsong catalogue.

"The Great Southland" is also worth discussing briefly, given it enjoyed phenomenal popularity and extensive exposure upon release.[4] As Riches and Wagner (2012) note, this song typifies phase one of Hillsong, a phase where "Bullock toured his music across Australia, and his lyrics became anthems for Australian Christians" (22). This Australian focus is important[5], given it was a period where Hillsong was aiming to influence the national Christian conscience. I have written elsewhere (Evans 2002) how the thin, spacious texture of the production replicates sonically, following Coyle (1995), the tyranny of distance heard in much Australian popular music and film soundtracks. Elements of these production techniques, most notably the slow build throughout the song until the fullness of the final choruses, the high register synthesizer pads with climbing chordal progressions, the climatic finish and of course the fading applause of the congregation as the song (and album) conclude, would become staples of the Hillsong music aesthetic for many years.

Lyrically the song is revivalist in tone, using biblical metaphors to stir the evangelistic fervour of Australian Christians: "A land of reaping, a land of harvest … we will see a flood … And to this people we see a harvest." This too meshed well with the vision of Hillsong at the time and provided a suitable rallying cry for Australian Christians, even those existing outside the doors and denomination of Hillsong. Bullock would later call "The Great Southland" the song he "regret[ed] writing more than any other" (Interview with the author, 1999) due to its failure to acknowledge the original Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia.

The song had minimal international circulation and has never registered in the top 25 congregational songs of any country other than Australia. But it provided Hillsong with an anthem for the nation,

and initiated the history of Australian Christians looking to their music to find suitable expression of their faith. Demonstrating Hillsong's understanding of the importance of "The Great Southland" in shaping their musical direction, the song featured in the service to inaugurate their new auditorium in 2002, 10 years after its premiere. The song's incorporation into that commemoration paid tribute to the role Bullock played in shaping the development and growth of Hillsong music. As he himself conceded in 1999:

> I'm very fortunate that I've been able to have a voice in the church through my music … In the first 10 years of my ministry life I was a catalyst to change. (Interview with the author, 1999)

That change was a profound shift in the desire for worship music in Australian churches as they eagerly adopted Bullock's compositions. Bullock's (and thus Hillsong's) music infiltrated the worship settings of large, mainstream churches and ultimately altered the way congregational music was thought of and utilized in liturgical settings. The migration of music out of Hillsong into Sydney's Hills District mainstream churches (e.g. St. Paul's Anglican Church Castle Hill) allowed a more straightforward entry into even less conservative Australian Christian churches. Hillsong music became the music to be copied or emulated in other denominations and Christian settings. To that end, Hillsong music effectively became a genre, or at least a sub-genre, in its own right.

Musically Bullock had set a direction for Hillsong, but his success also paved the way for the continued concentration on key individuals, and the eventual unleashing of their celebrity. Bullock's success would pale in comparison to his successor, Darlene Zschech.

Darlene Zschech

If Bullock was responsible for establishing the basis for a Hillsong sound, and the ethos and design of Hillsong's worship music, then Darlene Zschech was responsible for spreading this music globally. With the other aspects that effectively built the Hillsong brand (Wagner 2014) and the resultant megachurch, this should not be overlooked:

> We had been practicing for weeks, getting everything ready. And four days before recording [the album] … he [Geoff Bullock] decided to move on.

> And Brian Houston said, "You have to lead this." And I said, "I can't, I really can't." But through Christ we can do all things … I just thank God we had no video cameras there that night, because all of us cried our way through that project. And God took it, and breathed on it, I don't know why, but he did. And that's why I always go back to "with God, all things are possible." (Zschech, Hillsong Conference Panel, July 15, 1999)

When Darlene Zschech took over from Bullock with trepidation in 1995, little did anyone realize what a global phenomenon within Christian music she would ultimately become—as I have elsewhere described the "face and sound" of Hillsong Music Australia (Evans 2006: 107). Riches and Wagner (2012) have rightly noted that, such was the depth of her connection to Hillsong that they effectively were "co-branded."

Zschech would go onto sell millions of records, write some of the most popular songs in the Hillsong catalogue, and take Hillsong to the world. More importantly, she would help raise a generation of Australian songwriters and worship leaders (particularly female[6]), many of whom would strive to emulate her, all of which would ultimately reinforce the dominance of Hillsong in the global worship scene.

Darlene wrote or co-wrote many of Hillsong's most popular worship songs: "The Potter's Hand," "All Things Are Possible," "Blessed," "Saviour," and "Worthy Is The Lamb," among many others. But undoubtedly her most notable contribution was the internationally acclaimed "Shout To The Lord." Written in 1993, this anthemic war-cry would go on to be nominated for Song of the Year at the 1998 Dove Awards, reach number one on CCLI worship charts around the world, and be sung by millions of Christians every week. The song was performed for the Pope as well as the United States President, and has been translated into many local languages, resonating with Christians all over the globe.

"Shout To The Lord" remains a timeless classic 23 years on, in part due to the careful songcraft that lies behind it. A feature of the song is that it uses both second person address and third person reference, as well as plural and individual point of view. These distinctions are fairly neatly separated into verse (second/individual) and chorus (third/plural)—although the second half of the chorus reverts back to second person individual. The balance of the song is also seen in the structure of the verse, where the first two lines speak of the character/title/

attributes of Christ, while the next two personally respond to those. Likewise the first half of the chorus is praise, the remainder response. As such the song is biblically grounded (Psalm 98:4a) as well as formally balanced and proportionate. The strength of the chorus, the "shout" as it were, is built around the popular ice cream change chord (I-vi-IV-V) progression, small vocal range (fifth) and catchy conjunctive melody. Christian songwriters claim little knowledge of what songs will resonate with congregations (Thornton 2015), though surely the properties of "Shout To The Lord" provide some indications.

There is no doubt Zschech was a gifted songwriter, vocalist, and worship leader in the pentecostal tradition, with the charisma to carry the Hillsong congregation with her. Yet her success also speaks to Brian Houston's understanding of the importance of key people to represent the Hillsong brand. For Zschech to fill the big shoes of Bullock at short notice, at a time when the church could have been mourning or confused by his departure, highlights the infrastructure and support that was around her. Hillsong music raised up both Zschech and other individuals to inspire and mark out the Hillsong musical identity.

From One to Many

"I want to see the next generation come through. Not just inspired but actually given the tools to come through for a lifetime of effective ministry" (Zschech quoted in Hallett 1999, 13). Once the dominant celebrity of Hillsong music, Zschech would go on to work with the senior pastors to build a team of Christian music celebrities that maintained the dominance, presence and brand of Hillsong around the world. Names such as Reuben Morgan, Marty Sampson, Joel Houston, Brooke Ligertwood (nee Fraser), Ben Fielding, Matt Crocker, and more, now mean as much to audiences as Zschech used to. The concept of celebrity works better here than the "star" (Dyer 1979), if following Marshall (1997) we recognize that the "celebrity system principally addresses the organisation of concepts of individuality and identity for the culture" (185). It thus presents a structure within which celebrities can be formed and organized without impinging on the collective identity of the culture (here Hillsong and Hillsong music particularly). Wagner argues that Hillsong tries to avoid celebrity "by emphasising the collective aspects of its musical activities" (2014, 75), and goes on to note that Hillsong presents:

> …its musicians as team members and its worship leaders as "reluctant" celebrities … (re)casting its communication in evangelical Christian language that resonates with the worldviews of its stakeholders. (ibid., 87)

This is a valid point, although the "reluctance" aspect needs further scrutiny. When one considers the hundreds of songs submitted by Hillsong songwriters for inclusion in each annual CD (Wagner 2015), there is definitely a desire for celebrity present too. The inclusion of a song on the annual releases brings huge exposure, and attendant celebrity, but also a range of other benefits (financial rewards, evidence of the anointing (see Wagner 2014), and the blessing of creativity on the church, etc.). Other aspects, including the stadium pop/rock styling of artists, world tours, press conferences and other media appearances are part of the lifestyle of these "celebrities," to the point it becomes hard to read the level of reluctance.

Marshall notes that fundamental to the construction of popular music celebrity is the "audience's close and intimate relationship to the pop star as well as the way in which the artist conveys his or her authenticity in representing the audience" (1997, 164). Interestingly, at the heart of this particular type of celebrity is songwriting. While most are worship leaders as well, or lead vocalists, congregational music has still lauded the songwriter more than other popular music genres. This too accords with notions of popular music celebrity where the "appeal of the celebrity and his or her music is not to the rational but to the emotive and the passionate" (Marshall 1997, 197). This works on two fronts in congregational music, first, given the wariness of performance culture within pentecostal Christianity, it allows the creation of the song to be acclaimed rather than the performance of it by an individual. As Wagner notes: "Hillsong's songwriters *create* the product, and then become celebrities (or at least 'celebritized') because of the marketing, distribution and use of their songs" (2014, 71). Second, it acknowledges that the worship song is largely appealing to the emotive side of humanity, attempting to provide a voice to individual expressions of faith. For Hillsong, songwriting, the song, the "war-cry," has been part of their DNA, as Zschech routinely explained:

> Our church [Hillsong], has an anointing for a new song. We have tried other things, but we have an anointing for a new song. (Zschech, Hillsong Conference Panel, Thursday July 15, 1999)

And this God-given anointing was abundant even back in 1999, as she continued: "we don't even have enough Sundays to sing all of Reuben's new songs. We have so many songwriters coming through, but that is the anointing of our house" (ibid.). This anointing narrative provides justification for the industrial nature of their annual live worship, and later Hillsong United releases, as Wagner (2015) documented:

> Each March, a day of services is set aside specifically for a new album's recording. Because the album is recorded "live," the songs have all been field tested and taught to the congregation in the preceding months. The new album is then heavily promoted in the run-up to its release at Hillsong's July conference … Hillsong's message thus emerges from a self-referential, cyclical communications strategy of which the production and distribution of its musical product is an important element. (37)

Whether through spiritual or commercial imperative, or some combination of the two, the industrial production of Hillsong music is relentless. There is future research to be done here on the saturation point for pentecostal music generally, but for now the demand shows no signs of abating, and new online communities are forming around worship music without any formal Church membership or allegiance (Thornton and Evans 2015). The other aspect crucial to this on-going demand is the stylistic developments aimed at new audiences. The rise of Hillsong United as part of this stylistic divergence has been usefully documented elsewhere (Riches 2010; Wagner; Riches and Wagner 2012), and represents a pivotal moment in Hillsong Music's continued expansion. Four years after United's emergence (Riches 2010, 123), Zschech noted that:

> We have definitely seen the parameters of what has always been acceptable church music be stretched and enlarged to accommodate the generations coming through. (Zschech, Interview with the author, 2002)

Those parameters were largely transformed through stylistic alterations. Again, these musical developments actually aided the blossoming of celebrity, given that "style is invariably drawn from a particular audience group or subculture and is then rearticulated by the popular music performer" (Marshall 1997, 162). Hillsong United represented that "rearticulation" which would become self-referentially enforced by the "collectivities" (ibid.) that were attracted to it. As Hillsong United

developed, so would the stylistic nuances that define it (Riches and Wagner 2012).

In recent years Hillsong has added the "Young and Free" catalogue to its brand. This music is emanating from its youth ministry and is largely influenced by electronic dance music, with some rap elements. It will be curious to see how much traction this sub-genre can get within actual church services. The music is certainly a fresh sound for Hillsong and holds an important place in the church's future. This represents the next stylistic pivot for Hillsong music. Some YouTube videos for Young and Free songs have garnered over 9 million views—and the next generation of celebrities including Laura Toganivalu (née Houston), Aodhan King, and Alexander Pappas.

Part 2: Hillsong Music—the "Sound"

Since the 1990s, cultural geographers and popular music scholars have been mapping the properties of various signature "sounds" as they exist in geographical locales. Examples abound, from the Liverpool sound to Seattle grunge, the Dunedin sound to Chicago blues (e.g. Cohen 1994). As Shuker notes: "Interest in particular sounds has concentrated on the significance of locality, and how music may serve as a marker of identity" (2008, 198). The Hillsong sound is different. It originates in Castle Hill, Sydney, but it is not seeking to represent or speak only for that area. Rather the sound typifies, represents, and speaks to a global network of churches. Wagner's (2014) investigation of the Hillsong sound and its contribution to branding provides many avenues for navigating this phenomenon. He observes that, "despite the objective consistency of Hillsong's musical offerings, participants experience the 'Hillsong Sound' differently" (ibid.). That is, in part, due to its non-sonic properties.

The sound itself is about "bright, contemporary, victorious Christianity" (Munroe 2013), an aspirational dimension that produces a distinct affect and is indeed experienced individually. The sound is also an ecumenical (See also Podevák, this volume), though we should also heed Yong's observation that "people vote on their 'praise and worship' by downloading music, buying CDs, and attending concerts, and this may or may not be connected to their theological sensibilities" (2015, 284). Hence the aesthetic criteria that produce the sound,

and its audience response, are vital. Part of that pertains to the music production processes (Wagner 2014), but the sonic properties of the music are vital.

Shuker argues that in the construction of popular music "the cohesion of … 'common' musical signatures is frequently exaggerated" (2008, 197). However I would argue that this is not the case with Hillsong and, in fact, the church is very deliberate in ensuring musical signatures are inherent to the practice of the songs. As Povedák writes from a Hungarian perspective, "Hillsong's song tutorials on YouTube, which are intended to teach the songs also work to propagate a universal Hillsong aesthetic and style, and are widely used by Romani church musicians" (2015, 171). So what are the sonic properties that ultimately produce the Hillsong sound? For many, the Hillsong sound can be thought of in purely technical dimensions.

The Internet is littered with blogposts and technical help groups attempting to deconstruct the Hillsong sound on the basis of the musical equipment involved. A typical example is the following, taken from popular guitar-based site, The Gear Page[7]:

> NickDanforth: I'm mainly going for a Hillsong/Hillsong United tone overall. My two main guitars are a Custom G&L Legacy, and a Cort Yorktown, going into a Tech 21 Trademark 60 … Pretty bare-bones. What effects would you suggest I consider for the sound I'm going for, with the guitars and amp I have?
>
> Thiscalltoarms: a second delay. And a menatone TBIAC. Because the hillsong sound really is a tube screamer hitting a quarter note delay into a dotted eighth delay into a vox AC-30.
>
> Craig Walker: Yep, a TS9 and a Vox will get you the base tone. I believe most of them [Hillsong guitarists] use a Boss DD5 for the dotted 1/8 thing.

And so the conversation continues (and continues). What is important here is the focus on the sound itself. Yes, Wagner (2014) is correct, the "sound" is a confluence of activities and elements, both physical and non-physical, along with the "adaption of American industrial models" (Riches 2015: 60), but there remains a sonic dimension that is integral. Perhaps there is little to be gained from trying to isolate its key feature,

but acknowledgement of the sonic signature of Hillsong must be noted. In various forums whether popular or academic, Christian or non-Christian, amateur or professional, common demarcates of the sonic properties of Hillsong are discussed.

Album reviews of Hillsong releases, particularly in Christian media, increasingly standardize the trope of the Hillsong sound. Writing about the album *Open Heaven/River Wild* (2015), Andy Walton noted:

> The first thing you notice about the album is that the trademark "big" sound of Hillsong's music is here in spades. Pounding drums, wall-of-sound style guitars and layers of synthesisers wrap around the vocals, all backed up by the stadium full of voices making this an epic album—in the true sense of the word.
>
> Building layers of repeated choruses which die back and then build up to a louder crescendo has long been a trademark of the Hillsong sound.[8]

Such descriptive accounts are commonplace:

> *No Other Name* is beautiful, though "safe" and middle-of-the-road. The production is exquisite, and the musical vibe is largely the trademark, now classic, Hillsong sound: backing choir, lots of pad layers, simple but captivating electric guitar melodies, and lots of diverse drum work. The songs are singable (though high as always), with a few surprising melodic twists.[9]

Such is the perceived understanding of what the Hillsong sound is, it can be used with negative connotations:

> In the past few years, contemporary worship music has been consumed with the so called "Hillsong" sound. With ethereal synths and killer guitar licks, this style is sure to get you pumped up for Jesus. However, due to its popularity … everyone is adopting this atmospheric sound, and quite frankly I'm tired of it. The ethereal, washy sound is starting to lose its appeal because it is being overused.[10]

Music scholar Alan Moore has described the recorded texture of the Hillsong sound as "immersive," which he goes on to qualify as "highly resonant, emotive, medium-paced stadium rock with little virtuosity" (2015, 192). To achieve all of this the music is exquisitely produced.

"Live" albums are extensively overdubbed and the spatial build to the wall-of-sound climaxes carefully arranged. In all the voice, the emotive voice holds precedence. The sound, so often described as ethereal or resonant or big, is curiously so non-distinct as to be distinct.

All of this might imply the Hillsong sound as fixed in time, just as its performance is "fixed" around the world (Evans 2015). Notably, one long-term Castle Hill congregation member was able to describe textually how he had heard the Hillsong sound morph over time:

> There is definitely a Hillsong sound. These days it seems to be lots of guitars with one or two main singers and lots of backup singers. Years ago it used to be lots of voices all at once, but now it seems like the backup singers are turned down more than they used to be, so its one or two dominant voices. (Bradley, Interview with the author, 2016)

This not only fits with the church's development of, and focuses on celebrity, but also shows how the sonic properties of the sound can develop with the church. That said, the overall sonic dimensions (in production, performance, and songcraft) remain the drivers. One thing that will not change anytime soon is the power and reach of the Hillsong sound. For, as the next section will show, the sound is ironically no longer simply about Hillsong.

Conclusion: A New Sound

On 4 January 2014, high profile Sydney Anglican scholar, Reverend John Dickson,[11] used social media service Twitter to start a remarkable chain of events. His tweet read: "Dear @hillsong, could your brilliant songwriters please put the Apostles' Creed to inspiring music. Do world-Christianity a massive favour." Hillsong's Worship Pastor Cass Langton and songwriter Ben Fielding were quick to reply that they would "have a go." So began a conversation that would lead to the song "This I Believe (The Creed)" (Ben Fielding, Matt Crocker). In an amazingly short period the song would premiere at the Hillsong Women's conference "Colour" in March 2014 and was recorded live at the annual Hillsong Conference in July 2014 before spreading internationally. The song has an equivalent consumption of 459,000 units, which is made up of 273,000 downloads or sales and approximately 28 million streams,[12] and is sung in churches worldwide.

Dickson's purpose in sending the original tweet was clear; as a statement of faith the Apostles Creed covers the essential tenets of the Christian faith and is recited in various denominations around the world by Christians of every persuasion. He explained:

> I just thought a song that really was reminiscent of the Apostles' Creed, that covered its main points, would be a beautiful way of calling modern churches to reflect on the foundation of the faith that unifies us.[13]

Despite its name, the Apostles Creed was not written by the Apostles (though such a folklore has definitely circulated). James Orr (1915) noted that it does indeed have "its roots in apostolic times, and embodies, with much fidelity, apostolic teaching." It is the oldest of all the creeds, and is drawn upon by many others. It was essential in an aural culture that people could easily remember and cite the basic tenets of the (new) Christian faith.

Dickson's "involvement" in the song (he also provided feedback to the songwriters on an early version) led various denominations and religious outlets that would not normally follow Hillsong developments (such as Lutherans and Anglicans) to report upon it. The Bible Society of Australia, via their *Eternity* newspaper, reported its upcoming launch under the heading "The Hillsong Song That Every Christian Can Sing," the title speaking to the traditional evangelical view of Hillsong's theology. Yet the article went on to quote songwriter Ben Fielding discussing the benefits of ecumenical interaction:

> It's such an enriching experience. It's sad to think we wouldn't be able to have that dialogue because of denominational barriers. Perhaps working on things like the Creed would be a great way forward, to open dialogue and engage on that level that we have in common.[14]

Fielding is right to appeal to the commonality between Hillsong and mainstream churches. Sure there are largely stylistic differences, and also some different theological hermeneutics at play, but in the grander scheme the basic doctrines of the faith are the same. In response to the song "This I Believe" and, more astonishing, a visit to Hillsong conference, a local Sydney Anglican minister wrote in his church newsletter:

> I am not calling for the high walls existing between Sydney Anglicanism and Hillsong to be pulled down but maybe they can be replaced with low hedges, and perhaps a neighbourly gate or two, instead.[15]

The division between the mainstream church (particularly Sydney evangelicals) and Hillsong is long and deep (Evans 2002). "This I Believe" represents a watershed moment in that relationship. Here we have public figure from one side acknowledging the "brilliance"[16] of the Hillsong songwriters and appealing to them to help further the cause of both sides. Twenty years after *The Power Of Your Love* album was released Christians everywhere, from all theological perspectives, understand the power of Hillsong music. Dickson didn't challenge the Hillsong team on the hope they might produce something, he did it with full knowledge of their sound, professionalism of their songcraft, and the power their celebrity would create for the song itself.[17] In a recent call to further embrace the "glocalized imaginary," Roland Robertson (2015, 13) quotes the work of Kishore Mahbubani who notes that, "in the next few decades … [we will] increasingly realise that our village is a world and not that our world is a village" (quoted in Robertson 2015, 11). Perhaps in the moment of "This I Believe" we get a glimpse of Mahbubani's utopian vision. Here we see not the problematic forces of globalization often applied to Hillsong music (Evans 2015), but Hillsong music representing the world of Christianity. And what a war-cry that would be!

Notes

1. Many thanks to Steve McPherson and Tim Whincop for this information (personal communication with the author, September 2016).
2. This chapter uses the terms congregational music, worship music, and "praise and worship" music interchangably. For discussion on the definition of terms see Ingalls (2012) and Evans (2006).
3. In an international survey of popular congregational song conducted by the Worship Resources Centre website (http://www.praise.net/worship/survey/), "The Power Of Your Love" placed 12th. Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI), the official copyright collecting agency for Christian music, publishes the top 25 congregational songs—based on church use—for each survey period. The first list archived was August 1997, where "Power Of Your Love" placed second on the Australian list and New Zealand list, each time bettered by "Shout To The Lord." In

the February 2001 list, "Power Of Your Love" placed 5th in Australia, 14th in New Zealand, 18th in Canada, and 24th in the United Kingdom—the only Hillsong song to chart in the UK besides "Shout To The Lord." Given that "Power Of Your Love" was written in 1991 and released in 1992, these figures highlight the popularity and relative longevity of the song within churches worldwide.

4. Such was its success that "The Great Southland" still charted on the Australian CCLI top 25 in August 1997.
5. "The Great Southland" draws openly from Dorothy MacKellar's poem *My Country* (1908) (popularly known as *I Love A Sunburnt Country*) and has resonances with the Australian rock group Icehouse's song *Great Southern Land* (1982).
6. Zschech was the first woman to lead worship on an Integrity album (Hallett 1999, 12).
7. All original spelling and grammer has been preserved. For more see http://www.thegearpage.net/board/index.php?threads/finding-that-hillsong-tone.374714/, accessed August 19, 2016.
8. http://www.christiantoday.com/article/hillsong.album.review.open.heaven.river.wild/70391.htm, accessed August 19, 2016.
9. http://www.zachicks.com/blog/2014/7/7/review-of-no-other-name-by-hillsong-worship.html, accessed August 19, 2016.
10. https://www.theodysseyonline.com/5-christian-bands-that-dont-sound-like-hillsong, accessed August 19, 2016.
11. John Dickson is the author of 14 books, and founding Director of the Centre for Public Christianity (2007–present)—one of the most outward facing Christian media think tanks in Australia.
12. Sincere thanks to Tim Whincop for calculating this information. Personal communication to the author, November 2016.
13. http://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2014/07/this-i-believe-the-creed-song-story/#.V9JEwWUwyJU, accessed August 5, 2016.
14. https://www.eternitynews.com.au/culture/the-hillsong-song-that-every-christian-can-sing/, accessed August 5, 2016.
15. Reverend Matt Stedman quoted at, http://standrews.net.au/news/StA-News-2014-07-06.pdf, accessed August 5, 2016. It must be acknowledged that Stedman works directly with John Dickson, and hence his connection, however to publish such a comment in public Sydney Anglican discourse represents serious provocation.
16. As former singer-songwriter with the Christian band In The Silence, Dickson's musical opinions also hold value.
17. Dickson's own form of celebrity has also contributed to the successful reception of the song beyond pentecostal walls.

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PART II

Diversity, and Dialogue

CHAPTER 5

The Sisterhood: Hillsong in a Feminine Key

Tanya Riches

As an individual woman, to be able to say "I AM SISTERHOOD" is liberating, but as a company of diverse and fabulous women … to collectively say "WE ARE SISTERHOOD" carries power beyond imagination.
—Hillsong Global Senior Pastor, Bobbie Houston (2016, 7).

Hillsong supports womens' traditional roles of wife and mother, yet its women are increasingly found in corporations and boardrooms. This chapter therefore investigates the controversial claim of Hillsong Church that its ministries "empower" women.

Within the international development literature, empowerment has proved a notoriously problematic concept to define and measure. Famously, Naila Kabeer (2001) defined it as a woman's increased choice. Synthesizing the various models presented since her publication, Moghadam and Senftova (2005, 389) widen this definition to "a multidimensional process of civil, political, social, economic, and cultural participation and rights."[1] They present six indicators that include: basic

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capabilities or choice, bodily integrity (e.g. privacy and dignity), literacy and educational attainment, as well as participation and rights in economic, political, and cultural arenas (Moghadam and Senftova 2005, 398–399). This harmonizes with Amartya Sen's capability approach that emphasizes freedoms for the individual (and removal of unfreedoms). This chapter argues that, despite the media and scholarly claims to the contrary, Hillsong's rituals produce a fluid and multivalent identity that meets Moghadam and Senfova's typology, with women in Sydney, Australia rehearsing various skills and emotional capabilities (e.g. resilience and compassion) that are suitable for greater participation in public life.

This chapter is based on thirteen ethnographic interviews with women attending Hillsong's women's ministries—its annual women's conferences or weekly meetings—in Sydney.[2] It also draws on my own long-term involvement with Hillsong. Importantly however, I am an insider of some, but not all the representative groups studied. My family joined Hillsong Church when I was a child, and I have attended this congregation for almost thirty years.[3] I sang as a backing vocalist at the first Colour women's conference, attending over fifteen others since then. At the age of seventeen, my picture was featured on stage at Colour—just as many women's faces are today. Yet as an undergraduate student, I could not justify reducing study time to attend the weekly Thursday Sisterhood meetings. However, my mother, a Clinical Professor and psychologist provided a strong role model of balancing full-time work with attending Hillsong.

Various critiques related to the women's ministries of Hillsong church have touched me in multiple ways. For example, as a master's student (2003–2005) I volunteered in Shine's program in Redfern, Sydney.[4] In 2008 Hillsong's Shine curriculum featured in the center of a media storm claiming it linked self-esteem with make-up.[5] When Hillsong's Mercy Ministries home for troubled girls was shut in 2009, it was constructed as a public debate between science and religion, with an army of social workers opposing pentecostal preacher Nancy Alcorn (Levin 2007, 212). More recently, when the radical Sydney feminist group "Destroy the Joint" presented 30,000 signatures asking Hillsong to remove controversial preacher Mark Driscoll over his statements regarding women,[6] Hillsong ignored their request, and was the only leading Christian conference to give Driscoll a platform following his departure from Mars Hill.

If I am to be *entirely* honest, due to these things, The Sisterhood[7] has both in turn enraged and deeply inspired me. I'm not sure I have always "gotten it" as Bobbie Houston notes of the women who supported

her in the early days (Houston 2016, 35). But the stories of Hillsong's women are woven through my own life. And, in researching the experiences of these women, it became clear that the stereotypes circulating in the media and academia are insufficient to explain The Sisterhood.

Part I of this chapter sets up Sydney as the context within which debates on religious authority, and the empowerment of Hillsong women, arise. It notes entrenched disconnect between the theological and international development discourses. Part II outlines the role of Hillsong Senior Pastor Bobbie Houston and presents the "The Sisterhood" as a diverse group of women linked by a shared affective connection produced via participation in Hillsong's rituals. Part III investigates this further via the ethnographic interviews. Although space does not permit a full review of each area, many resonances with Moghadam and Senfova's typology were seen, with Hillsong promoting the choice of women regarding work or career, bodily integrity, educational attainment, and also facilitating their economic, political, and cultural participation.

Part I: Mapping Christianity and Gender in Sydney, Australia

Women's empowerment in the Pacific is a topic of weighty importance. The UN Women states, "The Pacific is the epicentre of violence against women, and the place where women have the lowest representation in leadership roles anywhere in the world."[8] Australia plays a leading role economically and politically within this region, which is highly Christianized. Characteristically, the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) movements that aimed to improve women's lives viewed religious communities as oppressive. However, this is now changing with recognition of shared concerns about women's rights and participation (Marshall and Van Saanen 2007, 44; Moghadam and Senftova 2005, 394). Religious concerns intersect with local issues in various ways.

From Sydney's colonial years, different groups of women boasted varying degrees of social legitimacy, or right to participation in social life. The Gadigal and Dharug women survived the invasion of the First Fleet on the 26th January in 1788, but were not granted citizenship until 1967. In comparison, the convict women became notorious for the roles they played as mistresses and prostitutes.[9] This illegitimately

earned power contrasted government official's wives including Elizabeth Macarthur and Elizabeth Macquarie, who shaped various aesthetics of the colony, and therefore the city of Sydney as it exists today.[10] Although scholars emphasize how women's bodies both limited and improved their status in the colony (de Lepervanche 2013), religious commitments also played an important, and perhaps overlooked role in improving social standing during this time.

Today, Sydney's Christian denominational landscape can be viewed through its attitudes to women's participation in religious life. Differences of opinion are rationalized as biblical hermeneutics regarding teachings on women's role in marriage (Eph 5:22–24; 1 Cor 11:3), preaching (1 Tim 2:11–12; Tit 2:3–4), and governance in church structures (1 Tim 3:8–13). This contrasts female figures in the First Testament (e.g. Miriam, Esther, and Deborah) and Second Testament (e.g. Junia, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Lydia) who held varied roles in the faith, community, and public life.

The Anglican Diocese of Sydney has a particular historical importance, and maintains a conservative evangelicalism based upon identification with Calvinist celebrity pastors such as John Piper, Wayne Grudem, and, until recently, Mark Driscoll (Giles in Clifton and Grey 2009, 127). Its theology is mainly cessationist, i.e. rejecting the extra-biblical role of the Holy Spirit today. It also refuses women as preachers (with a few notable exceptions, e.g. Dickson 2014), and certainly as priests or bishops. Similarly, Sydney's Catholic[11] and Eastern Orthodox denominations restrict the role of women in religious life (John Paul 1994; Nicolaides 2005). But various laywomen's associations (e.g. Catholic Women's League Sydney) have played and still do play a significant role within Sydney, redirecting these religious women to "authorized" Christian pursuits within the public square.

In contrast, the more liberal Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) is characterized by its openness to women's participation in pulpit ministries and church governance.[12] Its *Agreed Statement on The Ministry* dated December 1989 reads, "The Uniting Church, from inception, will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognize among its members women and men called of God to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world." Further, its 1982 ruling declared, "…the sexual orientation of a candidate is not and has not been in itself a bar to ordination." This also resulted in a local option for the ordination of celibate gay clergy.

Australia's many smaller denominations (including Baptist, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist, and Brethren) often oppose or align with these oppositional Christian movements according to their views on gender, sexuality, and the participation of women. Still, Muriel Porter states that according to national data in 2001 there were 2,823 women identified as ministers of religion, compared to 11,415 men. She notes, "This corresponds to around 20% of self-described leadership roles in Australian religious bodies."[13]

Outgrowing many of these other faith communities, and in various locations across the city is the ACC, with their largest congregation member Hillsong Church. Due to their founder Sarah Jane Lancaster, ACC congregations were initially egalitarian but many later adopted gender role distinctions (Clifton and Grey 2009, 46)[14]. Thus, Clifton and Grey highlight historical versus contemporary tensions within Australia's pentecostal churches, stating:

> …the presumption that PC [pentecostal-charismatic] communities are empowering to women (when compared, for example, to mainline denominations) creates the situation where the sense of self-congratulation undermines the voice of any who might be advocating for change. (Clifton and Grey 2009, 1–2)

Grey argues that Spirit empowerment of pentecostal women should open a role for "managerial leadership," (Grey in Clifton and Grey 2009, 77). She emphasizes the "feminine distinctive of leadership" as encouraging "collaboration and inclusiveness," resisting domineering authority, and nurturing a future community culture (ibid., 78). She and other theologians have expressed disappointment with Hillsong Church, associating it with "princess theology" (Grey 2002, 2003), which reduces women's contribution to a two-dimensional consumer image (Maddox 2013a, b), via a fundamentally patriarchal "theology of submission" that reinforces traditional gender roles (Miller 2016, 64).

"Princess theology" is often attributed to a popularist theological attitude. Although many women in Hillsong's congregation have pursued higher education, this was not necessarily as true of Hillsong staff. Last year, however, Nandila Spry was the first church staff member to receive a PhD. Her dissertation and later publications translate the (theological) contributions of the Shine program into development discourse, quantifying an increase in "self-esteem, emotional intelligence, purpose and

mobilization" in women attending (Spry 2015, 142). Spry (2015, 57) found increases of between 5 and 10% in these four measurements, using relevant scales. Of her evaluation, African-born Spry states:

> … The girl that oversees Shine [in Cape Town] said … she believes Shine was designed for African women. Because I think the message speaks louder with women who are oppressed.
>
> Everyone (in the church) knew it was working, but there was no evidence, no empirical evidence, and that's what governments and educational boards want … So, it was a very hard task, coming up with concepts relating to Shine. What literature is out there relating to worth, strength, and purpose for example? And even the whole faith part of it, what's available? (Interview with the author, August 4, 2016)

There is little wonder that development serves as the natural disciplinary location for many Hillsong researchers. Development researchers have long noted a "social uplift" associated with pentecostal conversion, usually due to reductions in a husband's discretionary spending on gambling, drugs, and sex workers (Chesnut 1997, 57; Miller and Yamamori 2007). Indeed, the global South seems to be where pentecostalism shines brightest. But even for migrant women in the UK, pentecostalism is noted to increase business opportunities and thus income (Toulis 1997). In Western cities, it is highlighted as re-embedding the social reproduction of family life in an uncertain neoliberal context (Barker 2007, 411).

Pentecostalism, Authority, and Gender

Historian Leah Payne's (2015) work on religious authority serves as an important bridge between the theological and development discourses. Noting that pentecostal theologies allow women access to the Spirit, she builds upon Weber's charismatic authority and Butler-esque notions of performativity to present ways real pentecostal leaders have utilized gender, race, and class to "create, through ritualized acts, an identity of authoritative, female ministry" (Payne 2015, 15). She notes that particularly during the Victorian era, the gender binaries promoted successfully attached "manliness" or masculinity to public life. Thus, the revivalist preacher defied an increasingly privatized or interiorized spirituality by inhabiting ideal masculine space (ibid., 28).

Payne argues that historically, pentecostal women performed roles of "educated motherhood" and "companionate wifedom" in the pulpit as ways to gain authority within ministry (ibid., 31). She notes that Aimee Semple McPherson adopted Hollywood fashion and dramatized imaginary conversations that refuted any opposition to her leadership (ibid., 64). In contrast, Maria Woodworth-Etter embodied holiness via simple, modest attire (ibid., 68). Both women revisioned church architecture to "create spaces that displayed their power as ministers and their status as womanly women" (ibid., 75, 81). Such techniques enabled them to participate in church leadership and public life.

Therefore, Payne argues, pentecostal women's authority to speak was intentionally crafted, with the office of the female minister generated through personal trust generated between the preachers and their congregations. She states:

> As ritualized acts, revivalist preaching performances were the site for the creation and renegotiation of power. The preacher entertained, inspired and invited the congregation to agree with the message that he or she preached. The congregation in turn gave power to the preacher through their attendance and participation in the sermon. (ibid., 96)

These features are highly relevant to Hillsong's Sisterhood gatherings. The next section outlines how the story of Bobbie Houston's own empowerment at Hillsong provides a theological model for The Sisterhood, which in turn promotes public participation via ritual rehearsal of particular affect, particularly compassion for others.

Part II: The Emancipation of Roberta Lee Houston, Global Senior Pastor

There is no doubt that Bobbie Houston plays a central role in the religious imagination of those who attend Hillsong's women's gatherings. Houston's official title is Founder and Global Senior Pastor of Hillsong Church, and CEO of Colour Conference. She is a best-selling author, international speaker, and mentor to many of Hillsong's women leaders. Within *The Sisterhood*, Houston retells her story just as she would in these meetings. Her journey at Hillsong is emphasized, transforming from a shy young mother into "restructure[ing], rework[ing], and more importantly re-envision[ing]" ladies' ministries globally (ibid., 21). Her

own transformation occurred after a "whisper from heaven" that ignited Colour Conference in 1996 (Houston 2016, 3). She emphasizes that women now participate at every level of the church (ibid., 53).

At Hillsong, empowerment is often framed as taking available opportunities for leadership. Houston's biblical interpretation calls women towards "something noble and great" (ibid., 12, 14) as they are "…not beneath, behind, or secondary [but] worthy of honor…" (ibid., 248). Interestingly, her vision articulates public participation as an aesthetic quest:

> I saw us coloring and influencing our world with the many tints and hues and … expressions of heaven above … I saw us as women, walking His tangible grace and glory into a broken and hurting world. (ibid., 39)

Houston's presence is discernible within Hillsong's marketing, and conference management (ibid., 44, 49) and she distinguishes her "feminine" contribution through a lavish emphasis upon words, and kindness demonstrated in "little gifts and little gestures" (ibid., 83) that become "tools to facilitate change in … everyday life" (ibid., 206).[15] She emphasizes the role women play in Hillsong's services, bringing the "warmth, welcome, and expectation" of hosting in a family home (ibid., 69–70).

Houston is known for employing traditional Evangelical motifs including a childish "simple affection" for God (ibid., 62), and a "heart-moving" romantic desire for the King (ibid., 65), thus designated "princess theology." But with her father (of Tongan descent) serving in the military, many of her metaphors are also militaristic. Her famous and often misunderstood phrase "daughter—princess—warrior" represents the progression of a woman's self-understanding in identity, status, and power. She depicts life as a spiritual war in which "…[hu]mankind's spiritual enemy (aka Lucifer, Satan, Devil, Accuser, Adversary, Liar, and Thief) has held God's daughters in contempt and hatred." She goes further, "…society officially calls it 'misogyny'" (ibid., 35–36). Accordingly, Houston initiated a "Fight Club" using the social media hashtag #middaybabymidday that encourages interaction via women's social media profiles, with women praying (and increasingly acting) against the oppression of women.

She argues that although Hillsong church receives constant criticism, it furnishes a social good (ibid., 91, 165). Her intention is to "create pathways that lead people toward purpose, fulfilment, happiness, and ultimately freedom" (ibid., 198). Pragmatically, her leadership strategy

is "awareness, prevention, education, rescue, and prosecution" (ibid., 220). Therefore, Sisterhood women are active in addressing diverse global issues such as HIV, domestic violence, human trafficking, and government corruption. The Sisterhood's cultural and humanitarian activities continue to grow, translating online concern into local initiatives that facilitate women's political participation. Their action is marked by proximity to grassroots issues particularly via Hillsong's campuses in Africa (ibid., 165) and Eastern Europe (ibid., 189). As The Sisterhood expands, its constituency becomes more diverse.

Part III: Hillsong's Ministries for Women

The interviews revealed that "Hillsong" held varied meanings for Christian women in Sydney, directly related to its rituals. Five aspects are of particular interest here, as participating in these various activities generates the affective or "sisterly" bond between The Sisterhood who attend Hillsong, and also other Sydney congregations.

First, women referred to "Hillsong" most frequently in relation to its recognizable musical and teaching products that are distributed widely as "resource." Many informed me that they play this music in their cars and workplaces as constant reminders of the Spirit's presence with them at all times. That the women emphasized Christian music was unsurprising, as musician Michael Gungor (2012) famously outlines "Becky," a mythical female towards whom global Christian radio stations are tuned. The success of songs like "Shout to the Lord" and "Oceans" is invariably due to resonance among female listeners, but also women worship leaders. It is important to note that from its inaugural album Hillsong women have been involved in almost every aspect of music production and have contributed towards the fame of the church (Riches 2010). Notably, Darlene Zschech was for many years "the face, indeed the voice, of that spirituality" (Hutchinson in Grey and Clifton 2006, 181), and female artists including Miriam Webster, Brooke Fraser, and Taya Smith played significant roles.[16] Today, Cassandra Langton operates as the Global Creative Pastor of Hillsong Church.

Second, thousands of Sydney's women (including those interviewed) attend "Colour," Hillsong's annual Christian women's conference, which was pioneered in 1996 in Sydney, Australia.[17] Kate Harrison Brennan, CEO of Anglican Deaconess Ministries notes:

> Women in society generally in Australia, and within many Christian communities, are not being supported to flourish, and use their God-given gifts. Sometimes that's lack of understanding, and sometimes that's the narrative that has gained power there, it's misuse of power. But they're the overall trends. (Interview with the author, August 17, 2016)

She notes the evangelistic role Colour plays for women in the city of Sydney:

> I have never seen a more beautiful representation of the whole story of the Bible as I saw in [the conference opener] ballet. It was an experience that brought together the beauty of the gospel together with truth, in a way that speaks to people who are looking for the story of their lives … or replacing the small dramas of life with a big drama of God's story. (ibid.)

Significantly, each conference incorporates many of Hillsong's female artists, dancers, and poets.

Third, Hillsong is church "home" to many women. In fact, the National Church Life Survey (Powell 2011) reveals that Hillsong is disproportionately female and young. In 2006, 55% of City and 60% of Hills campus respondents were females, with 61% unmarried overall.[18] Interviewees noted the regular participation of female pastors including Bobbie Houston (Senior Pastor), Christine Caine (A21 Founder), Donna Crouch (Hillsong Ambassador), and Julia A'Bell (Australia Pastor) in the pulpit. Although most women contribute alongside their husbands, increasingly single women such as Catrina Henderson (Principal of Hillsong College and now Lead Pastor of Hillsong Israel) are becoming visible.

Fourth, "The Sisterhood" midweek gathering is primarily for women. It serves as the "bedrock" of Hillsong's women's ministries and is attended by all female staff. One employee "Hannah" explained:

> I think the weekly meetings act as a bridge, bringing people who come from very conservative or restricted views of what a woman can or cannot do into the same forum and place as people like Kylie Beach—a vocal activist for social justice—to allow them to interact, and to engage each other … there ends up being something for everyone regardless of their understanding of a "woman's role." (Interview with the author, July 23, 2016)

Interviewees noted that while the Thursday Sisterhood meeting was traditionally for mothers, increasingly it includes businesswomen. Lalita Stables, a Sales Executive at a large tech company, also highlighted special quarterly "Sisterhood United" night meetings that include working women. She described being instated as a Hillsong Board member in 2010:

> I've come from a 19-year career in IT and I'm often the only woman at the board table ... For [Hillsong] it was perhaps a big deal but it wasn't so new for me … I can definitely tell you that they want us to rise up into senior leadership positions and be all that we've been called to be … in boardrooms, corporates, in the arts, in government, in every sphere (Interview with the author, July 15, 2016).

Finally, the "Shine" discipleship programmes were initially created as deportment programmes for girls in Sydney's inner city schools but have now expanded into a range of programmes for community and churchwomen.

Complexities in the Voices of Real Women

Various complexities emerge in the lived religious experiences of women participating in the above ministries. Interviews with the women reinforced Houston as the central figure of The Sisterhood, her authority arising from a pentecostal understanding of Spirit empowerment. Houston's leadership development was often recounted by interviewees as a movement from a timid and supportive wife into the role she now plays. For insiders, such narratives undergird her current role as Senior Pastor of Hillsong Church. Pastor Amanda Fergusson stated:

> She would be the first to say that she's not one who likes the limelight, or anything like that; she's very much just responded in obedience to what she feels God has told her to do. (Interview with the author, August 4, 2016)

Affectionately termed "Mother Dove" by her congregation, the staff also lauds her prophetic gifting and voice into the everyday working of the church. Fergusson explains:

> She's incredibly resilient with a huge compassion, which comes out in all our Sisterhood projects. But she is also zany as well. I think our church would not be the same without Bobbie … [a] great example of how a woman can bring something distinctive into the leadership picture. We always say we don't just want to hear men preach. Otherwise we only hear the masculine side of God. We need women … we're made in his image. I think that's what Bobbie and others bring to the church, is that feminine side—without apology. (ibid.)

Although the media ignores Houston's intersectionality, Hillsong attendee Honia believed that for Hillsong's Pacific women, this representation was significant:

> The first time I met her, her first words were "Did you know I'm part Tongan?" And I was like, "No!" I guess it encouraged me to know, "Wow, my senior pastor is half Tongan. That's pretty cool." In some ways I could relate because I'm part Tongan myself … so I could connect to her being the same culture. (Interview with the author, July 12, 2016)

However, it was clear that these women were very conscious of the external (particularly theological) criticisms relating to Houston and to Hillsong Church. Many struggled to reconcile these views with their own experiences. For this reason, some women declined an interview. Many were confused about *what* to say. Leah, now a pastor in the Churches of Christ denomination, emphasized how things had changed at Hillsong:

> Leah: The first time I went … probably 10 years ago, I remember enjoying the worship, but I felt like it was a bit shallow … I don't know how to explain it. Just a little bit like "we're Princess Warriors and we're all wonderful." But last time, two years ago, definitely the culture had changed. (ibid.)

Leah related these concerns to cultural representations of the Hills District (as a sub-area of Sydney) on stage:

> We're all Stepford wives, right? We've all got the beautiful, perfect new home with the beautiful garden … [women in the Hills district] are used to doing well in their career, and then they have children. And it's like, "Whoa, what do I now do with my life?" (Interview with the author, August 16, 2016)

Leah was acutely nervous of unintentionally replicating disempowering images:

> I think we just have to be careful in all our churches, not just Hillsong … for someone like myself who struggles with anxiety from time to time … it's just like you're seeing all these other people that have got it all altogether [but] you don't (ibid.)

The women agreed that Hillsong valued womens' contributions when compared to other Sydney congregations; its ministries seemed catered to women who felt undervalued. Leah suggested that perhaps many of Sydney's Christian women felt this way:

> Leah: As a key leader in St. Paul's for years, I didn't have a voice … I felt like I wasn't important … I just took it and submitted to it then, whereas now I don't feel like I could. It's terrible, isn't it? (ibid.)

Anglican woman "Samantha" described Colour conference as life changing due to the visible participation of women:

> I saw Australian women on the platform who spoke so beautifully, and eloquently, and humbly about their faith in Jesus—passionately, with real joy. Oh my gosh. [chuckle] … in the Anglican church in Sydney … you're put in the box … [that's] all about your roles. You're not allowed to raise your hands or they're a bit suspicious. You can't sing with true joyfulness … one particular year [at a women's conference] they talked about the theology of princesses, and how we're *not* God's princesses—that's putting us up on a pedestal. In fact, we're not even worthy to be called prostitutes in God's eyes. (Interview with the author, June 26, 2016)

She, like many others, associated attending this conference with a personal theological shift:

> It was the year [Reverend] John Dickson … suggested the Apostles' Creed song to Hillsong. And I remember singing "I believe in the Holy Spirit" … words I've recited in The Apostles' Creed for close to forty years … And then as I sang it … I thought, "Hang on, do I believe in the Holy Spirit?" (ibid.)

Afterwards, Samantha initiated a new ministry to increase womens' participation in her parish.

In the interviews, women consistently noted that Hillsong's ministries facilitated a reprieve for women by offering a nurturing rather than critical theological voice. "Silva," an ordained Lebanese pentecostal preacher, drives an hour and a half each week to attend the Sisterhood meetings. She laughs while describing herself as a "fashionista." She enjoys Hillsong's systematic biblical teaching. She sees The Sisterhood as a "prophetic place" and argues that it provides a "guard against academic pride within my own vocational formation and ministerial formation" (Interview with the author, June 23, 2016).

Catherine Thambiratnam, who oversees Sisterhood's development programmes, explains, "We say, 'United in friendship and cause.' My boss, Bobbie, often says 'Sisterhood isn't Sisterhood without both.'" (Interview with the author, July 21, 2016). Indeed, the desire to empower other women was common across the interviews. "Trinity," a pretty North American with her hair pulled into a ponytail, skypes from Los Angeles where she still attends Hillsong. She misses Sisterhood meetings. Her background in social work, she now manages a not-for-profit in the downtown area:

> … what makes the biggest difference is that it's not about, "Let's sit around and make something crafty" [but] "let's do something that advances the culture. Let's do something that advances the Kingdom [and is] about other people…" (Interview with the author, August 4, 2016)

She describes her current role as consistent with Sisterhood values:

> In working with survivors of sex trafficking, one of the things that we do to empower is to promote choice. And so, we have different empowerment events and things like that … [to] expose them to different opportunities (ibid.).

Many women outlined how skills gained from volunteering in Hillsong's ministries have developed their careers. Honia described how her General Secretary approached her after finding out she attended Hillsong, to ask whether they could implement any of its methods in their organization:

> My organization has a great product. They help [support] employees' [claims] in the commission. But I've found that Hillsong assists us with living. … educating our minds and our hearts to live better … I've learned

> bits and pieces in church that I've brought into my workplace … practical stuff about building up leaders, speaking positively to people, ensuring there's no bullying and harassment …. (Interview with the author, July 12, 2016)

A new grandmother, "Victoria," is forthright in stating that she gained her international development role largely through involvement in Sisterhood:

> I had a degree in education. But it was all the years of serving in Sisterhood that actually [mattered] … compassion, and conflict resolution [managing] volunteers. A lot of the job description actually related [to my volunteer role], … I would have said my degree counted for 20%. (Interview with the author, July 4, 2016)

In discussing her decision to join Hillsong Church, she specifically mentions two teenage girls:

> They were people that made it easy for us to come … they were in leadership and they were mature Christians. They could answer a lot of my crazy questions … I struggled with worship and all the hands up. I thought it was a bit intense. I struggled with the tithing … it was the way [Hillsong] they did it. I felt that the way that they asked for money was pushy … I look back and it's quite comical now, but these were such obstacles. (ibid.)

It strikes me how these two girls, who initiated Victoria into Hillsong, are invisible within the media and theological critiques. They are not ordained. Yet, at Hillsong, young girls are leaders capable of welcoming new families, able to gain access to answer serious questions about the theology and even the finances of the church.

Conclusion

Theological observations of Bobbie Houston often center on her promoted identities as wife and mother. These roles, affirmed by more conservative congregations, have been used as an underpinning foundation for her religious authority, that now extends well beyond her own congregation into the spiritual formation of women in Sydney's churches. Some women attend "Colour Your World" Conferences in secret or against the wishes of their diocese. However, if the affective relationship

between a preacher and her constituency constructs her authoritative voice, Bobbie Houston has built an army of young Hillsong women with a unique place in Sydney's religious landscape. Although media portrayals paint these women as submissively conforming to a separation of gender spheres, the lives of real women attending the Hillsong Sisterhood reveal a different and more liberative picture. The Sisterhood actively participates in the creation and renegotiation of religious power.

To return to the notion of empowerment defined by Moghadam and Senftova (2005, 389), Hillsong does in fact promote the visibility of women, especially as preachers, songwriters, and artists. It argues for women's control over their bodies and choice regarding sexual partners. It helps embed the nuclear family into a wider community that redresses some of the disconnectedness of suburban Australian life. It encourages women to build small businesses and take on economic projects. Its development programmes are expanding globally, with women as their directors, and evaluators.

Although Hillsong as yet often shies away from direct political engagement, it has an indisputable cultural power that gives it a unique voice in the public square. It would be difficult to argue that Hillsong's musical repertoire had not been shaped by the participation of women. Its extravagant conferences and gospel presentations provide a spectacular outlet for its creative community, many of them women.

In the Colour 2015 conference teaser video, a Black woman dances as colours are projected onto city's walls. The Message biblical paraphrase flashes, "You are to be light … bringing out the God-colours … God is not a secret … we're going public with this." Bobbie Houston's voice speaks out, "women have full permission to be front and center of the will of God in these days … to be at the forefront of what it is to pioneer again." What The Sisterhood will pioneer together, however, remains to be seen.

Coda: Field Diary

It is March 4, 2016, and I am overwhelmed. As in many other years, I am attending "Colour" at the Hills Campus venue in Sydney. But this time, I am both participant and ethnographer. Friends have bartered tickets so I can attend this session, but I will fly out the following morning to present at a conference in Los Angeles. It is my turn to save seats,

and I negotiate our small band of women into a side section. As they arrive, they greet me with hugs and laughs.

The lights turn down and the music begins. As visuals flicker, so do thoughts in my mind. My PhD dissertation sits in a document on my desktop, barely assembled in broken paragraphs and sentences. My conference presentation needs printing for Los Angeles. During the past weeks I have edited many documents, pulling together this book project in conjunction with my co-editor.

I reflect upon this process. Although my chapter moved in focus, it finally fell upon "The Sisterhood." Nobody wanted to review the women of Hillsong church, something which I felt was vital. I think of this community I have known for decades, and the criticisms against it in the public square. I wonder if I am exposing myself (or my family) by undertaking this project. The responsibility hangs on my shoulders as I weigh the implications, anticipating what scholars might conclude about my research and my community.

Suddenly, the music pauses, and all falls silent. A dark blue light washes across the women gathered. The worship leader, Laura Toganivalu nervously steps forward on stage. She wears a simple white shirt, with a brush of magenta lipstick. Tousled blonde hair falls around her shoulders. She stands in this blue light and closes her eyes tightly. A guitar begins to pluck and she sings:

Through waters uncharted my soul will embark
I'll follow your voice straight into the dark
And if from the course you intend I depart
Speak to the sails of my wandering heart

Like the wind you'll guide
Clear the sky before
And I'll glide this open sea

Like the stars, your word will align my voyage
And remind me where I've been
And where I am going.

The melody lifts and falls, with light like ocean waves moving back and forth across the women gathered. A few raise their hands, but most stand perfectly still.

As the song reaches the bridge, the choir begins to hum. And, while women stand around me humming, I feel my body drop its stress and strain. In this moment is a deep quietness. I think of the men who traversed the Pacific oceans as captain and crew, despite the perceived dangers of the sea. I think of convict ships floating on the waters carrying my ancestors to Sydney. I think of the Aboriginal nations they displaced, but who survived. I think of different Aunties and Uncles I am now privileged to know.

… And then, I think of God. This moment is an experience of entire and total freedom. As women sway together, singing both out of and from within the living essence pentecostals call the Holy Spirit, or, The Spirit of Jesus, I join them in this song. And this moment is timeless, even eternal.

Notes

1. Moghadam and Senftova note the various available indices (e.g. the Gender Empowerment Measure or GEM) as particularly flawed, and more useful for lobbying national governments than measuring inequality.
2. The 13 women were a mixed group made up of Hillsong Church attendees, and also those who engage Hillsong's ministries while attending other denominations. Four interviewees attended Colour Conference only, and were involved in their own churches on weekends. One attended Sisterhood's Thursday meetings, and preached in her own church on weekends. Eight attended Hillsong's church services, and Colour Conference (four from Hills campus, three from the City, one formerly a City attendee now based in Los Angeles). Of these eight Hillsong women, the five staff attended Sisterhood meetings weekly. The range of professions was: five Hillsong staff (one administrator, one Creative, two community development workers, one College trainer/pastor), one CEO, one sales manager of a leading multinational corporation, one manager of a not-for-profit, one political campaigner, one teacher, and two pastors of other churches.
3. This was broken by four years as AlphaCrucis College faculty and pastoring another congregation, and two years in Los Angeles.

4. At the Redfern (City campus) Shine programme I taught business skills (Shine II), as well as art, music, and graphic design (Shine III). The programmes I helped develop were discontinued, presumably as a result of media critiques.
5. Bibby, Paul, "Hillsong Hits Schools with the Beauty Gospel," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 26, 2008, http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/hillsongs-beauty-gospel/2008/07/25/1216492732905.html?page=fullpage.
6. Barlass, Tim and Kate Aubusson, "Keep out US Pastor Driscoll, Hillsong warned," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 7, 2016, http://www.smh.com.au/national/keep-out-us-pastor-mark-driscoll-hillsong-warned-20150606-ghi5py.html.
7. Women attending Hillsong's women ministries refer to themselves as "The Sisterhood." The term is extended to other women who attend Hillsong Church. But in addition, it can be used to include the solidarity between Christian women globally, or women from all denominations in Sydney who participate in Hillsong's ministries. It is self-declared and demonstrated by participation in a number of rituals, explored later in this chapter.
8. UN Women's website, *Where UN Women Operates*, accessed November 20, 2016. https://unwomen.org.au/our-work/where-un-women-operates/.
9. See Riaz Hassan, "Whores, Damned Whores and Female Convicts: Why our History does early Australian Colonial Women a Grave Injustice" *The Conversation*, accessed November 20, 2016. https://theconversation.com/whores-damned-whores-and-female-convicts-why-our-history-does-early-australian-colonial-women-a-grave-injustice-4894.
10. The Australian Government, *Women in Colonial Times*, accessed November 20, 2016. http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/women-in-colonial-times.
11. By affiliation Australia's Roman Catholic and Anglican denominations are the largest, followed by the UCA (Uniting Church of Australia).
12. The UCA is a 1977 amalgamation of Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational churches. Its agreed statement consolidated the new denomination's position on women's participation. https://assembly.uca.org.au/unity/dialogues/item/1405-agreed-statement-on-the-ministry.
13. She further notes "the percentage of those in the top echelon would have been considerably lower." http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0032b.htm.
14. The term "egalitarian" here refers to openness to both women and men in the ministry of the church.
15. Colour Conference launches with a magazine-style invitation. Many women collect this memento.

16. Hillsong's second generation of music, "United," was intentionally differentiated as "masculine" or "rugged" music, considered a positive trait within marketing circles (Riches 2010, 162). This suggests Hillsong sought to redress perceived imbalance that its church music was too "feminine."
17. The 2016 conference was held in London, Cape Town, South Africa, Kiev, Ukraine, and New York City, and in 2017 expands to Phoenix and Los Angeles.
18. This represented 1024 attendees at Hills, and 696 at the City Campus. Notably, the following 2011 survey may have an over-representation of college students, and thus earlier statistics were used.

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CHAPTER 6

A Comparison of the Religious and Ethnic Ethos of Hillsong College with Paul the Apostle

Isaac Soon

I see a church with a world-class college that raises, equips and empowers generations of young, anointed leaders from across the globe. Graduates who serve God in all walks of life, released to salt the earth with dynamic ministries and churches throughout the continents of the world.
– Brian Houston *The Church I Now See* 2014

Hillsong College serves as a training ground for emerging Christian ministry leaders from all over the world. An oft-quoted adage within Hillsong Church is: "Culture is not taught, it's caught," so hundreds of new students from a wide range of denominational backgrounds and ethnicities venture every year to the eastern shores of Australia in order to catch the culture of Hillsong Church.[1] It is for this reason that the College remains so close to the hub of the Church in Sydney, despite opportunities to open up other extensions of its College at the Church's satellite campuses globally.

Cross-denominational interactions between diverse ethnic expressions of Christianity have been a core feature of pentecostal-charismatic

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renewal movements for a long time. From its early moorings at Azusa Street and the ministry of William J. Seymour, the "birth" of pentecostalism saw interaction between people of many ethnic, socioeconomic, and denominational backgrounds. This diversity has led to its presence in so many different cultural contexts, most especially in the Global South (Anderson et al. 2010, 1).

Yet at the same time, however, at the roots of pentecostalism lies ecumenical and racial controversy. Though Seymour had for a time considered himself under the leadership of Charles Parham, once his success in Los Angeles overshadowed Parham's own ministry Parham became less than congenial. Parham railed against what was happening at Azusa Street, where he purported affluent white women fell into the arms of "big buck n*ggers" and that African American culture was being mistaken for the work of the Holy Spirit (Blumhofer 1993, 56). Additionally, after his arrest and the subsequent controversy that followed, Parham, who himself had earlier rejected denominationalism, found himself resenting and denouncing other leaders even within his own movement (ibid.).[2] Since this beginning, with the dawn of globalization and the acceptance of pluralistic beliefs in popular culture, the struggle to maintain religious and ethnic unity in modern pentecostalism has remained an important issue.

This chapter analyses the religious and ethnic ethos of Hillsong College in conversation with Paul the Apostle as found in the New Testament. It seeks to answer the question: What is the religious and ethnic ethos of Hillsong College and how does it compare to the Apostle to the Gentiles? As a New Testament scholar, I am interested, in particular, in what language and presuppositions the College uses to frame their attitudes toward these important pentecostal cultural values.[3] An analysis of these attitudes toward race and ecumenism is important because the College draws students from all over the world and because Hillsong Church plants congregations globally.

Paul as a dialogue partner also makes the most sense out of our early New Testament texts for two reasons. The first is that he himself had to mediate theologically how different groups with different beliefs and cultural backgrounds interacted with one another. The second reason is because his texts are key today in the shaping of ecclesial and doctrinal approaches to orthodoxy and cultural interaction.

My own experience at the College as an Asian–Canadian international student from 2007 to 2010, and an employee from 2010 to 2015

informs this chapter. This forms the foundation for my inquiry into an "official" position as communicated by the department. To summarize the College's religious and ethnic ethos I have limited the sources to official written materials (lectures, marketing promotions, policies and procedures, website).[4] These materials, although created by a variety of different parties in different areas, represent the unified voice of the College and I endeavor to synthesize this voice where possible. Admittedly, it is very likely that the day-to-day reality of the College varies from the ideal ethos presented in this material. However, a full ethnographic examination is not only outside of my own specialty as a New Testament scholar but would serve as an inappropriate conversation partner with the evidence we have from the Apostle Paul.

The chapter is broken down into two parts. The first part will explore the denominational ethos of Hillsong College (a department of Hillsong Church) in relation to its history and purpose. Next, I will analyze the College's ethnic and cultural ethos through content provided within its training and marketing material. In the second part, Paul's "religious" and "ethnic" ethos will be delineated, paying attention to the difference between the way "religion" and "ethnicity" differ in meaning for Paul in his first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman context. Finally, I will compare the College's ethos to that of my examination of key Pauline passages and note digressions, continuities, and development. I find that the College is in many ways a reflection of Pauline attitudes both toward denominationalism as well as the relationship between the gospel and ethnic identity.

The Religious and Ethnic Ethos of Hillsong College

At the turn of the millennium, Hillsong College emerged from the amalgamation of *Aquila College of Ministries* (previously known as *International Institute for Creative Ministries*) and *Hills Leadership College* (previously *Power Ministry College*). This unification coincided with the fusion of Hills Christian Life Center and Sydney Christian Life Center as the two officially became what is now known as Hillsong Church in 1999. The College emphasizes the nurturing, facilitation, and empowerment of "young, anointed leaders from across the globe" in order to "salt the earth with dynamic ministries and churches throughout the continents of the world" (Hillsong College 2016b). Hillsong Church now trains students in identical programs at two Sydney locations known as the City and the Hills campuses of Hillsong College.

Long before the marriage between *Aquila College of Ministries* and *Hills Leadership College*, both colleges had paid particular attention to the opportunity to provide ministry training not only for local Australians and New Zealanders but for the international community as well, seeking accreditation with the Australian Department of Immigration, as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs and later VETAB (now ASQA). The colleges have always had a high proportion of international students and, at the writing of this chapter some 17 years on, the international student community of Hillsong College now constitute the majority of the student population. With students from over 100 countries, 65% of whom come from the Global South, it truly draws on the international community.

Hillsong College's Religious Ethos

In speaking about the "religious" ethos of the College, this section aims to understand the College's definition of religion and, more importantly, religious interaction, especially within intra-Christian circles. At the heart of the question is denominationalism (that is, diverse branches of Christianity) and how Hillsong College walks the tension of preserving its own pentecostal characteristics while respectfully engaging with its "religious others."

The educational philosophy of the College is to train men and women with a particular pentecostal doctrinal emphasis. This is not unusual for ministry-focused institutions. Originally, the College courses were intended to train adherents of the Australian Assemblies of God, now known as the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) movement (Hillsong College 2016b). However, the College now welcomes and accepts applicants from a diverse range of denominational backgrounds (Hillsong College 2016a). Now within its advertising, the College's emphasis is expressed as "being Protestant in belief" but "Pentecostal in application" (ibid.). Interestingly, in addition to discipleship and being planted in a healthy church, the aspects that the College considers to be its core "doctrines" are the gifts and baptism in the Holy Spirit, two core pentecostal "distinctives" (Hillsong College 2013, 205). These core doctrines reflect an ethos that draws attention to both pentecostal church tradition and beliefs.

At the same time, the educational philosophy of the College focuses heavily on instilling the "culture" of Hillsong Church (Hillsong College 2016d).

By "culture" here I simply mean the core values of the Church. The College and the Church exist in a "symbiotic relationship," where the students glean from the "distinct approach and philosophy to church life and ministry" and where the vision and mission of Hillsong are furthered by the students' involvement (Hillsong College 2016a). The idea is that the student will "be totally immersed into the life of Hillsong Church" and "be involved in the actual work of the ministry each week" (Hillsong College 2016b). The College expects international students who have left their home churches to serve within Hillsong Church. The exception to the rule is those who serve, volunteer, or work in their own local Sydney congregation. Thus, Hillsong students engage Christian service in a variety of denominations (Hillsong College 2016b). Though catching the culture of Hillsong Church is clearly a priority, an essential aspect of the student's learning is the application of their learning in a local congregation regardless of its denominational affinity.

Though leadership and theology are the primary disciplinary focuses of Hillsong College subjects, anthropology forms a close secondary focus in the College's ministry, mission, and religious studies materials. The understanding of religion as evinced within the College's lecture material is often in service of an apologetic that seeks to separate Christianity from the religious other. In one assessment the students are asked to reduce another religion to "three major beliefs" and "two major cultural aspects," which encourages simplistic analysis (Hillsong College 2013, 14). Additionally, this is exacerbated by residue from the popular trope that "Christianity is a relationship, not a religion" (Hillsong College 2013, 22). As the main reason to understand other religions is for the purpose of evangelism (Hillsong College 2013, 14), one of the major purposes for studying them in the first place is to be able to discredit their arguments (Hillsong College 2013, 25–26).[5] The course's examination of New Age movements, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses alongside Catholicism indicate that the religious other includes sub-Christian groups and even other Christian denominations. However, as well as religious sensitivity and comparability, an important skill the student should walk away with is the ability to "discern Christian groups from cultic 'Christian-like' groups" (Hillsong College 2013, 5). The reduction of both the religious other into simple "beliefs" and "cultural aspects" (as well as framing Christianity into a "relationship") does not help to appreciate the complex differences between religious entities. If the goal is to distinguish between orthodox Christianity and other

religious expressions, then what is necessary as a starting point are robust understandings of those expressions.

For example, though one might argue that Catholicism is historically *the* orthodox Christian denomination, the College in its language struggles to place it squarely in a "Christian group" category or even a "Christian-like" one. At one place it admits the Christian essence of Catholicism. The course outline reads, "This religion is not a different world religion to Christianity in dogma … we are studying it to understand some of the major differences in practice" (Hillsong College 2013, 202). It is perhaps revealing that Catholicism is described here as a "religion," implying a perceived dogmatic and legalistic history between Protestantism and the Catholic Church. This implicit separation between Catholicism and Protestantism and its grouping with other religions is clearly seen in one of the questions asked in a tutorial to the students. Referring to "Shintoism, Catholicism/Folk Catholicism and Illuminati" the trainer is to ask two questions: (a) "Have you had any experiences with people of any of the above religions?" and (b) "What type of question do you think people from these religious backgrounds would have towards Christianity?" (Hillsong College 2013, 206). It may be that this is an editorial mistake, though this is not the only occasion when Catholicism is subtly demarcated from orthodox Christianity.

As in the tutorial mentioned above, Catholicism is elsewhere conflated with Folk Catholicism. A lecture on *World Religions* notes that Folk Catholicism is "a mixture of Catholicism and local beliefs … in Gaelic Scotland, Philippines, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Southern India as well as South American countries and the Caribbean" (Hillsong College 2013, 203). Though the lecture covers unique Catholic practices (e.g., "Mother Mary," rosary beads) the large majority of it (at least based on the percentage of content in the notes) describes Roman Catholicism in terms of Folk Catholic beliefs. Though the lecturer is reminded to mentioned that "not all catholics [sic] believe in this" ("this" referring to Folk Catholicism, Hillsong College 2013, 203), by nature of how much content is spent on this stream of Catholicism alone, a listener would be hard-pressed to distinguish between Folk and Roman Catholicism. The lecture outlines the problem with Folk Catholicism as syncretism of beliefs (not just practices) that occurs especially where local deities are turned into saints. This indicates the College's concern on in preserving the purity of Christianity, a purity in which, based on the statement above, Catholicism outside of Protestant

Europe and North America did not and perhaps still does not maintain. This preoccupation with purity reflects Western Christianity's fear of syncretistic religion, when local cultures mix with the gospel. The irony, however, is that it is becoming increasingly recognized amongst scholarship that pentecostalism has part of its roots in African spirituality, that pentecostalism itself is a product of "syncretistic" beliefs and practices.

Further underlying apprehension toward Catholicism is evident elsewhere. Two more examples will suffice. The first example is in a lecture description of the declaration issued in 2000 *Dominus Iesus* from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. First, it is wrongly attributed to Pope John Paul II alone. It was then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) who was Prefect over the document; Pope John Paul II approved the declaration. Second, the declaration is described in the *Church History* lecture as "regarding Equality [sic] of other religions" (Hillsong College 2015a, 201). The underlying sentiment is that this declaration places all religions within and without Christianity as being valid and equal. In reality, the thrust of the declaration is the inclusion of non-Catholic Christians, including Protestants, into the "ecclesial community" (*Dominus Iesus*, 16–17). However, it openly refutes any kind of religious relativism "which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another'" (ibid., 22).

The second example of Catholic apprehension comes from a *Mission and Culture* lecture explaining the Crusades: "It [the Crusades] was stirred up by a Pope; preached by the devout Bernard of Clarivaux and flies in the face of the Biblical Theology of Missions we have established" (Hillsong College 2016c, 47). The initial reason ("It was stirred up by a Pope"), though perhaps historically descriptive, also self-evidently implies that the Crusades were caused by a Catholic religious misdemeanor, perhaps infallibility or perhaps something else.

It does not appear, however, that the College's ethos toward Catholicism is consciously antagonistic. These examples do not denote a purposeful misconstruing of Catholicism. Neither do they entail a wholesale rejection of Catholicism as a pseudo-Christian entity. Rather, it is perhaps that the College's apprehension represented in its teaching material toward Catholicism is based largely on misconceptions, stereotypes, or misunderstandings of doctrinal belief or practice latent in Protestant culture. Indeed, many of the College's trainers have themselves attended and studied in Catholic higher education institutions. But, negative conceptions about Catholicism are very prevalent within

popular Protestant circles and it is likely that the College has inherited these beliefs. These skew the ethos of the College against Catholicism, creating dissonance that sometimes does not and other times does differentiate Catholicism from Christianity.

In comparison to Catholicism, the College's ethos toward other Protestant denominations within Protestantism is more amicable. A *Church History* lecture emphasizes the two-way street: "From our end, we need to be accepting of other Christians as brothers and sisters in the Lord, even if they do not participate in the baptism in the Spirit or speak in tongues" (Hillsong College 2015a, 215). In fact, the purpose of drawing a comparison between denominations is merely to "throw light on a difficult area for greater understanding" and not to compare ourselves with others (Hillsong College 2015d, 78). Language used in reference to other denominations, however, is not always consistent and occasionally it slips, emphasizing a harder line between pentecostalism and the rest: "Sadly, some weaker denominations have taken up the social action flag without the power of the Word of God going hand in hand" (Hillsong College 2015a, 230).

The observed tension in accepting other denominations (including Catholicism) is based upon two impulses or reasons. The first is to preserve the diverse and unified vision expressed in the early pentecostal movement. Just as William Seymour saw the unification of people from all different backgrounds, religious or otherwise, so to the differences between Hillsong pentecostalism and other denominations are not important enough to create division. This ideal is the reason for the emphasis on shared "dogma" between "Mainline Protestantism." What is shared (the person and work of Jesus Christ; scriptural authority, soteriological work of Jesus; the Trinity; justification by faith) weights more in favor of unity than what may be different (Hillsong College 2015a, 218). Sometimes, however, the College has a tendency to draw subtle differences between "mainline Protestantism," "Roman Catholicism," and "Orthodox Christianity" on the issue of Spirit baptism and soteriology (Hillsong College 2015d, 144). But, just because others in these traditions do not have a pentecostal "conversion experience" they should not be told that "they are not Christians" (ibid., 145).

The second reason is due to the effect of charismatic movements on other denominations. These movements have made other denominations more amicable with pentecostalism because they now "participate in renewal and the gifts of the Spirit" (Hillsong College 2015a, 216).

However, even in this overlap of belief, the College teaches a clear distinction between "Pentecostals," those who are actually a part of pentecostal denominations, and "Charismatics," those who stay in their original denomination (ibid.).

As this section has shown, the major struggle of the College's religious ethos is the preservation of their own denominational characteristics without creating a "two-tiered" Christianity. The College is clear that pentecostalism is evangelical (Hillsong College 2015a, 198) and that it aligns with mainline Protestantism, and to a certain extent Catholicism (on Orthodox Christianity there is not enough data). Yet, it differentiates between "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic." Moreover, the College distinguishes its own Hillsong identity apart from the identity of other pentecostals. The resulting significance is that the College promotes and emphasizes its own unique Hillsong identity.

Hillsong College's Ethnic and Cultural Ethos

Part of the vision of Hillsong College ("to salt the earth") is to enhance the worldview of each student. According to Joel A'Bell, Lead Pastor of Hillsong Australia, it is the combination of serving at a local church and studying at an international college that brings this transformation. The College promises its students that its staff will not only be qualified "but sensitive to the culture(s) of the students being taught" (Hillsong College 2016a). This section aims to delineate the ethnic and cultural ethos expressed in the College's literature.

As far as the College's definition of "ethnicity" or "culture" is concerned there does not appear to be a uniform understanding. On the one hand, it reflects contemporary social-scientific analysis and explores individual and group identity (Hillsong College 2016c, 60). However, often the word "culture" is used as a conflation of race, ethnicity, and nationalism (Hillsong College 2015b, 94–95). For the most part, "culture" and by extension "ethnicity" is defined in the College literature as "worldview." The flattening of these categories reflects a current critique of modern social-scientific analysis in which the categories of ethnicity, race, and culture (and nationality) are often collapsed into one another (Winant 2015, 2179–2180).

The College encourages students to understand and respect different ethnic cultures (Hillsong College 2015b, 61). Ethnic practices are valuable because they are gifts from God (ibid., 57) and compassion and

empathy are the lenses through which students may view other cultures (Hillsong College 2015c, 44). In fact, the College promotes immersion into the cultures of others so as to appreciate and be sensitive to different worldviews; it advances a "metacultural" outlook (Hillsong College 2016c, 64). In order to reach others, students need to be "culturally sensitive" and understand their worldview (ibid., 65–66). Therefore, the utility of understanding other cultures is for evangelism.

One of the most consistent and salient points of the College's ethnic and cultural ethos is that scriptural Kingdom culture transforms ethnic culture. The Bible is the basis for supra-cultural ("heavenly") values, which, when allowed to transform human cultures, "can lead to the wise appreciation and evaluation of the value of other cultures" (Hillsong College 2015b, 56). It is an appeal to a kind of "trans-cultural theology" that transcends the differences between different people groups (cultural, racial, national). The underlying model for this theology is Jesus and Paul whom the College argues worked within diverse cultures while at the same time transforming divisive ethnic practices.

There is for the College a distinction between ethnic practices and cultural behaviors and attitudes. Generally, ethnic practices are not mentioned whatsoever in relation to Kingdom culture transformation. Transformation in terms of beliefs, emotions, and mindsets, however, is used in conjunction with "culture" (Hillsong College 2015c, 55). The majority of cultural transformation envisioned by the College does not appear to be concerning ethnic particularities (style of worship, dress, etc.) but intra- and interpersonal elements that inhibits the potential and growth of an individual or group (bad habits).

The College is very much concerned about not imposing particular ethnic cultures (Jewish, Western, or otherwise) on others. In contrast, it does not profess to be the arbiter of what cultural practices should undergo change and what practices should remain the same (Hillsong College 2015b, 60). Though it occasionally confuses terminology (e.g., equating inculturation and indigenization) it sees the role of Christian mission to adopt the theological culture of Christ, not turn other peoples into ethnic clones (Hillsong College 2016c, 65). The penultimate hero of this kind of Christian mission is the Apostle Paul, whom the College asserts taught that Jewish culture should not be imposed on everyone else (ibid., 63). It asserts that a skillful missionary is one who can help people to make cultural changes that allow them to serve Christ while at the same time causing "as little disruption as possible in the culture lives

of a people" (Hillsong College 2015b, 96). In spite of this approach which assumes a "de-ethnicized" scripture with Christian principles that can be universally applied, there are a few ethnic practices that need "cleansing" through the Spirit (Hillsong College 2016c, 101), namely idolatry and pantheism. The College is very open about how ethnic traditions have been contaminated by sin in these two ways.

Although the College endorses a nonthreatening transformative Kingdom ethos, its presentation of the history of Christian mission is somewhat truncated. In an overview of missiological movements from 1600 to the present the College's material noticeably glosses over more negative colonial effects of the missionary movements described (e.g., government schools in Canada which literally stamped out First Nation language and culture). At one point it does admit the reality of colonialization (Hillsong College 2016c, 49), however, overall it presents an idealized and victorious Protestant Christian mission to the nations: "In 1800 the Protestant missionary movement began in earnest, taking with them democratic government structures, schools, hospitals, universities and political foundations" (ibid., 50). It is difficult not to see the white-savior myth standing behind this sentiment. However, in regards to the Christian Mission to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, the College does readily admit the negative effects (ibid., 113).

Overall, on paper the College promotes a scripture-based culture that emphasizes God's Kingdom, one that attempts to honor local traditions, but asks that restrictive ethnic marks are removed so as to increase its ability to integrate with other cultures. There is no pressure to assimilate to a particular ethno-religious practice, Jewish or otherwise. Rather than focus on ethnic cultural practice, the College is concerned with community culture and behavioral modification. It is not that ethnicity does not matter. The College's emphasis is that when individuals are exposed to Kingdom culture, original ethnic cultures should be preserved as much as possible. There are elements of these cultures that are incompatible with God's Kingdom culture, however, and require disposal or purification. But these cultures as a whole are not simply dispensable because of incompatible elements. They are redeemable, since the Gospel can transform them, removing idolatry and deviant worship, into ethnic cultures infused with Kingdom spirituality. At the same time, one concern is the de-ethnicization of the Christian scriptures, the result of which often moves toward the displacement of Christianity's Jewish roots and even to supersessionist or anti-Jewish attitudes.

Paul's "Religious" and "Ethnic" Ethos

This section will consider in brief the religious and ethnic ethos of Paul the Apostle, through 1 Corinthians and Galatians. Of course, we cannot assume that Paul saw "religion" and "ethnicity" in the same way that we do today. There has been much discussion about the use of the terms "ethnicity" or even "race" to describe early Christian self-identification. Although I cannot go into detail about the discussion here, we will adopt a collective view of identity in which the individual reflects on the characteristics of a group (Harland 2009, 6–7) and view "ethnicity" and "race" according to Buell's definition as "understandings of human difference" (Buell 2005, 2). These understandings of "identity" and "ethnicity" are not to deny the distance in horizon between Paul and ourselves, but have "heuristic value" for understanding history (Lieu 2016, 4).

In the early Christian movement there were no "denominations" as we have them today, formalized by governance, statute, and doctrine. Scholarship often talks about "Pauline" or "Petrine" or "Johannine" communities denoting formal self-identification within New Testament Christianity. However, these are themselves historical reconstructions. At most we might say that there were congregations and communities that had been established by different early Christian missionaries. That all of these communities saw themselves within different "streams" of "The Way" is not evident.[6] In fact, whether these communities saw themselves as outside of Judaism is unclear as well. What is evident is that Paul did encounter division and conflict in both Corinth and Galatia. In spite of differences from today, these examples of factionalism are perhaps the closest comparison we have to a Pauline encounter with modern-day denominationalism.

One of Paul's concerns in 1 Corinthians is of the different types of division (σχίσμα) taking place in the community. In 11:18–34 and 12:25, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for profaning the institution of the Eucharist by turning it to a segregated meal rather than a shared meal, the result of which meant the poor were left with nothing to eat. Paul's worry also appears in 1 Cor 1:10–17 where he attempts to down-play divisional pride that has arisen amongst the Corinthians. It has been reported to him by Chloe (1:11) that different members of the community identify with different Christian leaders: "For I am talking about this, that each of you is says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollo,'

or 'I belong to Peter,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Surely, Paul was not crucified for you nor were you baptized into Paul's name!" (1:12–13).[7] Paul is emphatic that what unites the Corinthians together is not the one who brought the message, but the person who died on behalf of them and in whose name they were baptized: Jesus. The unity of believers in Christ is for Paul emphasized frequently in many of his letters through the metaphor of the "one body" (ἕν σῶμα—Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 6:16; 10:17; 12:12–13, 20; cf. Eph 2:16; 4:4; Col 3:15). It is the single baptism, because of Jesus and through the one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) that tethers believers to one another.

Earlier in his missionary career, Paul found himself in opposition to some who were attempting to circumcise Gentile Christians in Galatia. What is significant for us is the emphasis that Paul places on his own gospel message in his letter. In Gal 1:8–9, Paul is vehement that any gospel other than the one he initially preached is cursed, including the one preached by those who wanted to force circumcision upon the Gentiles and thus submission under the law (Gal 5:3; Öhler 2011, 244). Paul distinguishes between a Christian gospel that requires circumcision and one that does not. Though this is not a formal denominational separation, it is a separation of core beliefs. The gospel is inherent for salvation and to jeopardize it with circumcision (for the sake of boasting—Gal 6:13) was to put one's future at risk. In this case, Paul emphasizes the gospel message that the Galatians have received from him alone.

So in terms of factions within believers, for Paul, while leadership should not cause division between believers, beliefs that contaminate or alter core aspects of the gospel are grounds for a separation or distinction between different groups. Interestingly, Paul is not afraid to prioritize his own "kerygma" (preaching) above all others.

In contrast to Paul's view of division in Christianity, Paul's attitudes toward ethnic identity are less simple to articulate as evidenced by growing scholarly literature. For non-Jewish Christians, the Apostle Paul is the hero that stood against ethnic legalism. In Galatians Paul clearly and openly prohibits making circumcision the requirement for the Gentiles to be full members of God's covenant through Jesus (Gal 5:2–3). This is later reiterated in his letter to the Romans (2:28–29; 3:30). Despite the prodigious amount of research done on Second Temple Judaism as well as the so-called the New Perspective(s) on Paul, the popular idea of "Faith versus Works" or "Grace versus Law" (and by logical extension, "Christianity" versus "Judaism" and "liberty versus legalism") still

remains prevalent in popular Christian circles. Christianity is the glorious liberation from legalistic and works-based Jewish culture. Yet, modern biblical scholarship under the banner of "the Parting of the Ways," has reiterated firmly once again that Christianity in the time of the Gospels and Paul, for all intents and purposes, *was* a part of Judaism and that the separation came much later (see Dunn 2006).

Paul as our earliest witness to Christian communities testifies to the importance of ethnic identity for both Jewish and non-Jewish believers alike from the very beginning of nascent Christianity (Öhler 2011, 243). A *crux interpretum* for Paul and ethnicity is Gal 3:28. While it may seem that this verse ("There is no longer Jew or Greek") signals the end of ethnicity, a closer reading shows an important nuance.

The first thing to note is that Paul's writings view ethnicity from the binary perspective of "Jew" and "Non-Jew" (Frey 2007, 300; Stanley 2011, 118). Indeed, the whole of Paul's gospel worldview is dependent upon Jewish scriptures, traditions, and a Jewish Messiah. The distinction between human cultures begins for Paul with the Jew. Whatever identity emerges out of his gospel is going to be Jewish in some way shape or form. The other ethnic identities of his followers will thus be somehow infused with this gospel of Jewish origins.

The second thing to note is that the gospel does not simply remove the realities of these human divisions. The Jewish or Greek ethnicity, slave or free status, male or female gender, all remain present realities for believers; they do not simply cease to exist. What Paul envisions here is an overarching framework that allows for people with these different distinctions to co-exist and flourish. This overarching framework is not a new race (against supersessionism). At least in Galatians, Paul uses the language of family rather than the language of ethnicity (Butticaz 2015, 509). This overarching framework is what Butticaz calls "an apocalyptic identity": the "new creation" of Gal 6:15 (Butticaz 2015, 518). "New creation" is thus a supra-ethnic category for Paul. This kinship does not suddenly make the ethnic, engendered, and economic cultures disappear. Nor is the text concerned with overriding or abandoning these cultures as a whole. The believer retains his or her Jewishness or Greekness but these ethnic boundaries do not define the terms for the community of those who follow Christ. It is faith that is the currency of God's new household (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:26). What Paul is arguing in Gal 3:28 is that cultural distinctions (ethno-cultural, gender, economic) do not determine who are heirs to the God's promise. It is not these

distinctions but their oneness in Christ (πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) which defines them. If, however, any aspects from these cultures (e.g., circumcision) disrupt the community of those who are united by faith in Christ, then, the believers need to remind themselves of the basis of their inheritance. Their inheritance in Christ hinges upon the extra-ethnic faith of Jesus Christ.

In Paul's mind, the family of God is united, not by distinct ethno-religious practices such as circumcision, sabbath keeping, or kosher food laws but by the saving faith of Jesus. This is the significance of his example of Abraham's descendants in Romans 4. It is not about physical genealogical ethnic ancestry, but an ancestry of righteousness through faith (Rom 4:11–12; Gal 3:28–29). The community of God is united by a gospel-culture that consists of faith in God's work through Jesus (Gal 2:15–16; Rom 4:16) and a Spirit that testifies to their inheritance (Rom 8:15–16).

Conclusion: Hillsong College's Ethos in Comparison to Paul

This chapter has shown the way that Hillsong College works to maintain its own unique Hillsong identity in the context of larger charismatic and Protestant Christian movements. It has also shown that the College emphasizes a transposable Kingdom culture that works with rather than against the ethnic identity of believers. In many ways Hillsong College's denominational and religious ethos is consistent with Paul's own religious and ethno-cultural ethos. Both the College and Paul aim to preserved unity between Christians by emphasizing core beliefs that are shared in common. They also both emphasize the importance of ethnic cultures, however, not at the expense of the transformative power of the gospel.

However, there are some points of departure. The College is much more concerned than Paul about emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of their own denomination. At times their accentuation of the key pentecostal doctrines of baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues, leads the expression of a larger divide between them and other denominations. Paul, make no mistake, does emphasize his own gospel (e.g., Gal 1:6–9). However, the gospel that Paul stresses is justification by faith, something that Hillsong College considers a core Christian belief.

The pentecostal doctrines of Baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues, by the College's own self-admission, should not be points that cause schism.

This chapter has demonstrated that the trainers at Hillsong College (at least based on the official written material) have attempted and are continuing to grapple with the complexities of culture, in both the religious and ethnic realms. They are a set of individuals who are immersed in classrooms of diverse students on a regular basis. The flow of their students into Hillsong Church affects the greater community. Tensions and issues from churches across the globe are brought into dialogue with one another and debated in this educational setting. This osmosis is not unlike the apostle Paul as he journeyed across the early Church communities. The problems he faced are the same ones that pentecostal communities like Hillsong College are poised to provide solutions toward in the coming decades.

Notes

1. A note on nomenclature: The official institutional name of "Hillsong College" is "Hillsong International Leadership College." It is abbreviated to "Hillsong College" in this chapter simply for convenience. The title "College" in Australia's government-accredited educational framework does not refer to "University-status" as it does in the US. Hillsong College is a Vocational Educational Training (VET) provider, which offers government accredited awards that are transferable and recognized across Australia. The legitimacy of the awards is evident in the matriculation agreements the College has with other US and European Universities. In terms of "awards" (what might be termed "degrees" in the US), the College offers Diplomas, Bachelor, and Master Degrees. The Diploma awards are not "degrees" in the North American sense but Vocational Training awards. The Bachelor and Master degrees are fully accredited higher-education awards (as in North American and Europe), conferred in partnership with Alphacrucis College.
2. Parham had apparently been accused of sodomy.
3. I use the term "culture" in the way that the College understands it which refers to core ideas, values, customs, and social behavior.
4. Within Hillsong College's Vocational Educational Training (VET) system, all lecture and tutorial content is delivered via training manuals. These act as a repository of material that trainers can use in teaching and for later reference. One of the requirements of accreditation is consistency of teaching

across multiple campus sites and these training manuals facilitate that purpose.

5. The material cites 1 Cor 10:5 and 1 Pet 3:15 as proof texts.
6. This was an early name that reference to Christianity. See Acts 9:2; 19:9; 19:23; 24:14; 24:22.
7. λέγω δὲ τοῦτο ὅτι ἕκαστος ὑμῶν λέγει· ἐγὼ μέν εἰμι Παύλου, ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Χριστοῦ.

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CHAPTER 7

"The Come to Brazil Effect": Young Brazilians' Fascination with Hillsong

Cristina Rocha

As I have been doing for the past two years, I went to the Sydney city campus of Hillsong church to conduct research during service in late June 2016. Upon arrival, I was greeted by a couple of young Brazilians who were volunteering at door ministry: "Welcome to church," they chirped in unison. I knew them so kissed them hello, and walked into the reception area. There I found myself surrounded by many other young Brazilians. Some were queuing to pick up their translation devices from other Brazilians volunteering behind the reception desk. Others were chatting in groups. By now I knew a lot of them and I joined in the conversation. As expected for temporary migrants and students they were chatting about jobs (or the lack of), English language skills, college assessments, accommodation, visa applications, and for some, work-led sponsorships, that would allow them to apply for Permanent Residency. They were feeling anxious about at least one of these topics. After all, for the vast majority, this was the first time they were both living in a foreign country and living independently from their parents.

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When the doors finally opened we got in together and walked toward the rows marked "reserved for the Brazilian community." Most Brazilians come to services on Sunday evenings (as is customary in Brazil), and they usually amount to 200 people each Sunday. This was a Saturday evening service but they were there in equally large numbers because we were having a Brazilian "country party"[1] after the service. Indeed, after the usual worship, praying, and offering, the pastor announced the "Brazilian barbeque and dance after-party" and the Brazilians in the audience cheered and clapped. So the pastor asked us to stand up, and then invited two Brazilian students from Hillsong College to come on stage. We screamed and cheered a bit more. Next, the pastor asked the students to teach him how to dance the *samba* while the band played Brazilian music. The whole congregation—mostly made up by other youngsters—went wild, and the students took to the microphone to invite everybody to stand up and try some steps. The congregation laughed excitedly and gave their best shot at samba. A few minutes later, the music stopped, the students left the stage, and we moved on to the "Church News" video clip. Meanwhile, in the large warehouse area adjacent to the church auditorium, Brazilian volunteers were busy heating up typical country party food to be sold at the café, and preparing the small stage for the square dance that would take place after the service. How did this community become so large at Hillsong church to the point of holding their own parties for the congregation?

In this chapter, I investigate the global forces that have been attracting an ever-growing number of young Brazilians to Australia and to Hillsong church. Brazilians' fascination with Hillsong has led to some Hillsong insiders informally terming "The Come to Brazil Effect"—a phenomenon in which Brazilians beg the church on social network media to set up a branch in Brazil. In late-2016, a Brazilian campus was finally created in São Paulo city. This is particularly striking since Brazil is the country with most pentecostals in the world, with its own share of pentecostal megachurches (Freston 2001, 198; 2004; Mariano 2010). This chapter argues that the fascination with Hillsong is a consequence of an asymmetry of power between the Global North and Global South. Young Brazilians desire to go to Australia and be part of Hillsong because they aspire to join the culture and lifestyles of the Global North, or "First World," as they call it. Hillsong's strong youth and celebrity cultures, its global branding which emphasizes excellence, competency, efficiency, and success (Riches 2010, 149; Wagner 2013), its focus on

love and inclusivity, and its operation in English language and location in Australia all make it a desirable church in the eyes of young middle-class Brazilians. Indeed, for them Hillsong offers the opportunity to learn English, meet Australians and other foreigners, and live a kind of pentecostalism which is fun, exciting, and more informal and attuned to youth culture than what they have in their home country.

This chapter draws on participant observation with Brazilians in the Hillsong city campus and in a "connect group"[2] that meets fortnightly in Sydney. It is also draws on interviews with Brazilians who live in Sydney and study in the college or are part of the congregation, those who travel from Brazil to Sydney for a short period of time to participate in the Hillsong annual conference.

The Brazilian Diaspora in Australia

Brazil was traditionally a net-immigrant nation, but the socioeconomic crisis of the late twentieth century exacerbated social inequalities, crime, and violence prompting many Brazilians to emigrate. Although this situation has improved in the past decade, it remains the nation with the eighth most unequal wealth distribution in the world, with alarming rates of crime and violence (Caldeira and Holston 1999; Wacquant 2008). While the poor leave the country to find work elsewhere, young middle-class professionals and students leave to escape crime and violence in everyday life (Rocha 2014; Rocha and Vásquez 2013).[3] For the latter, moving to the developed world is not perceived as "migration" but as "adventure," a rite of passage in which they learn to live alone and to support themselves, without family and friends by their side. Most of all, what propels their travel is a desire to become part of the "First World."

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Australia has become a favored destination for this sector of Brazilian society. The majority arrives as students and subsequently applies for permanent residence. Australia's beach/surf culture, safe streets, English language, strong economy, developed-world status, and for many, Hillsong, are significant attractions (Duarte 2005; Rocha 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2014; Wulfhorst 2011, 2014). Traditionally the USA, which also boasts many of these features, has attracted a majority of Brazilian migrants. However, Australia's visa system allows 20 hours of work per week and

the potential for future migration through a point system, and so things are changing.

A precise number of Brazilians in Australia is hard to estimate, but it is clear that the community has been growing quickly. Official statistics greatly understate the nation's Brazilian-born population (the 2011 census counted 11,404), as most Brazilians are reluctant to complete census forms because of a generalized distrust of government (DaMatta 1984; Hess and DaMatta 1995; Sallas and Bega 2007). A survey conducted by the Brazilian Ministry for Foreign Relations counted 27,000 Brazilians in Australia in 2014 (MRE 2015), and in 2016 the Consulate-General of Brazil in Sydney spoke of a population of 70,000. According to the Australian Department of Education and Training, Brazil is the sixth largest supplier of students to Australia, with 17,267 students enrolled in 2015, just behind China, India, Vietnam, South Korea, and Malaysia. Of these, 12,000 were aged between 20 and 29 years old and another 3000 were between 30 and 34 years old (DET 2016). It is clear that this is a young adult cohort. Most of them either already have tertiary education, or have deferred their university studies halfway through their degree to study English in Australia. Indeed, Brazil had the second highest student numbers in the ELICOS sector (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) after China in 2015. After a period of studying English, most of them move on to VET (Vocational Education and Training) courses hoping to be sponsored by their bosses in order to become Australian Permanent Residents. However, some enroll in the Hillsong International Leadership College, which provides them with a student visa and is more meaningful to them than studying in vocational courses when they already hold tertiary degrees. From this profile (tertiary-educated, and able to travel, and pay for their studies overseas), we can infer that these Brazilians in Australia belong to the middle class.

Scholars have demonstrated the ways in which religious institutions from the home country support their migrant congregation by creating a home away from home (Freston 2008; Levitt 2003; Vásquez and Marquardt 2003; Tweed 2002). They help migrants cope with the pressures and anxieties of migration by offering them a meeting place where they can speak the language and eat food from the homeland, meet others in the same situation and make friends, and find out about jobs, accommodation, and the culture of the host society. However, for many Brazilians I spoke to this was not enough. Traveling to Australia by themselves and as young and middle class, they also wanted to learn

English, meet Australians, and integrate in society to recover their middle-class status as soon as possible. Hillsong potentially offered these things plus the gloss of being part of a famous church. A Brazilian pastor told me that recently arrived Brazilians came to his church to feel safe and meet other Brazilians. However, once they were more established in the new country, they left for Hillsong. He sighed when he concluded: "It is more fashionable to have a picture of themselves on Facebook by Hillsong than by my church. Brazilian churches do not give them the glamor that Hillsong gives" (Personal communication, Sydney, February 18, 2013). As Brazilians usually go to church at 7 pm on Sundays, some alternate between participating in services in his church and Hillsong. For them, each church fulfills a different role—the former gives them a small, close-knit community, where the pastor knows them well, while Hillsong helps them integrate in the new society. As a result, Brazilian churches suffer from a constantly fluctuating congregation and this puts them in a very precarious situation.

Hillsong in Brazil: Celebrities and Fans

Hillsong first arrived in Brazil as music. At the turn of the twenty-first century, following the global explosion of the song "Shout to the Lord," famous Brazilian worship bands started translating and recording whole albums of Hillsong United songs, while local churches frequently made their own translations to be sung at church. Brazilian youth spread the word by showing CDs and DVDs of the band to each other. From 2006 onwards, Hillsong celebrity singer Darlene Zschech and the band Hillsong United actually started touring Brazil to perform concerts and participate in the annual March for Jesus.[4] By then there were Brazilian Hillsong United fan clubs, and many fan communities on social media (such as *Eu Amo a Hillsong*/I Love Hillsong), particularly Google's Orkut, a precursor of Facebook.

Many of the young Brazilians at Hillsong whom I interviewed had attended these concerts as teenagers, after listening to the band on tapes or CDs given to them by their friends and family. They told me of the strong impression it made on them, which in turn made Australia desirable to visit. Paula is a good example of this.[5] This is how she describes how she found out about Hillsong:

> One thing that influenced me a lot was Hillsong. I got to know Hillsong when I was 10, 11 years old. My cousin came home one day with a CD, which she copied from the son of a pastor she met … that CD "Shout to the Lord," I remember it to this day. We heard the songs and it was an amazing experience for me. I didn't understand the English lyrics, but I was captivated somehow, by the praise, by the worship … After that, I used to play Hillsong CDs all day long every day. And we recognized a few songs, which we sang in church in Portuguese, which we didn't even know were translations! So we said, "Wow, so this band created the songs we sing [in church], so it must be really important and we didn't even know it!" (Personal communication, São Paulo, October 9, 2015)[6]

After that, Paula and her cousin researched Hillsong on the Internet, and found out that it was in fact a church (not only a band) in Australia. She started looking for other CDs, but it was very hard to find them as they were imported. Some months later, she finally found and bought a Hillsong DVD in a specialized Christian shop. The DVD explained the church; it included preachings by Senior Pastor Brian Houston, and showed scenes of the services, and youth events. Paula's parents were pastors and she started thinking that she could transform her family's church. She told me: "I saw that it was the young people who composed and recorded the CDs, and I started to see that as a dream, God's dream, a dream for our own church." The impact Hillsong had in her life was so great that she started studying English at 12 years old so that she could travel to Australia, study at Hillsong College, and bring what she learned back to her church. It is significant that Paula blurred her love of Hillsong and Australia, using the word "fan" to describe herself in both instances:

> I had all their CDs. And I kept researching about Australia on the internet. I had several photos, I studied the [Australian] culture, customs, curiosities, its exotic animals … *I studied virtually everything about Australia, I became a fan*! [laughs] Just like a teenage fan. *Every teenager has an idol singer, right? Mine was Hillsong; I was a fan*. I already knew the names of the band members from the DVD, so my cousin and I researched everything else about Hillsong on the internet. At the time it was more Myspace [that was] the social network, so we would even check out their [United band members'] profiles on Myspace! We were following them online, finding out where they were going to give concerts, how old they were, their family; I found out that Joel was Pastor Brian's son!

When the band finally came to São Paulo in 2006, she went to the concert with her cousin: "We arrived early, so that we could be right by the stage … Just like a fan that goes to a concert to see the band they love." In the following year, Darlene Zschech gave a concert in Rio, and Paula and a few friends took the five-hour bus ride from São Paulo to Rio on the day of the concert, and returned home on that very night. Significantly, the Internet played an important role in connecting them with other young Brazilians who also loved the band. Paula recalled:

> On [the social network site] Orkut there was this [Brazilian] Hillsong community, in which many Brazilians like me who had this dream, were exchanging conversations [about them and Australia]. In fact, after the concerts we used to organize a get-together with other people from the Hillsong Orkut community. So we were making more and more friends who also *dreamt of going to Australia, who loved Hillsong*.

Again, Paula overlaps Australia and Hillsong, turning both into the subject of her and her friends' dreams. In order to fulfill this dream, she started working to save money for the trip at 15. Finally, in 2009, when she turned 19, she left for Australia.

Here we can see the role of youth and celebrity cultures in attracting Paula and other young Brazilians to Hillsong and Australia. Celebrity culture is an important part of Hillsong branding and one that is managed carefully. According to Wagner (2013, 22),

> Hillsong's transnational structure dictates that it uses mass mediated, "celebritized" images of its musicians to communicate its values efficiently. However, it must do so in an evangelical Christian context in which only Jesus is the "Famous One" and celebrity is often viewed with suspicion. The "celebrity" of its musicians must therefore be carefully managed. To do this, Hillsong promotes its values and message through a group of well-known worship leaders who are also part of the church's inner circle. Darlene Zschech, perhaps Hillsong's most well-known worship leader, is co-branded with Hillsong – she and the church are inextricably associated with each other.

While Zschech has left Hillsong, other musicians, particularly JD and Taya Smith, have become celebrities in their own right. Celebrity culture is even more potent when it flows in English, the language of power, of globalization, and from the developed to the developing worlds.

Levitt (1998, 927) has coined the term "social remittances" to describe "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities." Significantly, she argues, "remittance impact is also a function of size and power differences between sending and receiving country … Some recipients will be more receptive to remittances because they want to be more like those in the 'rich,' 'modern,' receiving community" (ibid., 940). That is one of the reasons why, for many young Brazilians, going to Australia to visit or study at Hillsong College in Sydney becomes "a dream." A blog by a Brazilian who studied at Hillsong College demonstrates this. He writes:

> Many Brazilians write to me to ask about worship, pastoring and TV courses at Hillsong … In Brazil there is an immense fascination in relation to Hillsong. They sort of idolize the church, the worship, and even some pastors and singers … This fascination makes many Brazilians sell their car, borrow money from their father, uncle or grandfather to come here to take up these Hillsong seminary courses. (Strazzery 2011)

Indeed, when I asked a young Brazilian in his second year of the Hillsong College what his Brazilian friends thought of him studying there, he replied: "They think is it fantastic! I have a friend [who] tells everyone that his friend is studying at Hillsong, [that] his friend is part of Hillsong and such." His young friend was obviously hoping to have the sheen of celebrity, which he felt the student acquired by studying at Hillsong, rubbed off on him. Similarly, in his study of a pentecostal church in Brazil (Comunidade Evangélica da Restauração, CER), Gomes (2007) found that Hillsong is an inspiration in terms of music, dress, and service style for young CER adherents. A 23-year-old CER woman told Gomes (2007, 73):

> Hillsong has a lot to do with my dress style. I am just not blonde like the woman [Darlene Zschech], but I mirror myself in her … I find her way of thinking … I am dying to read her book but I haven't had the time yet. I think just like her. … I identify with her.[7]

The reference to Zschech's blonde hair and the desire to be like her is telling. It demonstrates the ways in which Hillsong, Anglo-Australia, and the developed, English-speaking world are associated with each other in the minds of Brazilians. This means that the church continues to struggle

to balance its music branding (and church growth) with the focus on God, as Wagner (2013) identified above. This fine line is epitomized within the Brazilian student cohort. A second-year Hillsong College Brazilian student, who is in charge of assisting newly enrolled Brazilian students in the college, is acutely aware of the issue. In his first meeting with new students, he always warns them not to treat those connected to Hillsong as celebrities. He tells them:

> Guys, please, this is their home, don't ask these famous Hillsong people to take pictures with you. I'd rather you have a chat, have a conversation [with them]." Because what is the photo for? To show someone who's not here that you had a moment of closeness (which you did not have!) with a person you never even met. For example, Taya Smith, the singer of United you just saw walk by … This girl has 300,000 followers, [she's] super famous, but here she feels at home. (Personal communication, Sydney, June 8, 2016)

Hillsong's celebrity status in Brazil has been strengthened since the megachurch established branches in the USA in 2010. As with other peoples in peripheral countries, Brazilians are very much aware of and copy trends in the Metropole. After Justin Bieber, Hailey Baldwin, and other celebrities joined the Hillsong services in NYC and LA, the church was featured in many American media stories. Perhaps the most notorious being Harper Bazaar's 2015 report titled "Is This The Most fashionable Church Ever?" (Marcus 2015). Brazilian celebrities have also joined the church, advertising this on social and old media. Take, for instance, David Luiz, the Brazilian soccer player who was on the Brazilian squad in the last World Cup. While playing for Chelsea he converted and was baptized in the London Hillsong branch, and after moving to Paris, to play for the Paris Saint-Germain, he joined the Paris branch of the megachurch. Since his conversion, he has posted pictures and comments of his church activities regularly on social media for his millions of fans in Brazil. Another local celebrity, Bruna Marquezine—a soap opera star at Globo TV network and former girlfriend of soccer player Neymar—has been to Hillsong Los Angeles. While there, she posted short videos of her church visit on Instagram and reproduced part of the lyrics of the song "Alive" to her fans (Chagas 2014). The fact that Brian and Bobby Houston's son Joel—a musician in the Hillsong United band and co-pastor of the church in NYC—is married to a Brazilian model has only

strengthened this connection between music, fashion, celebrity culture, and the church in the minds of Brazilians.

Hillsong's Excellence/Australia's Perfection

In addition to celebrity culture, another feature of Hillsong attracts Brazilians. All interviewees remarked that they were impressed by Hillsong's constant striving for "excellence." Indeed, Riches (2010) has shown that a key feature of Hillsong's branding is its association with the idea of "excellence." Likewise, Wagner (2013) demonstrated that the branding of the church with the idea of excellence is so successful that churchgoers expected musical and technical excellence when they went to Hillsong services in London. According to Wagner (2013, 107):

> Although the high production value of Hillsong and churches like it has sometimes been criticized as "glitz," the church counters that, for participants who experience the highest-quality level of media production in their everyday lives, anything less than that standard will be deemed amateurish and distract from worship.

In an interview, the Vice-Principal of Hillsong College concurred, and explained that the idea of making "excellence" a cornerstone of Hillsong comes from Senior Pastor Brian Houston. She explained what excellence means for the church with these words:

> It comes down to … me bringing my excellence to this meeting is actually just placing value on you and placing value on the time that we have. Excellence is not a formula … Excellence is bringing your best … God gave his best for us. Like he gave his son, he didn't hold back anything, and he did that so that we could be in a relationship with him and so at the heart of all of it is that. God didn't hold back his best, so why should we hold back our best? (Personal communication, Sydney, June 8, 2016)

Brazilians admire "excellence" because they associate it with the developed world. By contrast, Brazilians associate their own country with a culture of bending rules, cutting corners, and doing things carelessly. Bureaucracy, regulations, and inequality burden Brazilian society. In order to counter this situation, Brazilians usually resort to the so-called *jeitinho* ("a little way," from the expression *dar um jeito*), an informal

system of mutual favors where people bend the rules and bypass laws for others. In a way, *jeitinho* is a "recourse to power" (DaMatta 1991; Levine 1997). However, many Brazilians wish to leave this attitude behind when they arrive in Australia since they perceive it as a root cause of their country's developing status.

Hillsong may assist them in this endeavor. Following rules, being accountable, and giving their best are things they learn by serving the Hillsong church and studying at its College. Patricia, a young Brazilian who studied at Hillsong College for a year, also told me she learned commitment and following rules there. As we discussed the upcoming establishment of Hillsong in São Paulo in an interview, she was sure that Brazilians' lack of responsibility and *jeitinho* would pose obstacles for the church there. She said:

> They [at Hillsong] just have a mentality that is *gringa* [of foreigners], a mindset of excellence in service, commitment, a mindset that if you say you will do something, you have to do it right, and you will be held accountable. *This is a culture that they have overseas*, and it is very strong there [at Hillsong]. They teach students that. I learned it there and tried to bring it here a little, but Brazilians are not like that. If they want to go to a movie on Sunday night [the usual service time], they won't call their [ministry] leader and say "today I can't go because of this and that. I've asked a guy to replace me." No, they just don't show up, and then there's nobody there at the right time. Hillsong is very punctilious about these things. So [when they open in Brazil], there will be a lot of people without training and it's not going to work the way they want. I think they are taking a long time to open here because of that.

The same Brazilian College student in charge of assisting newly-enrolled Brazilian students in the College said he had a 10-point advice to them:

> We had a session about [Australian] culture, kind of what we need to change [in ourselves] here. It was really cool because I presented it to them in a funny way, as the "10 commandments" for Brazilians in the College. I said: "number one: the alarm clock is your friend; no Brazilian-time here. If the class is at 2:30 pm, be there at 2:25 pm, five minutes before the class. Don't be late because this is part of the Australian culture too. It is socially acceptable to be five or 10 minutes late in Brazil, not here; it is disrespectful, so don't be late." (Personal communication, Sydney, June 8, 2016)

Here this student is overlapping Australian and Hillsong cultures. Like Hillsong, Australia, as part of the developed world, is often idealized as perfect and its citizens as law-abiding. Australia first entered the Brazilian imaginary after the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000. Since then Australia has been featured in Brazil through an ever-increasing amount of (overwhelmingly positive) images circulating in the country. They are created as much by Brazilians in Australia (on social network sites), the Brazilian media, and the Australian government. For instance, as early as 2002 Folha de São Paulo, a prominent Brazilian newspaper, ran a story on Brazilians in Australia. One of the sections was titled "Everything Works in Sydney, Even Street Traffic," and it described how there were no traffic jams in Australia's largest city. Undoubtedly, this was a construction derived from a desire for what Brazil lacks: organization. Traffic jams are common occurrences in Sydney, and public transport is in some ways worse than in São Paulo (Sydney relies on a train rather than a subway system). In 2015 an OECD report found that Australia topped countries with the best quality of life in the world. This was picked up by many Brazilian magazines, blogs, and on social media. This comment was posted as a response to this news on a blog called Brazil Australia:

> I have a *dream*, that one day I'll be in this wonderful country. I pray to God that I am healthy and have money to go to Australia [one day]. I study everything about this fantastic country: its culture, way of life … everything makes me believe that Australia is a model to be followed by other countries. (http://www.brazilaustralia.com/os-paises-com-melhor-qualidade-de-vida-em-2015/)

Doing its part, the Australian government has been heavily marketing Australian education and tourism in Brazil. The Australian Embassy in Brazil organizes annual education fairs around the country to market Australia's "excellent" education system. It also entices Brazilians to travel to the country by promoting a positive image of Australia on its Facebook site. There it posts articles referring to Australia as one of the best places to live in the world. This is understandable since both education and tourism play a significant role in Australia's economy.[8] When these two idealized perceptions—of Hillsong and Australia—overlap, they create a strong pull-factor, which allures Brazilians to Australia.

Traveling to the country and being able to serve or study with celebrity singers in a fashionable church become infused with a dream-like quality.

Love and Inclusivity

While celebrity culture may attract Brazilians to Hillsong, other qualities besides excellence make them stay. The church focuses strongly on a message of inclusivity and love for others. At Hillsong, Pastors tell the congregation that everyone is welcome at church—no matter the way they are dressed or their actions—because Jesus never discriminated against anyone. The church focuses not on judging people or imposing rules on dress and behavior, but on bringing them through the gates and showering them with love. They believe that once people start coming to church the Holy Spirit will do its work and transform people's lives. Hence Hillsong's oft-repeated mottos: "Welcome Home," and "Come as You Are." For young Brazilians, who come from a conservative church culture where appropriate dress and behavior are paramount, this is significant. As young people, they are struggling to follow church rules while being bombarded with youth culture on social media.

Hillsong's focus on making people feel welcome, on loving rather than judging others and not isolating the church from the outside world is attuned with youth and middle-class sensibilities (Koehrsen 2016). While conducting fieldwork one Sunday evening after service, I witnessed a good example of the importance of Hillsong's inclusivity to this cohort. I was chatting with a group of Brazilians from my connect group, when a Brazilian girl approached us. She was wearing a miniskirt, boots, tank top, jeans jacket, and a hat and sporting tattoos. Some in the group started joking with her that she would not be allowed in their church in Brazil. Then each one took turns telling others horror stories of punishment when they did not behaved or dressed appropriately for church. One told us how she was put on a naughty bench on the corner during service and was forever embarrassed by the experience; another said his pastor became really upset when he got a little tattoo. Everyone kept nodding in agreement. At the end, they all laughed at these stories and agreed that it was much easier to be at Hillsong where they could dress as they felt like because the focus was not on these "small" things, but on their love for God.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore young Brazilians' fascination with Hillsong that has resulted in their growing number at the church's Australian services and in the International Leadership College. In particular, this chapter was interested in the ways Australia and Hillsong overlapped in Brazilians' imagination as dream places marked by perfection and excellence. It argued that the church's celebrity and youth cultures, branding emphasis on excellence, competence, and success, focus on love and inclusivity, and use of English language are strong factors in attracting young Brazilians and keeping them in the church. Certainly, both Australia's and Hillsong's location in the Global North gives middle-class Brazilians an opportunity to become cosmopolitan, something they intensely desired. For them, becoming fluent in English and integrating into Australian society are important in order to recover their middle-class status in the new country.

Most of the people I met during this research were first and foremost fans of Hillsong United, the church's worship band. Some only realized the band was part of a church when they became such dedicated fans that they researched the band and joined other fans on social network sites. Others realized this only *after* they decided to study overseas. Many then chose Australia as a place to study because of the opportunity to work and even possibly migrate to at the end of their studies. It also meant they would have the opportunity to be part of Hillsong, and join their celebrity musicians during services and at its College.

Notes

1. Introduced during Portuguese colonization, "country party" or *Festa Junina* is an annual festival which takes place in late June (hence "Junina"), the beginning of winter in Brazil. Although it occurs on the evenings of the days dedicated to Catholic saints (St. John the Baptist, St. Anthony, and St. Peter), it is also a celebration of the harvesting before winter and rural life, featuring bonfires, square dancing, and typical rural food and warm drinks. It is therefore widespread in the country and not circumscribed to Catholic adherents.
2. Connect groups are small groups of people from the congregation who meet outside church weekly or fortnightly to study the Bible and support each other.

3. The largest Brazilian communities are located in the USA (1,315,000), Paraguay (350,000), Japan (180,000), Portugal (166,775), Spain (128,638), and the UK (120,000) (MRE 2015).
4. This is an annual global evangelical event which started as "City March" in 1987 in London, and takes place in several cities in Brazil, the largest of all attracts over three million people in São Paulo city.
5. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
6. All communications in this chapter were in the Portuguese and English languages, and I translated those in the former.
7. Many of Darlene Zschech's books have been translated into Portuguese.
8. According to the *Financial Review*, "The latest figures firm up education's position as Australia's third-largest export after coal and iron ore, as well as its position as the largest services export. Tourism exports also rose strongly in 2015, up 11% to $15.8 billion, the ABS trade data shows. Separate figures from the federal Education Department show about 650,000 international students were studying in Australia in 2015, more than 10% more than the previous year." (Dodd 2016)

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PART III

International Expansion and Spheres of Influence

CHAPTER 8

"The Music That Just About Everyone Sings": Hillsong in American Evangelical Media

Wen Reagan

In 2014, *Christianity Today* blogger Ed Stetzer posted a "fact sheet" on Hillsong Church. The church was approaching its 30th anniversary and as an influential voice in American evangelicalism, Stetzer had garnered the attention of several journalists interested in getting his perspective on the highly successful megachurch in Sydney, Australia that had recently planted new churches in New York City and Los Angeles. The catch, however, was that Stetzer—like most American evangelicals—actually knew little about Hillsong, outside of the planetary influence of its music.

Under his sub-header "Music," Stetzer presented one of the main arguments of this chapter:

> You can't talk about Hillsong without talking about music. Even churches that are not like Hillsong Church – or even dislike the church – use and love their music. That's a key part of the global growing influence of Hillsong. It's simple. Books change minds, but songs change hearts, and

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> that's central to Hillsong's influence … They've focused their music on a universal idea that God is worth praising, and since all Christians agree on that, Christians around the world embrace Hillsong Music even if they don't know much about Hillsong Church. (Setzer 2014)

Indeed, in America, you cannot talk about Hillsong without talking about music. American evangelicals may not have known much about Hillsong Church, but they knew its music well. And over the last 20 years, American media has both informed and followed American evangelicals on this topic, reviewing new Hillsong albums and interviewing Hillsong musicians as Christian celebrities.

Though Stetzer concluded his post with a quick caveat, explaining that he was aware that "not all churches are enthusiastic about Hillsong," his blog post declared an otherwise warm affirmation of the church. Absent was any critique of Hillsong's prosperity theology or a concern for accusations of financial impropriety and political meddling brought against the church over the years (Stetzer 2014).

Stetzer represented the American media's consciousness of Hillsong in 2014, finally paying attention to the birthplace of the musical phenomenon that had swept through congregations in America for 20 years, yet still viewing it through a celebratory lens. And he thus revealed how most American evangelical leaders had approached Hillsong in general: with an admiration for its growth, influence, and celebrity, all driven by the powerful impact of its music. Stetzer's warm appreciation for Hillsong was endemic to American media, and could be found in the pages of *Christianity Today*, *Relevant*, or *Worship Leader*. Even articles in major secular publications like *The New York Times* and *GQ*, though they provided a slightly more critical edge than their evangelical counterparts, still approached the Australian phenomenon with a curious wonder.

The media outside of the USA, however, did not always share Stetzer's enthusiasm for Hillsong. Australian publications often provided an alternative narrative of the megachurch, highlighting the moral, financial, and political controversies that pestered Hillsong over the years. While Stetzer's tagline was fairly benign, Australian headlines were not as kind. Take Adele Ferguson's 2005 article in *Business Review Weekly*, which focused on Hillsong's finances: "Prophet-Minded: Pentecostal Churches Are Not Waiting to Inherit the Earth; They Are Taking It Now, Tax-Free." Or the title of a 2003 piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "Praise the Lord and Pass the Chequebook." Even Australian academic journals

were critical of Hillsong. In his 2005 essay in *Australian Geographer*, John Connell had a difficult time hiding his distaste:

> It is a church without humility or mystery, without learning or dignity: superficially egalitarian, populist and popular, and inherently materialist and anti-intellectual. It is a church that is pragmatic, problem- and result-oriented, and this-worldly rather than philosophical. Membership is fluid, based on personal choice, not on heredity. Religion is fun, fashionable and even trendy; it is about consumption rather than commitment, in a church of flows rather than place. (Connell 2005, 330)

Contrast Connell's critique to a 2007 glowing album review in American magazine *Worship Leader*:

> Sonically this album has so much to offer, and yet what lays beyond the music is what holds this project together: lyrical content. When you filter in that these kids come from a biblically sound, Spirit-filled church under the leadership of Brian & Bobbie Houston, and worship pastor Darlene Zschech, I would expect no less. Excellence in ministry and in music have become synonymous with Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia. (*Worship Leader* June 2007, 40)

This chapter considers the portrayal of Hillsong in American media by comparing it to that found in Australian media, particularly during a period of transition for Hillsong in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[1] In contrasting Hillsong's portrayal in these two countries, I hope to shed light on the etiology of Hillsong's success in America. This contrasting consideration not only provides us with a better historical understanding of the international expansion of Hillsong's influence, but also insight into the way that worship music culture works, across international borders, in the twenty-first century.

Australian Media

In its native land, Hillsong has garnered both acclaim and scorn over the last 25 years. As the church's music gained popularity and its growing numbers required new "extension campuses" in the 1990s, the Australian media began to take notice.[2] In 2004, Hillsong's musical innovation—originally crafted under the leadership of Geoff Bullock and then carried on by Darlene Zschech (see Mark Evans' chapter in this

volume)—reached critical acclaim in Australia when their album *For All You've Done* reached the number one spot on Australia's ARIA charts. That same year, Australian treasurer Peter Costello spoke at Hillsong's annual conference, revealing its growing political influence. But this success brought critical attention. From 2003 to 2005, several popular Australian publications looked unfavorably upon Hillsong in the midst of its rise to national prominence.

In January of 2003, journalist Greg Bearup wrote about his Hillsong experience in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The title of the piece, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Chequebook," instantly revealed his focus and aversion. The piece derided a prominent part of founding pastor Brian Houston's preaching platform, a prosperity theology that declared material blessing and success for those who tithed generously to the church. "If you embrace this brand of God," Bearup explained about the church's pitch, "you will be rewarded financially and spiritually in this life, as well as the next." Bearup focused on Houston's prosperity promises and petitions during the service:

> But you, too, should honour the Lord, the pastor tells his flock, and He will deliver these miracles, because the Bible says so, right here in Proverbs, chapter three … He makes the point numerous times, lets it sink in, then informs the throng that credit card facilities are available, and cheques should be made out to Hillsong. "Amen," shouts the pastor, thumping the air with his fists. (Bearup 2003)

For Bearup, Hillsong provided "religion for our material age," and the most prominent example was on stage for everyone to see: "the handsome, charismatic pastor, his bubbly wife and their three beautiful kids," all backed up with Houston's prosperity guarantee from his book, *You Need More Money*. Bearup tried to prod into the money issue with Houston, but the pastor closed up on the topic:

> So I do [ask Brian about his salary at Hillsong]. Brian Houston's open, good-guy demeanour disappears. No, he will not tell me what he or Bobbie earns. "All you guys [the media] want to know about is the money," he says. "You don't want to know about the church." Well, it's a bit like walking into Rose Hancock's[3] house and not noticing the chandeliers—the money at Hillsong just leaps out at you. (Bearup 2003)

Bearup concluded his take by comparing Houston's actions with his words:

> What we do know is that Houston wears a watch worth thousands of dollars, he owns an enormous house overlooking a bush valley, in a suburb of other enormous houses, at Glenhaven. He also owns a picturesque spread on the Hawkesbury River, near Windsor, just west of Sydney, gets paid handsomely to speak overseas and is a property developer – and he's not ashamed of any of it. "Look," he says, "I can tell you that if I was in business, and held this sort of position, I would be earning three times as much. I don't do it for the money. (Bearup 2003)

When it came to Hillsong's music, Bearup named it a morally suspect revenue generator for the church, noting that it brought in a "tidy tax-free $8 million" in 2002. This critique of the tax-free revenue that Hillsong garnered from its visitors and music sales became a common refrain among critical pieces of the church.[4]

Freelance writer Rachel Power followed Bearup in 2004 with her article for Australian magazine *Arena*. While Power's piece primarily served as a critical commentary on the rise of Australian pentecostalism, it sat in agreement with Bearup's, particularly in its perspective of Houston's prosperity gospel:

> Solarium-hued, smooth-talking salespeople, church leaders Brian and Bobbie Houston claim to bring financial prosperity to their followers, sharing their materialistic preachings with the congregation and promoting their various money-making bibles. Church members are encouraged to give generously when the plate comes around, sometimes three times per service, with the promise that God will reward them. (Power 2004, 27)

Power noted the contrast between traditional Christian ideals and Hillsong's emphasis on prosperity. "[If] the most important mark of an apostle is 'an enduring suffering for Christ,'" Power pondered, "it must be a very private form of pain that the likes of Brian and Bobbie Houston are withstanding." Yet Houston simply rejected suffering as an important mark. He saw the pursuit of simple living as a "very tragic view … one that ignores the power of money to enable 'effectiveness' in the world." And if congregants followed Houston's instructions—which were widely available in the church store, Power noted—they too could partake in this kind of effectiveness.

What Power never considered in her essay was Hillsong's music. Only one short clause, without any additional commentary or analysis, mentioned the musical juggernaut, plainly describing Hillsong music as a two-million-dollar annual revenue stream for the church (Power 2004, 28).

In May 2005, investigative reporter Adele Ferguson reported on the financial practices of Australia's largest pentecostal churches. Published in *Business Review Weekly*, the title—"Prophet-Minded: Pentecostal Churches Are Not Waiting to Inherit the Earth; They Are Taking It Now, Tax-Free"—did not pull any punches. Ferguson allowed interviewees like Philip Powell, a pentecostal pastor and former administrator for the Assemblies of God in Australia, to provide the harshest critiques:

> It is my conviction that the present Pentecostal leaders like Brian Houston and Phil Pringle [pastor of Christian City Church] have hijacked the godly movement, which was simply a fellowship of churches. They have turned it into a hierarchical denomination for selfish purposes and ends … They are not "pastors" but business managers who have cashed in on a loophole in the Western governmental tax system. (Ferguson 2005, 36)

Ferguson's investigative critique of Hillsong was extensive. She named Hillsong's global church planting endeavors as a "franchising" strategy of moving a popular brand into untapped markets, brought concern to the lack of transparency over Hillsong's use of taxpayer-funded federal grants for charity work, and noted that the "unholy alliance" between religion and politics emerging in churches like Hillsong had become "increasingly powerful—and disturbing." What got little attention in the article was Hillsong's music, beyond a few figures describing its global success.

There were other Australian publications critical of Hillsong around the same time, like John Connell's essay in *Australian Geographer*, or Tanya Levin's personal expose of Hillsong in her book *People in Glass Houses: An Insider's Story of a Life In & Out of Hillsong,* and several articles in *The Briefing,* an Australian evangelical magazine. All of these publications tended to focus their critique of Hillsong on a few core issues: its prosperity theology, lack of financial transparency, questionable use of taxpayer money, and supposed influence in Australian politics. This stood in contrast to the coverage found in the American media.

American Media

In contrast to the critical coverage of Australian secular publications, American media coverage of Hillsong often has been benign, if not celebratory. That is, when it was actually present. Compared to

the Australian media, Americans' interest in Hillsong—as an institution beyond its music—has been a recent phenomenon, largely fueled by church plants in New York City in 2010 and Los Angeles in 2014. American Media coverage before 2010 was sequestered to evangelical media, which hardly ever moved beyond Hillsong's music.[5]

Hillsong was practically invisible in America until "Shout to the Lord" spread through American churches in 1996. Evangelical trade magazine *Worship Leader* caught wind of Hillsong music—then called "Hillsongs"—emerging from the Hills Christian Life Centre in Sydney, Australia (the church changed its name to match its popular music arm in 1999), providing a few album reviews celebrating the work of Geoff Bullock, Hillsong's main worship leader and songwriter before Darlene Zschech. Even after the arrival of "Shout to the Lord" in America, Hillsong coverage remained limited to album reviews in *Worship Leader* and provided nothing but high praise. Take the glowing declaration of Hillsong's arrival on the American worship scene in the review of their 1996 live album *Shout to the Lord*:

> *Shout to the Lord* is truly one of the freshest live recordings released this year. There seems to be a hunger and an urgency in their voices that speak entirely to the heart of the worshipers, the listener and to God. The songs will grab you and surprise you, the sound is alive and filled with a sincere adoration for Christ. (Roberson 1996, 48)

Later in 1996, *Worship Leader* prophetically announced Hillsong's impending dominance of worship music in a short breakout section, where Hillsong served as the example of how independent artists could transform into major players: "Independent recording projects can give us a clear forecast of the approaches and even the specific people that major labels are likely to include in years to come. Consider as an example the history and current impact of [Hills Christian Life Centre's] Hillsongs in Australia. Three years ago, they were defined as independent; today, they define the genre" (Christensen 1996, 53). Little did *Worship Leader* know just how much Hillsong would come to define the genre.

American evangelical coverage of Hillsong did not move beyond album reviews until 1999, when *Worship Leader*'s Melissa Riddle conducted an extensive interview with Darlene Zschech and Brian Houston. Like the album reviews, Riddle wrote the piece with clear admiration

for the Australian phenomenon. "[Hillsong's] community outreach programs are quite impressive," she explained, "an obvious priority in the overall mission and life of the church. There are food and clothing banks, counseling services, childcare facilities and camps for the underprivileged … and the church has an established reputation for investing in the community's poor" (Riddle 1999, 35). This celebratory focus stood in stark contrast to the critical commentary of Australian publications.

The next journalistic consideration came 2 years later in an interview with Darlene Zschech in one of *Christianity Today*'s spin-off online magazines, *Today's Christian Woman*. Reporter Camerin Courtney focused on Zschech as a worship celebrity, concentrating on her personal history and what it was like to write the "globally popular praise song" Shout to the Lord (Courtney 2001). Courtney asked no pointed questions nor provided critical commentary on Zschech's church. Instead, she painted a touching picture of Zschech as a saint who had seen challenges and blessings in her life.

The first critical coverage of Hillsong as a church did not appear in American media until 2002,[6] and even then it was but a paragraph. David Di Sabatino, *Worship Leader* editor, wrote a piece highlighting the rising popularity of global worship music. Di Sabatino noted that Hillsong's musical success was not simply the result of its commercial calculus, but also its ability to "transcend the church's own doctrinal nuances in its embrace of prosperity doctrine as witnessed in the title of one of pastor Brian Houston's books, *You Need More Money*." This was the first American recognition of Houston's prosperity-titled book and the first shot at Hillsong from an American publication. Yet it differed from the Australian critiques, addressing Hillsong's theology in the context of praising its music, declaring that *in spite* of its (perceived) poor theological content in preaching, Hillsong's music continued to spread orthodox doctrine around the world via its music. Di Sabatino pulled in Geoff Bullock to further solidify his point:

> Songwriter Geoff Bullock, former member of the Hillsong Church and mentor to Darlene Zschech, who left the church because of doctrinal disagreements, believes that the Hillsong music has risen above any theological idiosyncrasies: "Even though I disagree with the teachings that go on, I think the music stands for itself and is able to reach people." (Di Sabatino 2002, 24)

The next critical mention of Hillsong, this time from *Christianity Today*, did not appear until 2006. And even then its appearance was hardly noticeable—a short "news gleaning" found only on the magazine's news blog. Titled "Fearing Hillsong's Long Shadow" it recounted Hillsong's place in the Australian debate on religion and politics and reported that Hillsong denied accusations of financial mismanagement of federally funded grants. Author Ted Olsen commented that "now some members of Australia's Labor party are worried that the church will use its influence to retaliate against its critics in Parliament," revealing the complicated political power that Hillsong wielded in Australia (Olsen 2006).

In 2007, *Christianity Today* writer Cassandra Zinchini published the first full-length article on Hillsong Church for this flagship evangelical magazine, but only after Hillsong had started planting churches across Europe, particularly in London. And while Zinchini gave space to some of the accusations brought against the church, she remained focused on Hillsong's successes in church growth and music. Even in describing Brian Houston, Zinchini offered quite a different take than the Australian profiles:

> Houston, a tall man with piercing blue eyes, has the stereotypical Australian easy-going, "no-worries" manner. He seems to engender a culture of change … He makes sure his life is growing by spending either Friday or Saturday of each week alone in prayer and devotion, and by going for short drives on his Harley-Davidson. Houston's concept of a healthy church comes from Psalm 92:13: "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish." (Zinchini 2007, 36)

Reporting on Hillsong's political interactions, Zinchini remained descriptive rather than critical, and gave space for the supportive argument: "Senior pastor Houston denies that Hillsong has a partisan agenda. He sees a difference between a church being involved in politics and individual Christians being involved" (Zinchini 2007, 37).

Regarding Hillsong's prosperity teachings, though, Zinchini was more critical. She highlighted Hillsong's critics, noting that "mainstream Australian news media and Christian counter-cult groups consider Hillsong part of the manipulative health-and-wealth movement" (Zinchini 2007, 37). Yet she also made room for the counterargument, explaining that Hillsong claimed to teach the perspective that

"Christian discipleship and social engagement with the poor are essential aspects of ministry" (ibid., 37–38). Zinchini concluded with a vignette of Hillsong's financial petitions, though with a different spin than what Australian critics usually provided:

> Most of Hillsong Conference Europe is focused around helping the poor. On the first evening, 40 minutes into the conference, Gary Clarke, senior pastor of HilIsong London, belabors the offering. The next day, while waiting for the train to the Excel Center, conference attendees complain about the ten or fifteen minutes spent on raising the offering. They may or may not forgive him. But the money will go toward providing clean water to a village in Uganda. (Zinchini 2007, 39)

For Zinchini, Hillsong's financial requests were an example of its unconventional-yet-ultimately-inspiring ministry for helping the poor. For Australian journalists like Bearup and Power, the offering "sermon" was part and parcel of Hillsong's prosperity teachings, a brash sales pitch for a dubious product—the more money you give to Hillsong, the more God will bless your life. These two interpretations were not necessarily mutually exclusive, yet the disparity of coverage and interpretation between Australian and American media during this period revealed two differing public imaginations of what Hillsong truly represented.

Hillsong's presence in America radically changed in 2010, when Brian Houston's son, Joel Houston, and American born yet Hillsong-trained pastor, Carl Lentz, decided to plant a church in New York City. Hillsong NYC has since grown in numbers and media presence, garnering the attention of dozens of media outlets and profiling in two major articles in *The New York Time*s and *GQ*.[7] With its new physical presence as a church, American media coverage of Hillsong expanded beyond the evangelical reporting found in *Worship Leader* and *Christianity Today*. Yet American secular media coverage did not completely mimic the critical tone of its Australian counterpart. Michael Paulson's article in *The New York Times* remained as curious as American evangelical publications, focusing on Hillsong's musical success and its engaging Sunday morning spectacle. While the article reported on Hillsong's critics, it remained descriptive, and paid as much attention to Hillsong's stance on gay sex and its perpetuation of "hipster Christianity" as it did to critiques of its theology and finances. And Brodesser-Akner's piece in *GQ* brought an even more nonjudgmental take, providing her personal interaction with Hillsong NYC and its pastor, Carl Lentz.

Under the Theological and Denominational Radar

We began with a question—why was media coverage of Hillsong in America so celebratory when back home, in Australia, it was so critical? Australian reporter Andrew Carswell put it another way:

> It's a rather peculiar oddity: how the Christian mega church birthed in a lounge room in Castle Hill 30 years ago is routinely maligned at home, and worshipped abroad; how Hillsong's ubiquitous preacher-in-chief is viewed with scepticism by many Sydneysiders, but idolised by foreigners … Or, taking the man out of the equation, how a church youth band that the vast majority of Australians would never have heard of (United, Hillsong's youth band) can reach the US Billboard Chart top five and sell out stadiums across the country. (Carswell 2013, 60)

So what caused the difference in conception and reception between America and Australia? In Australia, Hillsong was a physical church, an institution incarnated in the suburbs of Sydney, replete with doctrines and practices that its native neighbors had to reckon with. The music might have been good, but it could not monopolize media attention over the litany of perceived threats that Hillsong, as a physical church, presented. In America, Hillsong explicitly emerged as a musical act, yet also *implicitly* as a liturgy, or even simply a *sound*. And because the majority of its lyrics, as Di Sabatino and Bullock noted, did not carry the "theological idiosyncrasies" of controversial doctrine,[8] its musical popularity in American churches continued to rise with each album. Unmoored from the contentious teachings and practices that had garnered criticism back home, Hillsong became an admired purveyor of modern musical liturgies in America and a trusted source of the contemporary worship music reshaping American worship. In turn, evangelical coverage of Hillsong in America glittered with promise, praise, and confidence. Such acclaim appeared often in the album reviews of *Worship Leader* in the 2000s, like its review of *For All You've Done* in 2004:

> The result is yet another polished production from a worship enterprise that has already had a world-shaking impact … Hillsong continues to set the pace and establish the gold standard for the extravagant modern worship experience. ("For All You've Done" 2004, 56)

Because Americans understood Hillsong primarily as music, it made sense that *Worship Leader* was the first evangelical publication to cover

Hillsong. Yet as Hillsong's musical popularity in America spilled over into a fascination with its celebrities, other evangelical publications like *Christianity Today* and *Relevant* took notice, providing more celebratory album reviews and genial interviews with Hillsong's musical personalities, like Darlene Zschech and Hillsong United frontman (and Brian Houston's son), Joel Houston. And once Hillsong's celebrity became incarnated in a church plant in New York, major secular publications took notice as well. While the prosperity gospel had a larger following in America than in Australia, Houston's acclaim or disrepute as a prophet of prosperity was not the real story behind the continental discrepancy. Instead, American media coverage of Hillsong was grounded in the reality that Hillsong came to America *as music*. And as music, Hillsong received the same kind of uncritical coverage as other popular music acts, coverage focused on celebrating popular albums, sold out arenas, and celebrity personalities.

In 2015—a year after Ed Stetzer wrote his blog post—American blogger and former pastor Bruce Herwig published a post titled "Why I Stopped Singing Hillsong." After hearing Houston preach his prosperity doctrine first hand, Herwig made a case for why worship leaders should be wary of singing Hillsong and should scrutinize both the content and origins of their worship music, regardless of its popularity. Herwig argued that Hillsong music could not be separated from Hillsong Church, nor from its overarching prosperity teachings and ministries. To sing Hillsong in one's church, or buy a Hillsong album, or attend a Hillsong conference or concert, Herwig argued, was to support Hillsong's erroneous teachings and ministries, in spirit and wallet (Herwig 2015).[9] Similar arguments had appeared elsewhere online, and not just in America.[10] One such blog post was "The Heresy of Hillsong" on *The Protestant Standard*, a popular evangelical blog in the UK. Like Herwig's post, the UK blog decried Hillsong's popularity among evangelicals when so much of its theology emerged from the "Word of Faith" movement (a stream within the wider river of prosperity theology) and its positions on issues like homosexuality ran against the conservative evangelical grain (McDonald 2014). The post, as of August of 2016, had nearly 77,000 page views.

I do not present these blog posts because of their theological arguments, but simply because they existed. The fact that bloggers felt the need to write these posts, and titled them as such, revealed the extent to which Hillsong had come to dominate the musical repertoire of

worship services around the world, and with Herwig's post in particular, in America. Yet Herwig's post, in both its plea and popularity, also marked how little Americans connected "hillsongs" (or their songwriters) with their context of origin. And this is our chapter in a nutshell. Hillsong's localized and institutionalized context as a megachurch could not be ignored in Australia. Yet that context was easily an afterthought (or no thought at all) in America. Before Hillsong NYC, the Australian phenomenon in America was not a church but a *sound*, and that sound was easily abstracted from its context of production. In part because American evangelicals did not *need* to know where the sound came from, for they had already found it affectively effective, in that it powerfully moved them into an emotional connection with God. Its utility and efficacy was well tested and known, and thus, in the fashion of evangelical pragmatism, its origins became inconsequential. In this sense, worship music was not primarily understood as a doctrinal tool (though it certainly *was* that), but as a "theo-affective" tool, an instrument that aided the worshiper in emotional communion with God.

We should return to Di Sabatino and Bullock's mutual assertion that Hillsong music rose above the "theological idiosyncrasies" that marked Houston's preaching, for this contributed to its popularity as well. Hillsong lyrics looked much like any other contemporary worship music, focusing on the emotional, one-on-one relationship between worshiper and God, a relationship celebrated in American evangelicalism for centuries and that marked the contemporary or modern worship music genres, which emerged from charismatic and pentecostal traditions steeped in an affective intimacy with God.

There is no lyrical conspiracy here intended to sugarcoat a controversial theology. Instead, because Hillsong developed from the broader pentecostal tradition and, more importantly, because the emotional one-on-one relationship with God dominated the lyrical disposition of contemporary and modern worship music, the music emerging from the Australian megachurch did not look that different from Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, or Brian Doerksen. If assumed in Herwig's blog post was the assertion that churches somehow embedded their pulpit theology in their songs, then Hillsong's lyrics became a thorn in the side. Instead, the discrepancy between the genericness of Hillsong's lyrics and the particularity of Houston's doctrinal teachings revealed that contemporary worship music culture was more influential in shaping worship songwriting than localized theologies. Perhaps this was a result of musicians'

routinization into broader lyrical cultures before localized theology seeped in, or, to put it another way, songwriters inherited the language, syntax, and rhythm of contemporary worship music well before they ever attempted to write new songs. They implicitly learned *how* to speak/sing worship music from an established theo-affective dialect before ever attempting to contribute to the canon from their localized context. The routinization of the global worship market, where only generalized, broadly accepted evangelical lyrical themes could become popular across various denominations and traditions, may have forced Hillsong to learn—perhaps implicitly—what kind of generic lyrics would provide the most global impact (and sales). Or, perhaps, it revealed the extent to which Houston's prosperity theology was a "soft prosperity,"[11] and thus dilutable to a general lyrical sense of divine blessing on the lives of those who turned to God.

Over the last 20 years, "Hillsong" became a popular name known by American evangelicals because—and pretty much only because—of its captivating music. This popularity came *in spite of* the scandals and theological idiosyncracies that marked the Australian megachurch in its native land, because Hillsong was *a sound* in America, not a church. And, as Ed Stetzer noted in the beginning of our chapter, it was Hillsong's sound that captured American evangelicals' hearts. American media played a role in both instigating this love for Hillsong's music and reporting on a love already growing, and it stood in contrast to an Australian media that had to reckon with a local megachurch making theological, financial, and political head waves. Instead of serving as a theological "Trojan horse" in America, perhaps Hillsong simply revealed how little Americans actually cared about the contextualized origins of their worship music as long as it "got the (worship) job done," as well as how powerfully influential the established lyrical culture of contemporary worship music was in routinizing songwriters into its own broader theo-affective rhythm, regardless of the theological idiosyncrasies emerging from the pulpit.

Notes

1. Riches and Wagner described this period as phase three (1998–2002) and phase four (2003–2007) of Hillsong's evolution, which was marked by the rise of youth rock outfit Hillsong United, the Hillsong London church plant, and an extensive development of Hillsong's marketed brand. See Riches and Wagner 2012, 23–24.

2. See Fray, April 1995; Fray, December 1995; Jinman 1996; Mathers 1994; Pitt 1997; and Scott 1997.
3. Rose Hancock (now Rose Porteous), famous Australian socialite and widow of the late Australian iron ore magnate Lang Hancock, is known for her ostentatious display of wealth and opulence.
4. See also Price and Benns 2004, Ferguson 2005.
5. Unlike the Australian media, the American media ecosystem included a niche for a large Christian media subculture, where publications like *Christianity Today*, *Relevant*, and *Worship Leader* found a sustainable readership.
6. Critical attention of Hillsong in both Australia and America emerged around this time, perhaps in part because of Houston's provocatively titled book, but also because of the expansion of Hillsong's branded presence (see Riches and Wagner 2012). However, while major secular publications took notice in Australia, media coverage in America remained among evangelical circles until Hillsong NYC was established in 2010.
7. See Paulson 2014 and Brodesser-Akner 2015.
8. As Riches has shown, there *were* Hillsong songs that proclaimed a kind of prosperity theology. But this lyrical theme was rare and declined after the 2002 album *Blessed*. In addition, the songs that featured prosperity theology were not the ones that captured the attention of American worshipers. See Riches (2010).
9. In a personal email exchange, Herwig noted that the post had proven extremely popular. In its first month of publication, the post provided Herwig's blog with a 53,000% increase in Facebook engagement. And as of October 2016, the post had over 76,000 page views, 53,000 of which came from America alone.
10. In Australia alone, there were hundreds of critical blog posts on hillsongwatch.com, organized by several evangelical Australian pastors, as well as a dozen extensive critical pieces on the Australian megachurch from *The Briefing*, a magazine-turned blog from Australian evangelical media company Matthias Media.
11. For more on "soft prosperity," see Bowler and Reagan (2014).

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CHAPTER 9

Singing Beyond Territory: Hillsong and Church Planting in Oxford, UK

Mark Porter

The city of Oxford is no stranger to church planting. As an influential intellectual and cosmopolitan center it carries a natural attraction for church planters, offering the potential both to reach those living and studying in the city's universities and colleges and, through them, to reach other locations of influence in the UK and around the world. Whilst Oxford's long Christian history has left the city with more than its fair share of established congregations (currently somewhere around 100),[1] this does little to deter fresh initiatives as churches seek to reach out to new groups, or to embed modes of Christianity that have yet to find a place on the local scene. In the 1980s the growth of the house church movement, for example, led to the establishment of Oxford Community Church as part of a wider county-level network; Oxford Vineyard church was established in 1992 as an offshoot of the London Vineyard, itself taking its roots from the growing Vineyard in the USA; Local Anglican churches St. Aldates and St. Ebbes have both sent out groups over the last 10 years to establish new

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congregations in the area around the city; New Frontiers International and Magdalen Road Baptist church have both established new congregations in recent years; and experimental congregations MayBe and Home were established in the early 2000s as part of the Church of England's Fresh Expressions initiative.

The impact of each of these groups upon the city's worshipscape[2] has waxed and waned as time goes by. Whilst, for example, the Oxford Vineyard was at one time a key musical center, employing well-known worship leaders and releasing influential albums, conversations as part of the fieldwork for this project suggested that it had become relatively insignificant in the present environment, with some local Christians unaware that it even still exists. These individual congregations, however, often serve as markers for larger-scale movements and trends; the planting of the Oxford Vineyard represented a high point of this group's influence on the UK church scene, with a number of Anglican churches adopting Vineyard musical models and repertoire as a result of the influence of John Wimber's visits to the UK, and of his newfound enthusiasm for the gifts and experience of the Holy Spirit. The charismatic legacy of the Vineyard movement has survived to a degree on the wider church landscape, and is an important factor behind the existence of a charismatic Anglican movement across the country, but the music of the Vineyard is not adopted with the same enthusiasm it once was, nor is the Vineyard looked to as such a key central source for spiritual revival.

St. Aldates, the charismatic Anglican congregation in which I conducted my doctoral research (Porter 2016), has been shaped in important ways by Vineyard models, by the house church movement, and by numerous other groups and trends as they have come and gone within the local, national, and global worshipscape (Wilkinson 2007), and the Hillsong network is no exception to this pattern. Since the late 1990s, the global dissemination of Hillsong repertoire has made its influence felt both within St. Aldates song selections, and in the way the church has cultivated certain sounds and values in worship. The church's official repertoire list from 2012 contains 22 Hillsong compositions and, whilst song introductions from different sources tend to occur in phases at St. Aldates, at one stage it might not have been inappropriate to describe St. Aldates as "the Hillsong of Oxford." The planting of a Hillsong congregation in Oxford, with its first Sunday service in March 2015, then, raises a number of interesting questions. Is Hillsong significantly different from other church plants that have come and gone

on the local scene? What is its contribution to the broader ecclesial ecology of the city? What does its arrival on the scene mean for churches that have already bought, to whatever degree, into the Hillsong identity through the adoption of Hillsong repertoire? In this chapter I want to examine such questions with specific relation to St. Aldates, on the basis of my previous ethnographic work there, and on the basis of more recent conversations with members of and visitors to the newly established Hillsong congregation.

Narratives of Church Planting

Manuel Vásquez, in his theoretical examination of religion in motion (2008), surveys three different and complementary metaphors for religious geography, each of which provokes its own scholarly methodology, and each of which has its own particular blind spots. First, spatial metaphors, he suggests, include "terms such as landscapes, maps, territories, fields, geographies, cartographies, and place-making through the practices of dwelling and crossing," second, hydraulic metaphors use ideas of "flows, fluxes, confluences, currents and streams" whilst third, relational and connective metaphors focus on ideas such "networks, webs, and pathways" (Vásquez 2008, 165). For Vásquez, spatial approaches have the analytical advantages of locating religion in everyday spaces and allowing scholars a material focus through an emphasis on emplaced bodies whilst, they have the weakness of tending to "reify the local as a bounded whole held together by a unified cultural system" (ibid., 167). Hydraulic flows, meanwhile, help to complement spatial metaphors, offering insights into dynamic and cosmopolitan elements of the world around us. They also have a complementary downside, however, of drawing us toward a "thoroughly deterritorialized world" (ibid., 167) and neglecting the obstacles that face deterritorialization in the world we find around us. Vásquez proposes instead the idea of networks as a helpful third theoretical metaphor, offering a sort of hybrid between spatial and hydraulic metaphors, and highlighting "the fact that places are always interconnected and marked with crisscrossing relations of power" whilst "allowing us to embed space and the practices of place-making in dynamic fields of domination and resistance" (ibid., 168). At the same time he insists that networks be seen as dynamic, shifting, and containing barriers and inequality. Rather than locating religion in specific places, networks are inherently relational in nature, whilst resisting the complete abandonment of structure(s) that might come with hydraulic metaphors.

The dominance of one or other of these metaphors is important not just for scholarly analysis but also for religious self-conceptions. Narratives of church planting, I want to suggest, are often conceived of through primarily spatial metaphors. If a church is to be planted, then it is in a particular place, in order to reach the people thought to occupy that particular area. It is increasingly common, too, for existing churches to emphasize their embeddedness in order to minister to or incarnate themselves within the locality that they inhabit.

This understanding is, at least in part, the underlying rationale which led to a forcefully written and popular blog post, with over 7000 Facebook shares, criticizing Hillsong's move to plant a new congregation in the US city of San Francisco:

> I'm so tired of this. I'm tired of pastors coming to San Francisco, posting pictures of bridges and crooked streets and declaring how much they love this city without actually understanding any of it, without being hurt by it, without any scars to show or dirt on their shoes or callouses on their hands. I'm tired of people acting like this is an AMAZING city because we have a waterfront and burritos, but—be careful—it's also a demonic city because oh, we have gay people. What a perfect mix of yuppie fun and evangelistic intrigue; of course this city needs saving, doesn't it? (Lee 2016)

Whilst this post rails against the idea that San Francisco might be conceived of as a territory that someone might want to claim, the city is here nevertheless thoroughly territorialized. On the one hand, there are people who live there, who know the city, who belong because they have invested time and energy embedding themselves in the structures of the city, and on the other are outsiders who have no knowledge of what this place is, or how it works, and who have no legitimate connection to the work that is going on there. Spatial metaphors lead to Hillsong's presence being seen as somewhat nonlegitimate, and something of an enemy to the projects pursued by established local congregations. That they dare to invade this bounded space is rejected as a colonizing project perpetuating the evils of colonialists everywhere who dispossess native people of their existing emplacements.

Predominantly spatial metaphors for religious landscapes are at the root of other common church-planting anxieties such as "sheep stealing"—a perpetual fear either that a new congregation will draw

members away from established groups, or that they will be perceived as trying to do this. We are faced with church geographies that are conceived of as relatively static, with limited and bounded pools of people choosing the loyalties available to them within their immediate area. During my Oxford fieldwork, when speaking to pastors at the new Hillsong congregation, one of the first points they would be keen to make was that sheep stealing is not their goal. Instead, in a strategy common to church planters, they repeatedly emphasized that the purpose of the church was all about reaching new converts, of bringing people into the Christian faith that other churches had yet to reach. Alongside this they emphasized how they would discourage people from other churches from joining.

It is a claim which merits easy skepticism: amid narratives of church decline in the UK, the idea that a church could grow to hundreds, eventually perhaps thousands of attendees mainly through the medium of conversion seems a relatively unlikely one.[3] Whilst it is likely that at least some Hillsong members come from other congregations—and one of my interviewees suggested that Hillsong Oxford provides a new space for those disillusioned with their existing church involvements—the situation is inevitably more complex than this, with the church acting as a regional hub and providing a welcoming environment for new converts, for visitors or church-commuters from across Oxfordshire, for those new to the city and for those who may have once been more involved with church than they currently are. Some of my conversations suggested that Christian visitors to the area sometimes struggled to find a local church to which they could otherwise relate, and that going to Hillsong provided a space for them whilst they might otherwise have drifted away from any kind of local church involvement. Such complexities highlight the dynamic and nonbounded urban geographies within which Hillsong Oxford operates, and with such a move we can begin to see why Hillsong might not see the problems in San Francisco in quite the same light as the San Francisco blogger.

The Hillsong network does not work principally with fixed and bounded local spaces and ecologies. Rather, with Hillsong worship, products and people are in a constant state of flow whether in the form of mp3s and music videos distributed over the Internet, Hillsong financial resources and expertise flowing outwards from its Australian and national centers to its various campuses, Hillsong bands on tour or staff and celebrity worship leaders such as Reuben Morgan moving to new

locations around the Hillsong network. Hillsong itself is highly dynamic and mobile, so it is with these expectations and this mindset that the church approaches any city in which it involves itself.

In an online video introducing the San Francisco church plant, which seems to have helped to trigger the blog post mentioned above, (https://vimeo.com/156779291) we are presented with people on a whirlwind journey, with shots of planes, roads, and cars, and narratives of expansion. The pastors are clearly highly mobile, and a move to San Francisco seems largely to be for the sake of the larger networks of which they are part rather than a deep commitment to emplacement within the bounds of the city. This, as portrayed in the blog post, might be seen as a somewhat imperialist project except for one thing: as we will see, the journey and movement which the Hillsong pastors are engaged in is a movement in which members of their congregations are equally experienced. To a large extent, they are moving with the grain of their existing networks, not expanding into foreign territory. Territories are largely subservient to the broader flows and dynamics of the network, and this means that ideas of specific localities are not necessarily always at the foreground of Hillsong mentalities. Hillsong embeds within itself processes of deterritorialization.

This is not to say that local inter-church relationships are entirely absent from local negotiations: at the same times as disavowing sheep stealing, Hillsong pastors in Oxford were quick to avow a desire for good relationships with St. Aldates. In this particular case such assurances are particularly needed: during my time at the church St. Aldates fast-tracked the Anglican ordination of pentecostal pastor Gordon Hickson, whose children are staff members in parts of the Hillsong network. However, after strategic disagreements with the rector of St. Aldates, Charlie Cleverly, Gordon was asked to leave the St. Aldates staff, in one of the most controversial decisions in the church's recent history. Since Hillsong's arrival in Oxford, Gordon has become part of the Hillsong Oxford team, a place where he steers clear of the limelight, but nevertheless plays a significant role. Gordon's presence at Hillsong, then, provided a potential point of tension as the church became established and, at the same time, motivated the two churches to ensure that such potential was quickly dissolved, with a firm footing for un-jaded relations established. In conversation, Gordon emphasized the process of reconciliation that had occurred between him and the St. Aldates rector, the rector's excitement about Hillsong, and Gordon's own role in provoking

Hillsong Oxford to pursue more enthusiastic inter-church relationships than they might otherwise have engaged in. Clearly territorial concerns are important in these negotiations, but they are not primary—they are obstacles that need to be confronted in the service of other goals.

In conversation, the limits of any projected co-operation between St. Aldates and Hillsong quickly became apparent. The worship pastor at Hillsong had no idea who the current worship pastors at St. Aldates were, whilst the St. Aldates worship staff had no idea that Hillsong had even appointed one. Likewise, whilst the main pastor at Hillsong had (at the prompting of Gordon) been in regular attendance at city-wide pastors' meetings, Hillsong seemed to have little immediate motivation to involve itself in the associated annual Love Oxford event. With this outdoor worship service organized by the evangelical and charismatic churches in the city, Sunday services are canceled in order to worship together in unity. Whilst Hillsong worship pastor Matt was keen to emphasize Hillsong's potential role in helping and empowering other churches, it likewise remained unclear whether such rhetoric had any means of translating into concrete relationships. A large amount of good will toward other churches in the city was not structurally embedded enough to carry over into significant concrete engagement or collaboration.

St. Aldates' Response

Trying to talk to members of St. Aldates about the meaning of Hillsong's arrival in Oxford was not always the easiest or most fruitful task as a researcher. Amongst those I talked to, the level of disinterest and apathy at the church's appearance seemed remarkably high given the international stature of the Hillsong brand and their existing familiarity with Hillsong worship. Very few members thought that the church's arrival meant anything significant either for them, or for the congregation of which they are a part. One of the worship pastors wrote in an email that it wasn't a question she had really thought about, one member suggested that perhaps Hillsong had a greater interest in bigger cities like Birmingham, two questioned the need for another big charismatic church, one suggested that there is enough existing variety at Aldates that people feel no need to investigate elsewhere, and one made it clear that his existing commitment to one congregation meant that he had no interest in or knowledge of others.

Why, and how, is such a level of disinterest possible? In considering my research, an answer to this question became, for me, one of the most pressing concerns. Does the arrival of a prominent megachurch network in a small city really have such little impact on churches around it?[4] Is St. Aldates special in some way that grants it the freedom of complete carefree independence? Or is Hillsong so set apart from existing offerings that the world that it addresses has little crossover with existing congregations?

Some insight into this question came in the form of conversations with the second worship pastor at St. Aldates, Jamie Thomson and also with Dan Hames, a long-term member of the worship team and now curate and student pastor.[5] Both pastors were, on the whole, affirming of Hillsong's presence and mission in the city, but also keen to differentiate St. Aldates' current offerings with their perception of the direction in which Hillsong is going.

Dan suggested to me that the monolithic Hillsong brand is too much for some people, and that they are instead looking for authentic, grassroots Christianity. Whilst St. Aldates' Late service, at one time, was the loudest and rockiest of the church's offerings, more recently it has moved toward a more acoustic vibe, taking its musical lead from Bethel in the USA. At the same time, students have wanted to start their own revival prayer groups in their rooms, a ground-up form of Christianity that sits less easily with Hillsong's top-down approach to church. He suggested that there is an inclination in Oxford toward established traditions and that people like the opportunity to sing older hymns on a Sunday. He compareed Hillsong with BBC Radio 1, and St. Aldates with Radio 2—the Radio 2 offering being intentionally broader and appealing to a large range of people. St. Aldates, he suggested, has rediscovered its longer Christian history, with the rector increasingly embracing traditions of medieval Christian mysticism and the older disciplines of the desert fathers. He questioned whether musicians can feel involved in something like Hillsong in the same way, and whether worship leaders there have the same spiritual or musical responsibility that they might be offered in a place like St. Aldates.

Jamie, equally, was skeptical that St. Aldates would want to reproduce something like the Hillsong model, suggesting that it doesn't seem to fit very well what the church is trying to do with regards to long-term spiritual formation or content. He saw Hillsong's current vogue for dance music through their Young and Free albums as transient, and

suggested that churches will get exhausted if they are always chasing the next big thing. Similarly, Jamie didn't want to cultivate a Christianity reliant on the highs that might be experienced during big staged events, and suggests that the 20s and 30s demographic seem to be becoming increasingly liturgical in their desires whilst, at the same time, forming an ever-larger part of the St. Aldates musical setup. He wanted to know where, at Hillsong is the room for grassroots freedom and creativity? Does the worship pastor there have the freedom to collaborate or push his own ideas or songs? Do they have a space for a spirit-led time of singing? When considering their respective repertoires, Jamie believes that songs at St. Aldates have more of a focus on substance, whilst Hillsong is more concerned with style and, at the same time, that Hillsong may be more focused on marketing and branding than on meeting the needs of the congregation. A congregational focus comes across too in his desire that the congregation have more space to hear themselves singing at the church, and he highlights that there is room for diversity at St. Aldates, suggesting that St. Aldates' Hillsong-focused period was largely down to Lauren's (the other worship pastor) enthusiasm after a visit to the church.

The main striking feature of these responses, after many years of engagement with and research in this congregation, is their fit in the current moment. My own history at the church makes me aware that the priorities which Dan and Jamie feature so strongly would not have had anywhere near this prominence in the St. Aldates narrative even five years ago. On the one hand, they highlight them in conversation partly in response to my own questions about the church's relationship with Hillsong, and it is clear that, in saying these things, there is a deliberate effort to differentiate the congregations. On the other, these don't seem to be features that have emerged specifically in response to Hillsong's presence in the city, but are part of longer term trajectories within the congregation that lead, at this moment, to a divergence in priorities.[6] This is perhaps a matter of territories; a strong sense of differentiation means that St. Aldates members and staff don't feel that Hillsong is encroaching on their ground.[7]

I suggest, however, that there is more to it than that, and that the constant flow of people through the city and through the churches, combined with well-connected congregations that find their musical and spiritual identity within broader and shifting international networks means territorial concerns are pushed toward the background in the knowledge

that there are much broader pools and flows to be drawn upon. The Hillsong narrative often foregrounds networks and flows ahead of moments of territorialization. St. Aldates is also far from static as a congregation. As a church targeting the city's student population it has a remarkably high turnover of membership, students often displaying high levels of commitment for the relatively short three-year period that many of them are in the city. St. Aldates, at the same time, is keen to be seen as a missionary church, resourcing people and sending them out across the world and into positions of influence. If we begin to look at Hillsong's model of growth then we can see how the relationship between Hillsong and St. Aldates is differentiated as much in terms of networks and flows as it is in terms of territorial identity. Each church is firmly embedded within larger-scale movements of and relationships between people, which at points coincide but which, often, draw on different currents in the world around. As such both rely on and contribute to the deterritorialization of Oxford as bounded, self-enclosed space, however, as we will see, Hillsong opens out onto a different set of networks and movements which serve to inform its identity and role within the city as well as serving as a source of members for the local congregation.

Who Goes to Hillsong?

Hillsong Oxford has important differences from previous church plants in the city. Most important, perhaps, is the franchise-style model under which it operates, each local Hillsong congregation aiming to reproduce the models of the Hillsong mother-churches[8] in their services and structures and, at the same time, being offered centrally produced resources in order to be able to do so. In addition to being well resourced, in order to guarantee a certain standard of product, the church also had a minimum attendance criteria before they would be willing to officially launch a Sunday service. Scale is important in order to produce the proper Hillsong experience, and thus the church held off beginning Sunday services until they had 100 people in place both to serve on the team and to create the right congregational dynamic for worship.

As it nears time for the beginning of the service a pre-roll video is projected onto the screen at the front of the Odeon cinema, accompanied by the soundtrack of Norman Greenbaum's Spirit in the Sky:

When I die and they lay me to rest,
Gonna go to the place that's the best.
When I lay me down to die,
Goin' up to the spirit in the sky…

Gradually, the band appear on stage, the drummer takes up the beat of the song, and the congregation, now gathered in response to the music, start clapping along. As the music reaches a climax, live sound takes over, and the band capitalize on the energy in the room, merging seamlessly into the opening dance-number of the opening worship set. The service has opened with no awkward call to order, no explicit formal beginning, in fact with little definite boundary at all. The sound of a popular music track, instead, has captured everyone's attention, and has moved us from the spirituality latent within a pop song seamlessly into a fully-involved and (at least to me) relatively compelling act of high-energy corporate worship.

This moment provides an illustrative vignette of Hillsong's larger growth strategy. As highlighted by James Wellman et al. (2014), the church employs a common megachurch strategy of reducing the amount of cultural membership capital required to engage in ritual events, whilst instead relying on a creation of certain kinds of experiential highs, which serve in its place to create feelings of belonging, membership, morality, and spirituality or, as Matthew Wade and Maria Hynes put it (2013), comfortable, enthusiastic, and loyal worshiping subjects are produced through the production and mobilization of affect.[9] In this way it pulls down any distinction between insider and outsider, allowing non-Christians to serve on team and to move into the church community with no need for an explicit conversion.

Hillsong is also differentiated by a technologically facilitated relational focus. Whilst investigating Hillsong I took some time to visit a social evening for hosted at a local wine bar. A proliferation of social events organized via WhatsApp, Twitter, or Facebook is key to Hillsong's approach, "living life together" or "hanging" providing a comfortable means for both more and less-committed individuals to mingle and integrate together.[10] Chatting to young people from the congregation at the wine bar I quickly got used to hearing a typical story: they were new in Oxford, they had recently moved to the UK from overseas and they were enthusiastic about Hillsong. An international group such as this was, by itself, no news to me, I had been in regular attendance at

St. Aldates' International Pastorate for a number of years, and had been part of a postgraduate group at the church which had a large number of overseas scholars as part of its core demographic. But the difference with St. Aldates was immediately clear; whilst at St. Aldates such people were part of specialist subgroups, here they were mainstream. Whilst at St. Aldates they were people who the congregation needed to cater for in order to make them comfortable and help their struggles with a new culture, here they formed part of an empowered, cosmopolitan class, who found it easier, perhaps, to identify with a transnational brand such as Hillsong than they did with more-specifically English varieties of Christianity.

Église Sans Frontières?

Hillsong's identity, both organizationally and musically, is profoundly transnational (Wagner 2014). Whilst Tom Wagner highlights the church's glocalization strategies, particularly through its "Welcome Home" slogan, this interplay of local and global is not the result of stasis but of constant processes of exchange, travel, and movement. The portability of Hillsong can be key—as its music travels, so too can attendees, and as they travel the global Hillsong network means that they need not always be far from the Hillsong identity.[11] Vásquez suggests that:

> … in the modern imagination, religion has been contained within the space of the nation. Within the nation, religion has been understood in primarily two senses: 1) as an anachronism attached to locality, part of the traditional way of life associated with Gemeinschaft, which for better or worse secular modernity will eventually erase; 2) as the nation's secularized collective conscience, the source its moral habits. Transnational migration and other globalizing processes have destabilized Western modernity's equation of religion with the nation. Religion has become both a conduit for global flows and a source of the "scripts" that criss-cross various spatial scales. (2008, 157–8)

And it is perhaps here that we see a strong distinction between St. Aldates as a church rooted in the Church of England, but hooking into networks beyond the nation, and Hillsong, which, largely through its music, has become transnational at its very heart.

This is well in line with Miranda Klaver's (2016) suggestion[12] that, with its global, locally decontextualized brand, Hillsong appeals to an emerging

tribe of geographically mobile, urban creative professionals who can be somewhat disillusioned by more locally bound expressions of church identity. Whilst St. Aldates relies largely on flows of students through the city, Hillsong deliberately refrains from an academic focus, something highlighted to me repeatedly in conversation and illustrated by the career of the pastor as a former footballer and builder. Instead, the flow of mobile, cosmopolitan young people through the city provides a constant dynamic of people perhaps more comfortable identifying with a global religious brand than they are the specificities of a nationally defined congregation.

St. Aldates and Hillsong have, at points in their history, had crucial moments of crossover and connection. Now it seems, in important ways, their trajectories head in different directions. As St. Aldates rediscovers elements of its Anglican heritage, explores acoustic worship in the round and hangs a banner of Rublev's Trinity from the church ceiling, Hillsong Young and Free move toward an inclusion and embrace of high-production, high-energy electronic dance music. It is tempting to position Aldates' current trajectory as a response to Hillsong's presence in the city, however there is little evidence in support of a direct connection between these events. Rather, the moment where St. Aldates found, in Hillsong, an inspiration for new directions in its life and worship has passed, and as generations change, and other transnational movements and churches come and go, the church has found the limit of what it can usefully adopt from the Hillsong model and now seeks fresh sources of inspiration and renewal. These processes draw on local dynamics, but they hook into much larger-scale Christian imaginaries—the relationship between St. Aldates and Hillsong is determined as much by the extent to which St. Aldates understands itself as identifying with the larger global direction of the Hillsong movement as with the relationship between leaders and congregations at a local level. As John Connell highlights "Pentecostalism has no territorial center, hence 'new churches are local expressions of global culture, characterized by parallel invention, complex diffusion and international networks with multilateral flows.' Pentecostal churches thus operate 'simultaneously at the local and global level through dense transnational networks of churches and the strategic use of mass media'" (2005, 329). Hillsong and St. Aldates, therefore sit alongside each other not simply as potential rivals on a local scene, but as nodes in different kinds of national and international networks. If we want to understand Hillsong's relationships to churches around it, then we need to look far beyond local limits to examine national and international worshipscapes, flows, and networks.

Notes

1. Depending on where the city limits are defined, in addition to the chapels of the 38 colleges and six permanent private halls.
2. I use this term to refer to the overall pattern of acts and communities of worship within the city.
3. A number of recent studies have examined the ways in which churches and megachurches grow, and their impact on surrounding congregations in the process. Reginald Bibby (2003) examines the growth of conservative protestant churches in Canada, suggesting that 10% come from outside existing evangelical communities; Jason Wollschleger and Jeremy Porter (2011) write about the impact of US megachurches on local church ecologies suggesting that, like Walmart, the impact on similar congregations tends to be negative whilst the impact on dis-similar congregations tends to be positive as they revitalize the local scene; Robin Perrin et al. (1997), in a late nineties examination of Calvary Chapel and Hope chapel, find that between 30 and 40% of those he surveyed had no religious affiliation immediately prior to attending either church; closer to home in the UK, (see also Thumma and Bird 2009) the contributors to David Goodhew's (2012) volume on church growth in Britain argue that narratives of decline need to sit alongside narratives of growth, and that it would be a mistake to see growing churches merely as a product of transfer growth.
4. I should be clear that, according to popular definitions neither St. Aldates Oxford nor Hillsong's Oxford congregation currently count as a megachurch. Neither have upwards of 2000 weekly attendees. Whilst St. Aldates has roughly 1000 people making their way through its doors on a Sunday, and Hillsong currently around 350 both, however tend in the megachurch direction. Aldates as the largest local congregation has a large staff team and rich and diverse program of events across multiple locations whilst Hillsong taps into the national global resources of a megachurch network and clearly aims to grow well beyond its current size in the city.
5. In order to maintain a level of informality in my fieldwork I refrained from directly recording some conversations. These were, instead, written up in note form immediately after the relevant meetings. My material in this section, therefore, consists of summaries of comments made rather than direct transcriptions.
6. The Worship pastor at Hillsong was equally aware of current differences in approach, suggesting that St. Aldates music is more "Bethely," and that it reaches a good mix of old and young, working well for families,

elderly people, and students. Whilst, for him, St. Aldates and Hillsong are ultimately doing the same thing in worship, not every church should have the same style, and different flavors reach different people. Hillsong worship is very current in a way that St. Aldates music isn't, but both congregations are ultimately trying to glorify God, and this trumps any divisions that might be drawn in between them. A former member of St. Aldates also suggested that St. Aldates worship was more restrained and more conventional but, again, that this appeals to a particular demographic and that the two churches fit together as complements rather than rivals. Tom Wagner (2013) writes a useful comparison of the way in which worshipers at a London event differentiated between the worship styles and values of Hillsong, and Holy Trinity Brompton, in some ways St. Aldates' London equivalent.

7. Stephen Ellingson, in a comprehensive article surveying recent research on megachurches draws attention to a 1997 ethnographic study by Eiseland, which suggests three typical responses to a local megachurch: "One congregation succumbed to isomorphic pressures and tried to become a megachurch, although it followed a different path by establishing a number of branch churches rather than growing one church to megachurch size. A second response was to develop a new niche identity, grounded in a particular denominational tradition and the congregation's history in the local community that stood in contradistinction to the identity and programs of the megachurch. The third response was one of inaction in the face of limited and declining resources." (Ellingson 2010, 259–260).
8. Both those related on a national or European level in London, or an international level in Sydney.
9. See also Maddox 2013.
10. See Dougherty and Whitehead 2011 for a discussion of the role of small groups in fostering church commitment. They are one means by which, as Matthew Wade puts it, Hillsong becomes a re-enchanting total institution, allowing the church to pervade life narratives and provide an "all-encompassing network of support and affirmation seldom found in suburban life today" (2015, 2).
11. Actor Network Theory would discourage too strong a distinction between the role of people and products.
12. Based on fieldwork in Amsterdam and New York.

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CHAPTER 10

Hillsongization, Religious Ecumenism, and Uniformity: A Hungarian Case Study

Kinga Povedák

In October 2015 in Szeged, the cultural center of Hungary's southern Great Plain region, an ecumenical festival called Tágas Tér (Wide Space) was held. Over three days in several dozen tents 120 programmes were organized, among them handcraft activities, a market, debates on current cultural, religious, political and economic processes, a dozen praise and worship concerts, and mass and religious services, both in churches and elsewhere. Participants included Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, and large numbers of people belonging to other denominations or to none, believers and non-believers. Praise and worship bands of varied size, and set-ups gave concerts. The small audiences of less than 100 people were at first enthusiastic, then after the appearance of the second or third congregational band, they gradually fell silent; this can be attributed to only one factor: half of the songs performed by each these Baptist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Greek Catholic, and other youth groups were the same. The Hillsong songs such as "Oceans," "Mighty to Save," and "I Surrender" were performed again and again. By the time a group of young Baptists performed

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"Hosanna", the audience had already dwindled in numbers. A few hours later, though, a band from Hillsong London was standing on the stage. The praise and worship began and, as usual, the English-language text appeared in the screen. Many in the crowd sang the familiar Hillsong hits in English, while others sang in Hungarian. Young people occupied the mosh pit, just like they would at a rock concert, while members of the middle-aged group with their children formed an outer circle. It was obvious that everyone was familiar with the songs. They stood and jumped with their arms raised. The crowd shouted the most dynamic songs and the atmosphere was ecstatic, the sound of the concert attracting even non-religious people to the city park.

Pentecostalism has enjoyed tremendous growth in most parts of the world during the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, but this has been less true of Central Eastern Europe. In Hungary, apart from the HIT Gyülekezete (Faith Church),[1] the pentecostal charismatic congregations are small in size; they have not been able to build up a national network. Until quite recently there were no congregations affiliated to the Hillsong Church. However, if we examine the religious practice of Christian denominations outside of pentecostalism, we see that although pentecostalism itself is relatively under-represented in Hungary, its music is not. This chapter seeks to provide an answer to the question of why it is that in Hungary, a Central Eastern European country relatively marginal to the spread of pentecostalism, there appears to be an over-representation of pentecostal praise and worship music. To what extent does this phenomenon speak to broader musical trends, versus the sign of a deeper, more complex religious transformation in which international pentecostal praise and worship music—and particularly Hillsong—has overstepped denominational borders to promote a kind of ecumenism in the post-socialist region?

Building from a number of fragments (personal narratives, ethnographic work), this chapter seeks to answer these questions by showing how Hillsong songs appear in individual life stories, in the practice of congregational life, and in the religious rituals associated with various denominations. It investigates the underlying motivations behind these appearances, and attempts to trace via religious music the process of "pentecostalization" in these different Hungarian denominations.

Part I: Background

To be able to interpret the religious developments occurring in Hungary in the twenty-first century we need to first look back at the recent past. It is from this that we can understand why the condition and spread

of the pentecostal churches is so different in Hungary (and also in Central Eastern Europe) compared to other parts of the world. This historical summary has two focuses: it looks at the first encounters of the pentecostal charismatic and Roman Catholic communities with regard to Christian popular music, and second at the ways pentecostal charismatic songs spread almost without obstacle, and still today hold significance for the members of a number of Christian denominations, both pentecostal and otherwise.

Christian Popular Music in the Period of Socialism

The appearance of Christian popular music in Hungary cannot be examined merely as the result of a musical process; it must be placed in a wider context through which it becomes possible to analyze the circumstances that gave rise to this phenomenon, and its motivational sources. Such analysis must take into account the political and religious circumstances of the Kádár era,[2] the changes towards a one-party state regime; changes in the policy of the Catholic church including the measures taken by the Second Vatican Council to open up a whole range of possibilities for cultural expression, and how this took root in Hungary; the broader cultural context that led to the religious reforms; and the differing values of the generations that grew up after the Second World War. This can be placed into the globalization of music, including rock and roll that began to spread in the 1960s, which represented a way of life as a culture-shaping movement; as well as the attitudes and preferences of the period now known as postmodernity. All these factors together created the emergence of Hungarian Christian popular music in the 1960s, which at the time seemed to have emerged overnight.[3]

The attitude of the Kádár regime's policy on religion, and in particular towards Christian popular music, can be seen in the dossiers now preserved in the State Security Archive. These show that from the 1960s up to the second half of the 1980s the state kept Christian spirituality movements including youth communities under surveillance. Their main focus was on the central, organizing individuals and especially on ministers of religion who reached out to young people. The reason for the regime's antipathy was twofold; first, parish choirs and orchestras that gathered young people provided space for a new kind of religious experience and demand for renewal (and music) that accompanied it. Second, it recognized that the new forms of worship were in harmony with the changing demands of postmodern society in which the institution was no

longer considered an object of respect above all else, thereby endangering the already shaky relationship between state and church. However, in the great majority of cases, both the congregations and their music were far more depoliticized than the regime feared; surveillance amounted mostly to the regime projecting its own fears on to them.

The result of the suspicions of the one-party regime was that even up into the 1980s Christian popular music, although in and of itself basically apolitical, came to be regarded as a *doubly alternative movement*. The regime looked on it with suspicion, while at the same time it also represented a kind of alternative culture within the church. Many priests—especially the peace priests[4]—harbored an aversion to it because they saw within its community-forming power something that endangered the relationship between state and church. Others rejected the musical genre simply on its own basis. As a result, during the years of socialism, Christian popular music basically functioned as a new religious language, and was regarded as a grassroots revival movement, thus symbolizing an alternative religiosity in face of traditionalism.

The character of this grassroots revival represented an opening up of Hungarian Roman Catholic churches towards pentecostal denominations, especially within youth communities. A good example of this is the "beat mass"[5] of the American group *Only for Jesus*, which the secret police documented in detail.[6] The American pentecostal "song and music group"—as the report describes them—held a youth "beat mass" with the title of *Unity* in Budapest on August 2, 1976 in the Roman Catholic Saint Stephen's basilica, one of the most prestigious churches in Hungary. The mass was translated by the pentecostal preacher Lajos Simonfalvi and was held with the permission of the Roman Catholic assistant chaplain Árpád Alberti. The event attracted roughly 2000 Adventist-Pentecostal-Roman Catholic young people and was qualified by observers of the Budapest Police Headquarters (BRFK) as dangerous, in part because "they did not have permission from the authorities to hold it,"[7] so, as they saw it as "a premeditated political action, in its ecclesiastical aspect."[8] Also, because the interdenominational event was a new phenomenon that they had not anticipated: "In respect of the sects[9] it was especially the case, given that the church action is organized jointly with the Roman Catholic Church."[10] The agent who participated in the "rock devotions" held September 1982 in the Roman Catholic Church at No. 3 Bükköny Street in Budapest could report on this similar event. According to his account, 140–150 people, from teenagers to people in

their sixties, gathered to hear a four-member band who had come from America and who performed in English followed by Géza Németh, a Calvinist minister known as "Uncle Géza" who addressed the audience at the end of the programme.[11]

These events show that the interaction between the pentecostal charismatic and Catholic (particularly Catholic charismatic) communities is not a twenty-first century phenomenon but can be observed earlier, from the mid-1970s. The modern music style had already by then formed the first transdenominational links. It also shows what a substantial source of both motivation and suspicion modern religious music was. If we try to periodize the pentecostal music that appeared in Hungary on the basis of its character, we can speak of three main periods: Phase One with uncertain beginnings to 1989; Phase Two the search for direction up to 2005; and Phase Three Hillsongization from 2005 onwards. The period that lasted up to 1989 is marked by the underground popularity of pentecostal songs. These "received" modern songs arrived from abroad and were translated into Hungarian from 1989, and were used together with a small number of borrowed Catholic songs. Both the musical material and the performances were very diverse and generally realized on an amateur music level. From 2005 we can see the spread of Hillsong musical genre—not just among pentecostals but also among other Christian churches (Roman Catholic, Protestants). In this phase, the professionalism of the musicians gains increasing emphasis.

Phase One (Before 1989)

If we look at the way Christian popular music songs spread in Hungary during the years of socialism until 1989, it becomes easier to understand the process of pentecostalization that resulted in the spread of Hillsong songs to other Christian denominations.

Although the socialist regime opened the way for the pentecostal movement to a limited extent, it did not support it, as the state's final aim was atheism.[12] As long as these congregations did not appear in public spaces their existence was tolerated by the regime. Because of this, the spread of both Catholic and pentecostal popular music mostly took place out of sight of State authorities, in a kind of clandestine process.[13] pentecostal congregations, also first spread "underground" through groups that met in private homes. Thus, the songs spread in narrow circles through personal transmission, via handmade scores, or less often as

tapes. Under such circumstances the name of the composer, the congregation from which the song came, or the group that performed it were irrelevant. The most important thing was its usefulness in the congregation. Because many of these foreign songs spread on the basis of their appeal, unattributed and in multiple variations, they existed as folklore creations, which meant that pentecostal charismatic songs from the USA could appear even among Catholics, merely on the basis of religious content and aesthetic preferences.

Botond Rozgonyi, one of the few pentecostal theologians in Hungary, reports that in the 1980s Catholic popular music was strengthening at the time and also had an influence on the music of the small number of pentecostal congregations:

> Hungarian Pentecostalism is an extremely complex phenomenon, it has many different trends. And, of course, it must be added that the Pentecostal liturgy is not strictly regulated, so different kinds of music can exist side by side in different kinds of congregation. We [in Szeged] for example used a few songs from the Hungarian Catholic beat masses already in the 1970s–80s. Not many, but there were borrowings and we ourselves began to perform music in the same style and [instrumentation] as they did. Acoustic guitar, clarinet, vocal—and for a long while there was little emphasis on the level of training. (Interview with the author, Szeged, September 2, 2016)

The more modern-sounding praise and worship music was not unanimously successful, although the heated and angry debates that marked the Catholic music scene (Povedák 2013) did not appear in the pentecostal congregations:

> Between 1982 and 1989 I was the pastor of the traditional Pentecostal congregation in Kiskőrös. At that time the old organ songs were still played, but the new style songs were already coming in through the young people. There was a part of the service where they served. The older people did not like that music, they were not really able to join in, but basically they accepted it. Problems were mainly only with the sound level. (Botond Rozgonyi, Interview with the author, Szeged, September 2, 2016)

Between 1948 and 1989 several generations had grown up without religious education or religious knowledge, and the materialism of the socialist regime and its views on religion were deeply ingrained in their

thinking. For them the agitating, singing representatives of various denominations now appearing in public spaces seemed of little interest or foreign to their worldview. Thus, pentecostal charismatic songs remained mainly in internal use during that time. The songs became more readily accessible after the change of regime, but the technical circumstances were unchanged and that restricted their spread. Modern religious music in Hungary remained the characteristic of a Christian subculture that did not have sufficient economic potential to make it worth importing the records and cassettes of foreign CCM performers. The CCM industry practically left the region untouched, and as a result the earlier methods of dissemination/distribution survived into the 1990s. For this reason too, the spread of the pentecostal charismatic songs was random, linked to the translation activity of one or two energetic persons or a few denominations.

Phase Two (1990–2005)

Until 1989, most of the pentecostal songs in use were still foreign imports, although there were some well known Hungarian songs. In this respect, special mention must be made of the wave of awakening that occurred in the Faith Church in the first half of the 1990s. It was during this period that the congregation spread most dynamically in Hungary; the small community emerged from obscurity to become nationally known within a short time spreading to hundreds of settlements. Not incidentally, great numbers of original pentecostal charismatic songs were produced as a sign of the strengthening of the Hungarian pentecostal charismatic movement.[14] They were all the result of a conscious creative process, although in their own words the authors do not exclude the influence of the Holy Spirit. Compared to previous eras there was greater emphasis here on the individual composer, but in the 1990s they did not yet link individual songs to performers:

> Lots of local songs were born then, that are still very good for singing. Those praise songs of [19]93 are brilliant. [Faith Church] were really the first congregation in Hungary who began to create their own materials. It's much easier to borrow than to create. (Benjámin Stanzel, Interview with the author, Budapest, September 10, 2016)

Of course, it must be added that in the decade from the early 1980s the young people who began to play the new style of praise and worship music had grown up; at the time their musical taste influenced young people who were already strongly opening toward the pentecostal congregations.

The Faith Church left its imprint on the period from 1989 to roughly 2005. Besides its own compositions, foreign translations continued to spread in a random manner without help (e.g. via song books, teaching material). The songs continued to spread on tapes, and were transcribed, or the chords were noted and the text translated. The musical standard remained unchanged, although the enthusiastic amateurs were replaced by a growing number of professional praise and worship bands. This was strongly influenced by the Faith Church that appeared in the national media: a number of members of its praise and worship band had earlier been/still are well known professional musicians from the secular music industry.

Phase Three (2005–Present)

The most recent landmark was the launching of YouTube, the video-sharing portal (2005). The change did not occur immediately, but it did represent a strong transition in the musical material, professionalism, and method of access to this music. Before that date, there was practically no way listeners could learn the names of the composers of the different songs, and access to the original recordings was very limited. Although Faith Church translated and performed Hillsong songs in the 1990s, in their televised services they appeared without a title or original composer.[15] YouTube put an end to the spread of songs by ear, as videos became the standard, facilitating the sharing of music scores. After a while, videos teaching praise and worship also appeared:

> It must have been some time around 2007, after the Savior King album appeared, that I searched for it on YouTube. I was bowled over by the album, and well, because of it I began to move from the Golgota Congregation towards Hillsong. I was absolutely amazed on YouTube. It was then that I realized that most of the songs I had been singing and loved were Hillsong songs! (Benjámin Stanzel, Interview with the author, Budapest, September 10, 2016)

That the use of the internet and media greatly influenced the flow of worship practices was obvious. As Evans and Thornton remark in their article, "YouTube is the New Mediator," providing a unique platform for the mediation of online Christian community. Furthermore, they argue that online communities are often formed around the YouTube versions of contemporary congregational songs (Evans and Thornton 2015).

It cannot be claimed, of course, that only Hillsong songs spread in contemporary Hungarian pentecostal communities, but it is clear that Hillsong has become a brand name. Because it is so familiar and widespread it points beyond itself. In practice, the expressions "Hillsong songs," and "Hillsong-type songs" are used as synonyms for contemporary praise and worship music. It overshadows almost all other performers otherwise enjoying popularity at the international level. In the same way, because of admiration from younger generations, it pushes earlier music forms into the background, and blurs denominational lines:

> There is a Pentecostal song book called "Songs of Our Faith" but young people don't use it at all. They only know the more recent, Hillsong-type songs, they don't use any others. (Botond Rozgonyi, Interview with the author, Szeged, September 2, 2016)

Of course, in Hungary the Catholic Church and the Calvinist Church are more attached to liturgical tradition, and thus practice forms reaching back several centuries. While they are changing slowly, the Hillsongization process can now be traced outside the official, church liturgy, too (Povedák 2014). What many people have concluded is thus also true of Hungary, as among others Donald E. Miller writes in his book Spirit and Power: "one of the most important elements of pentecostalism is its ability to adapt to local contexts, embracing culturally appropriate music and worship styles" (Miller 2013, 16).

The Dilemmas of Translation—Globalization Case Studies

Hillsong songs spread in Hungary in basically two ways. First the songs appeared anonymously, in a number of pentecostal congregations, and then also in Catholic ones. After the appearance of the music, as a second stage the institution arrived as a grassroots initiative. The first local congregation connected to the Hillsong Network was formed in Hungary in 2011 under the name of Budapest Connect at the encouragement

of four Hillsong congregation members returning from London. This bilingual, as yet small community holds fortnightly services where the Hillsong songs are always sung in Hungarian. They do not yet have their own music repertoire, drawing on the parent congregation for sustenance. Benjámin Stanzel, the congregation's pastor hopes that they will soon reach that stage because "the congregation will be really strong when it produces its first songs. They will be nourished by the power of their own faith. Until then we copy the music of others" (Interview with the author, September 10, 2016).

The translations were of special importance in Hungary, a country foreign in culture and language to the original Australian context. Basically, three different translation strategies can be found. First, individual pentecostal congregations often use their own translations that vary in the quality of their prosody and content. Beside these we also find differing Catholic translations. The large number of variations indicates that the translations are made to meet spontaneous grassroots demands, without the intervention or imposition of any kind of authority. But it also indicates that the Hillsong songs have a surprisingly strong attraction across different denominations. This kind of variety can also cause problems for everyday life. My Catholic charismatic informant spoke about this:

> Last year we found that there was a song and everyone knew it, I don't know, in four different versions. And they said, it's good that it's at least the same in English. Then we'll sing it in English, because there were Americans among us too. Or take the case of *Oceans*. I knew this from Dezső and his congregation. They made a very good translation. Then Laci Csiszér (Catholic charismatic singer) sang it too in a different translation and it was only from the melody that I realised it was the same song. Then I heard a version from Béla Pintér (Debrecen Free Christian congregation). That's different too. What's the situation then? Everyone has their own variant? (Ildikó Majoros, Interview with the author, Szeged, August 21, 2016)

The second strategy is the one the Faith Church uses. They had large numbers of the most popular praise and worship songs translated—perhaps they saw the potential for conversions through the praise music?—and most of the other pentecostal congregations have now adopted these from the Faith Church's television broadcasts. With this the church

strengthened its own position politically in face of the other smaller congregations that, through this borrowing inevitably came into contact with the Faith Church's big economic potential and membership, at least by Hungarian standards. A similar process can be seen in the Éden Congregation in Szeged based to a great extent on Romas. Through good quality texts and a high level of musicianship, their own versions are spreading among connected congregations in the region, and several denominations including the Catholic charismatics are borrowing these variants.

The third strategy was born as a response to the first two detailed above, and appeared with the establishment of the Budapest Connect congregation. Seeing the existence of parallel versions in various denominations using different translation texts, members of this congregation—mainly pastors and praise and worship leaders—decided to publish more official translations (it must be remembered that the members of Budapest Connect are members of Hillsong London who have returned from London and speak English fluently):

> The process that we are doing on a voluntary basis is very lengthy and slow, but we felt that we have to do it. It is important to have the content authentic. We check every song to see why it was written, for what motivation, and we try to capture that. Fortunately Hillsong always published the Biblical texts that inspired the birth of the songs, that's good. We translate them, send them to Sydney, a committee there has them translated back and approves our translation if it corresponds to the original […] The earlier Hungarian free translations were very mixed, both theologically and artistically. They weren't able to cope with the more complex texts of songs appearing after Aftermath, they simply ignored the more artistic, more complicated structures. (Benjámin Stanzel, Interview with the author, Budapest, September 10, 2016)

The development of these translation strategies, and moving from musical amateurism towards professionalism, shows that the diversity of the initial grassroots movement character is gradually shifting towards uniformity, and also that pentecostal theology and in particular the vernacular theology widespread among followers is developing. In the early stages between 1980s and 1990s, similarity of musical form was sufficient for the songs to take root at a transdenominational level, but we are now beginning to see a process of clearing that points beyond the music.

"We must not forget," says Stanzel, "that the music is not the culture but the fruit, and a very important fruit, of the congregation" (Interview with author, September 10, 2016).

Budapest Connect strives for a perfect imitation of Hillsong, not only of the texts but also of the band and sound, so that the songs are performed in exactly the same way as the original. This requires musical training. According to Stanzel, there is big turnover in the group, as not everyone is able to meet the high standard required. It can be seen then, that while amateurism could still be generally observed in the 1990s, that many pentecostal praise and worship bands have now become professional, and Budapest Connect epitomizes this.

The Catholic Hillsong Songs, Hillsong Ecumenism

The spread of Hillsong songs across denominations is leading towards the emergence of a special form of ecumenism based in music. This process can occur on such a scale because of a simultaneous or shared musical aesthetic of pentecostal and Catholic vernacular religiosity, as well as a similarity of the religious emphases that can be felt behind the music in these vernacular religious theologies. It must also be taken into account that internet use became common in Hungarian households around the turn of the millennium, at almost the same time YouTube was launched. Those who searched for local praise and worship music inevitably found popular international bands. This may have been influenced by the fact that the Hungarian population has the lowest level of foreign language skills in Europe.[16] Was it limited knowledge or aesthetic preference that contributed to Hillsong's transdenominational spread? The answer is probably the latter because however widely the official translations spread, it is not the texts that influenced the lived religious reality of believers but the power inherent in the praise and worship and the religious experience associated with it:

> The text does not really matter. The majority pay no attention to the text. They are looking for the mystic experience, the presence of God and they do not search intellectually. The music, the melody and the rhythm brings people into a state where they experience their mystic encounter with God. (Botond Rozgonyi, Interview with the author, Szeged, September 2, 2016)

> These are free songs. The *blue book* and *yellow book* songs [collections of Catholic guitar songs] they have a beginning, we start it and they have an end. But these songs also have a section where there is a possibility for a kind of free praise and worship, with praying in tongues. And that's why we borrowed these songs, because they simply provide a possibility to be able to praise during the singing. A yellow book song, that is more formal, has four verses and a refrain, it's harder to do that there because you have to play from beginning to end, that gives it meaning. They tried to relax the style a bit there, to make it a bit more like pop, but it doesn't have that kind of praise style. But in my opinion in the case of Hillsong these songs originated with praise. That's why they are so free. The praise is the core. (Ildikó Majoros, Interview with the author, Szeged, August 21, 2016.)

This openness has resulted in the relaxation and fluidity of religious borders between consumers of praise and worship music. Catholics—mainly charismatics—take part in the various praise and worship events and festivals, and sing these pentecostal songs together with the others. For them, it is not a problem to include in their rites the songs of a composer who does not belong to their denomination. Dogmatic or theological boundaries are determined by the individuals within denominations. These believers place Hillsong songs within their own frames and interpret them in that context; as a consequence, the same song can appear with divergent interpretations within Hungarian denominations:

> It doesn't really cause a problem that it's not Catholic, of course, there were cases where one or two details made us think about what it wants to say. "Balm" for example, is something we can't understand. What exactly does it mean? Or the Holy Ghost: we call it the Holy Spirit. But basically no, it's not a problem. In reality what we are doing is singing our feelings to God, we're saying how beautiful, how good, how mighty God is. That's the essence … If you look at the order of a Catholic charismatic mass, you'll find that 80% of the songs in the mass were originally Hillsong … We Catholic charismatics have a songbook with scores containing around 180–200 songs, and at least half of them are Hillsong … we are able to accept them because, in my opinion, in America this kind of praise and worship is more typically found among blacks. Black culture is foreign to us, we wouldn't know what to do with it. The Hillsong kind of praise and worship is more white. It's like me, that's why we're able to accept it more. (Ildikó Majoros, Interview with the author, Szeged, August 21, 2016)[17]

That this does not just hold true of Hungarian Catholic charismatics is evident from the songs performed at the 2016 World Youth Day in Cracow. The Catholic charismatic movement has not really had songs that were widespread internationally (aside from Taizé chants) and the spread of Hillsong has changed that situation fundamentally:

> When I was at the World Youth Day in Cracow (as diocesan youth officer I was responsible for around 50 young people) I was struck by the fact that, apart from the hymns of earlier youth days, the musical repertoire of the central (non-liturgical) programmes consisted almost exclusively of Hillsong songs, and the young people from many different countries responded by singing them in translations into their own languages (there was hardly any Taizé music, for example!). For example, *Oh Praise the Name*, *You are Great*, *Our Lord*, *Hallelujah*, *Oceans*, etc. It is a kind of globalization of religious music that connects us, but at the same time brings uniformity. (Balázs Paksa, Interview with the author, Budapest, August 14, 2016)

While ecumenism makes the borders between the different denominations more permeable and breaks down the conflicts between them, it also raises barriers within denominations. One way it does this is by giving rise to fear and rejection among those less open to these new forms. Rozgonyi noted that in his own pentecostal congregation the more conservative groups attributed the praise and worship to the influence of Catholic charismatics and therefore rejected it, while in Catholic circles its opponents interpreted the process as an invasion of secular popular music (Povedák 2016a). Miller emphasizes that "among the changes that appeared as a consequence of the Second Vatican Council, one of the most unfortunate has been the blurring of differences […] The spread of dancing in the nave of the church, 'gospel' music, and the appearance of 'evangelizing' sermons, and 'Christian rock' in the liturgy are a few of the more obvious signs pointing to a blurring of the boundaries between the Catholic Church and the domain of *extra ecclesiam*" (Miller 2002). In this way, the distance between groups within different denominations is growing. Today the Catholic charismatic communities are much closer to and better understand the pentecostal charismatics than the more traditional forms within the Catholic denomination (e.g. Rosary Confraternity, Legion of Mary) (Povedák 2016b).

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to outline the *pentecostalization* or *charismatization* of Hungarian Christianity through the example of the Hillsong phenomenon. Many of the leading bands on the global Christian popular music market belong to the pentecostal charismatic movement (Hillsong United, Jesus Culture, etc.), yet their songs appear in the Roman Catholic and other historical churches. One of the results of this large repertoire borrowed from the pentecostal movement is that, in line with the values of consumer culture, the positive Christian message—avoiding the theology of suffering associated with the cross, and transmiting only the message of resurrection—has been packaged in the fashionable music trends of popular culture. This corresponds with a religious practice based on a high degree of spontaneity and individual intuition.

In Hungary, behind the Iron Curtain, pentecostal charismatic music circulated for a long time as an underground movement. The "handmade" scores copied without indication of their composer, and individually compiled songbooks survived even after the change of political settings. For a long while, the established Christian churches tolerated praise and worship music but did not publish songbooks or collections and did not encourage the work of choirs. A lack of regulation further strengthened the interdenominational use of the songs, and paved the way for the processes that eventually led to the spread of pentecostal charismatic songs. The spread of internet use coincided with the appearance of scores, score books, and song collections online, and under the influence of video-sharing portals, further strengthened this transdenominational sharing of musical repertoire. The lack of foreign language skills, inadequate theological knowledge, and aesthetic preferences perhaps made songs associated with other denominations attractive and helped them take root. The result of the process points beyond the music itself. A uniformizing ecumenism achieved through the music and a resultant pentecostalization of non-pentecostal denominations can be clearly observed. As John L. Bell notes: "As regards repertoire, we are increasingly eclectic, freely transgressing both denominational and national boundaries to discover music suited to our congregation" (Bell 2007, 2).

This is not simply a case of different religious groups using similar musical styles to attain religious experience; rather, it is that the music

is well suited to the realization of charismatic experience, corresponding to postmodern religious demands. This therefore makes this music successful on the religious market. The religious experience achieved within a pentecostal ritual framework supports the use of similar music styles and, as the case studies show, reinforces shared aesthetics that function as a channel for religious communication. Although Hillsong appeared in the religious environment as a trend, it owes its popularity and long-term survival to the successful embedding of these aesthetic demands into religious demands.

Notes

1. Although Hit Gyülekezete translates to "Faith Congregation," throughout this chapter the self-definition "Faith Church" will be used.
2. The period named after János Kádár, general secretary of the party, lasted from the defeat of the 1956 revolution to the change of regime in 1989.
3. For a more detailed view see Povedák (2014).
4. Peace priests were the priests who collaborated with the communist party in Hungary.
5. The Hungarian language uses the term "beat music" also for the rock and roll style. This is why the expression "beat mass" became widely used.
6. ÁBTL 3.1.2 M-40918/7.
7. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-40918/7. 2.
8. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-40918/7. 3.
9. For a long while the Roman Catholic Church and the general public regarded the Pentecostal movement as a sect. In many cases this view can still be found today in Roman Catholic circles.
10. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-40918/7. 2.
11. ÁBTL 2.7.1. NOIJ BRFK-110/1982.09.02.1.
12. After the Second World War, the new communist regime tolerated pentecostalism because it was thought to weaken the Catholic Church, which was considered the principle enemy of the atheist state. See Povedák (2015, 165); Rajki (2010).
13. This can be observed in connection with the spread of Christian popular songs brought in secretly from abroad, and in the reproduction of church recordings of similar Hungarian bands. A whole series of files in the State Security Archives report on how "beat masses" were recorded on tape, and how the scores of individual songs were distributed on the black market (Povedák 2016a).

14. Previously they had used almost exclusively foreign borrowings (Algács's songs, for example, became popular only among the pentecostal Romas), while from that time on the number of Hungarian songs increased.
15. Laci Prazsák [Christian popular music guitarist and singer, songwriter and praise and worship leader] translated a lot of Hillsongs (Ildikó Majoros, Interview with the author, Szeged, August 21, 2016).
16. According to the most recent statistics only 12% of the Hungarian population speak English. http://languageknowledge.eu/countries/hungary.
17. The Catholic charismatic community's songbook is exemplary both for the scores and the listing of sources. The name of the translator is also given for every one of the over 300 songs. http://enekfuzet.ujevangelizacio.hu/tartalomjegyzek.

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CHAPTER 11

Because They Can: Hillsong and Social Transformation

Andrew Davies

Once upon a time, there was a revivalist movement (let's call it "pentecostalism") which had its origins in some of the poorer and more underestimated corners of the world: the outskirts of Pyongyang in (now North) Korea; in a girls' orphanage in Pune, India; in the mining villages and rural communities of Wales and a little Anglican church in the industrial North of England; as well, perhaps most famously, as in the downtown backstreets of Los Angeles. This was a movement whose energy, enthusiasm, and transformative message would come to result in explosive global growth. Yet there were undoubtedly times when it was so heavenly minded as to neglect its earthly use. The earliest pentecostals looked "away, far beyond Jordan" for the ultimate restitution of the world at the end of time rather than its ongoing transformation. The mercy they sought was soteriological in orientation, the hope eschatological. The relief of earthly poverty mattered far less to them than the privilege of building up eternal heavenly treasure. Perhaps they were so transformed that they sometimes forgot what they had been transformed from.

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Sadly, this is not a fairy story, though we can happily now condemn this analysis and write it all off as being true just historically. pentecostals may once have been forthrightly resistant to the narrative of social justice, which they saw as exemplifying a fundamentally "liberal" representation of the Gospel message. However, for all kinds of reasons (economic, political, and pragmatic as well as theological), the progressive wing of pentecostalism has moved in the last three decades toward a more engaged perspective on the world and a renewed commitment to a holistic view of salvation, expressed in concern for those in need. The Hillsong movement has played a significant role in that transition. This church's prominent position in the public eye means that the profile of its social engagement projects and ministries is considerable and their influence is significant. The impact of such work upon the life and culture of the church can therefore be easily evaluated.

As would be true of any large organization, Hillsong's beliefs on social transformation are expressed in a variety of practices. The church's significant investment of human, financial, and social and other capital into sustaining and developing its projects are clear indications of its priorities. Its organizational structure and the way it presents its activities speaks to its conceptualization of social transformation, and the processes by which the relevant projects are led by or otherwise held accountable to senior leadership are indicative of the centrality (or otherwise) of their role in the life of the church. But how the church publicly interprets and motivates its work is also key, and Hillsong engages with a variety of forms of public discourse that serve to offer theological underpinnings for its actions and its views. These include the church's preaching (particularly that of its senior team), publications, blog postings, newsletters, publicity, and website materials; its promotion of, and alliances with, global agencies specializing in varieties of social justice ministries (and, of course, any conspicuous disengagement from spheres of service would be equally significant); the curriculum of its college and various training programs; and the public accountability processes through which it presents its activity in annual reports and project evaluations. And, of course, no study of any aspect of Hillsong's life and significance could ever fail to take account of its music.

In this short essay, I hope to assess and evaluate just a small proportion of Hillsong's social engagement activity in the light of the information the church provides to the public through its website, and seek to identify some of the theological motivations and messages that underpin

its work. This is by no means an empirical study. Rather, I will draw on just two datasets from among the huge array of potential source material (namely, data from the church's website and the immense Hillsong song catalog) in order to offer critical insight into some of the core theological narratives, explicit and more implicit, which underpin the movement's engagement with society and express the priorities and culture of the church.

In introducing its social engagement and international development portfolio on its website under the "Because We Can" label, the church highlights one of the key foundational biblical texts relevant to this area, 1 John 3:18: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (http://hillsong.com/bwc/). That crucial connection between action and truth will be central to the analysis here as I seek to identify and evaluate the theological motivations that underpin the church's thinking. I will begin that process by looking at how the church portrays its work and expresses its priorities through its website.

The Website: What does Hillsong do?

Hillsong's global website is a complex and impressive production in its own right. It adopts a media-intensive approach, with high-class visuals throughout, strong branding, and clear writing, which is designed to accommodate a variety of audiences—such as members of Hillsong's many congregations, potential visitors to the church, and users of its social engagement services, as well I am sure as media enquirers. Prominently positioned in the center of the website's main navigation menu, the "Ministries" headline offers access to the "Because We Can mini-site (http://hillsong.com/bwc/), which presents to us a hugely impressive variety of social engagement activities and collaborations with major national and international partners.

Hillsong's collaborations at a global level include partnerships with A21, which "exists to abolish injustice in the twenty-first century" (http://www.a21.org), particularly through the attempt to tackle modern-day slavery; Vision Rescue (http://visionrescue.co.in), a ministry originally to Mumbai's street children which provided food, basic education, and medical and dental aid, and has now expanded into caring for the city's "prostitutes, drug addicts and other vulnerable groups in the city" as well as supporting "a shelter and transition home for trafficked girls" (http://hillsong.com/bwc/vision-rescue/); for child sponsorship

(particularly in Uganda) and support for mother and baby care programs through Compassion (http://www.compassion.com.au); and the Watoto program in Africa, which is described as "is a holistic care program that was initiated as a response to the overwhelming number of orphaned and vulnerable children and women in Africa … positioned to rescue an individual, raise each one as a leader in their chosen sphere of life so that in turn they rebuild their nation" (http://hillsong.com/bwc/watoto/).

In each of these cases, it is clear that the church's intention is to provide consistent and sustainable prayer and financial support and additional publicity for the partner and their ministry, with visitors to the website being pointed to the sites of these other organizations in order to give to them and referred to church hosts at Sunday worship for more information on their work. There is clearly, therefore, an expectation that church volunteers will have a good understanding of, and indeed a significant commitment to promoting, the work of these partners. At the time of writing, too, the church is promoting a significant medium-term project in collaboration with World Vision intended to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis, which focuses on prayer for those affected as well as the call "to choose to be the CHURCH, the hands and feet of Jesus in these times of crisis" (http://hillsong.com/bwc/refugee-response/). This global response is mirrored by a series of local responses arising from many of the church's international locations—so, for example, the Copenhagen contribution has been supporting the UNHCR's resettlement work in Denmark (http://hillsong.com/bwc/refugee-response/copenhagen/), and French and Swedish congregations have been collecting health and hygiene products to give to refugees (http://hillsong.com/bwc/refugee-response/sweden/ and http://hillsong.com/france/bwc/urgence-syrie-hillsong/), whilst in London teams have been working to welcome refugees to London and were caring for them in the infamous "Jungle" refugee camp in Calais before it was dismantled (http://hillsong.com/uk/bwc/refugee-response/). The project is also supported and promoted through a series of blog postings from Global Senior Pastor Bobbie Houston and others highlighting elements of the challenge and opportunities for response (for example, http://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/11/praying-for-syria-the-responsibility-rests-on-all-of-us/#.WCjQThScZE4).

Somewhat more locally, the website also profiles a variety of projects led by the church more locally, with London and Sydney being

particularly extensively profiled. Hillsong London's activity includes work with rough sleepers through the Greenlight project (http://www.greenlight.london/#Home), which works with other congregations too to provide a medical van, soup kitchens, short-term shelters, street work, and hostel projects. The Greenlight website prominently features stories of those helped by the work as well as an opportunity for members of the church to volunteer their time and support the project financially, as well as links to current news and imagery on social media. London also features a "community youth" arm it labels "iCareRevolution" (http://icarerevolution.co.uk), which it describes as helping to "release the unique potential inside every young person by offering practical help with the issues that every young person faces every day of their life … changing the mind-sets of London's youth by encouraging them to be the difference … telling the kids that they are not worthless and that they have a future no matter where they come from or what their background is" (http://hillsong.com/uk/bwc/icarerevolution/). Care for the elderly is not neglected either, with an extensive range of projects including monthly lunch clubs, summer and Christmas parties, and "adopt a granny/grandad" programs highlighted under the "Regenerate RISE" banner (http://hillsong.com/uk/bwc/the-platt-center/).

Hillsong's most sophisticated and best developed social engagement program, however, is unsurprisingly its longest established, CityCare in Sydney (http://hillsong.com/citycare/#programs). CityCare, founded in 1986 just three short years after the establishment of the original congregation in Baulkham Hills, provides a huge variety of services to the local community, including advocacy and personal development programs; counseling services (with professional as well as volunteer staff) and a health center; community engagement work including street teams who care for, feed, and clothe the homeless (including a mobile shower unit); nursing home visitation teams; youth mentoring and personal development projects; prisons and immigration detention support services, which include chaplaincy, cultural mediation, and transition support programs; and "strengthening families" playgroups. CityCare's Justice Projects seek "to bring dignity and hope to people and communities facing challenging circumstances" by offering "large-scale practical assistance" on projects such as "high school renovations, suburb graffiti blitz, and many home renovations for families in desperate need of assistance" (http://hillsong.com/citycare/justice-projects/). Crisis care projects include provision of emergency relief and transitional housing (http://hillsong.

com/citycare/help-in-a-crisis/). Meanwhile, the church also attempts to tackle food poverty by asking people to donate nonperishable food items to their community food pantries in the run-up to Easter (http://hillsong.com/citycare/kilo-of-kindness/), and raises money for and seeks donations of Christmas gifts and hampers as part of its annual "Stuff the Bus" appeal (http://hillsong.com/citycare/stuffthebus/).

Again, the range of activities offered by the church is effectively and creatively presented on the website, with opportunities for financial contribution and volunteering and a series of blog posts highlighting issues of particular interest or concern (including, for example, the promotion of R U OK Day 2016 [http://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/09/r-u-ok-day-2016/#.WCjXSBScZE4]), and, significantly, recognition of NAIDOC week, which celebrates the contribution made by Aboriginal and Islander communities in modern Australia (http://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/07/240053/#.WCmV3xScaRs), demonstrating thereby that the church is not afraid to confront the hugely challenging and complex issue of racial justice, at least in some measure. The front page of the CityCare website also provides an opportunity for those in need of assistance to enquire as to what help the church might be able to offer them.

Beyond the fact that it is hard to be anything other than impressed at the significant contribution the church is clearly making to its communities, a critical reading of the Hillsong website invites a few key brief observations.

First, the church makes a significant attempt to be evidence based in its presentation of the need. So, for example, the short online introduction to the "Kilo of Kindness" project refers to research undertaken by the Australian Council of Social Services (http://hillsong.com/citycare/kilo-of-kindness/), and the more factual account of the church's transitional housing program is effectively supplemented by the story of "Cindy," a service user whose life was turned around by CityCare intervention (http://hillsong.com/citycare/help-in-a-crisis/). Appropriate and relevant facts are presented in the church's annual reports with key data represented in infographics, references to important relevant sources, and a financial analysis overview provided too (the 2015 annual report is at time of writing available for download at http://hillsong.com/policies/annual-report-australia/). Such reporting is thoughtful and responsible and is appropriate recognition of the need of the church's activities to be transparent and its leadership accountable.

Second, there is a clear distinction made between church's evangelistic activity and its community engagement, though the two are certainly related both practically and ideologically. For the purposes of presentation and reporting, Hillsong's mission work is carefully separated from its social concern work even when the two do run in parallel, and even though volunteers are invited to contribute to this more practical activity as part of their sense of calling to the church and service to God. But there appears to be no "religious test" for access to service provision and no compulsion for service users to identify as church members or Christians. So, for example, the church identifies one of the strengths of its transitional housing project as the opportunity to engage with the wider church community by participation in Sisterhood and Sunday services, but stresses this is, "not mandatory but has proven very helpful, as they feel embraced by a community of people who make them feel safe and provide positive social connections" (http://hillsong.com/citycare/help-in-a-crisis/). This particular statement also offers something of an insight into a third observation: the prioritization of community as the core *modus operandi* of the church in social engagement. Hillsong clearly believes that social issues are best, and certainly most sustainably, addressed by bringing those in need into a positive and supportive environment where the practical concerns are resolved and a new supportive network of relationships is established. It is surely not an insignificant insight into the church's approach and culture that the church works in partnership on some of its local as well as large global projects. But even at the level of the church's approach to individual people facing challenges, Hillsong defaults to an emphasis on the value of the wider church community working together to bring hope to the person in need. It would have been interesting in a more empirical study to have examined the levels and kinds of systemic interaction between the church's many and diverse activities (and, indeed, with wider church life), to see how this communitarian strategy is evidenced by practice, but such relations are not easily identifiable from the available data.

Fourth, it is interesting that Hillsong is not frightened to tackle the big global issues around social justice, with racial issues, the refugee crisis, immigration more broadly, global poverty, and human trafficking all being repeated motifs. This is clearly a strategic move which comes from the highest level of the church's leadership, and, interestingly, it differs significantly from the practice that the University of Birmingham's recent research project found in evidence in five other London megachurches,

where the focus was very strongly upon more individual and local issues of concern (the publication of our results is forthcoming). Furthermore, whereas in London we found that many programs were—whilst fully anchored in the church's vision—originally initiated by congregation members and supported by the church, the Hillsong website, contrastingly, presents their social engagement activity as very strongly integrated with the life and culture of the church and motivated directly by their leadership. Perhaps such high-level direct leadership of the social engagement agenda is necessary for it to adopt such a systemic approach.

And, fifth, those impressions of the commitment to partnership and intention are not only implied by the narrative offered but also directly expressed in the rationale that the church offers for its engagement, "Because We Can" (http://hillsong.com/bwc/). This account highlights a variety of keywords such as "sustainable," "partnership," "inclusive," "cohesion," "opportunities," and "change" in explaining the church's commitment to society, but suggests that ultimately, when asked why they choose to act, "the answer is no more complicated than 'because we can.'" (http://hillsong.com/bwc/). Actually, though, the church does have a rather more sophisticated and nuanced response to this question, which is evident in the theology expressed in much of its worship music.

The Songs: Why does Hillsong do?

The theology of any church can be extrapolated most obviously from its preaching and teaching, and that would have been a useful piece of analysis here. However, given Hillsong's particular contribution to global Christianity, it seems to me that an even better source for critical examination of its theology is its songwriting, which is (as it appears from the outside), as purposeful as it is distinctive. Though they have very successfully transitioned their musical style more than once in recent times, and now have a variety of brandings with their own distinct sound (such as Hillsong Worship; United; Young and Free, etc.), Hillsong lyric writing has remained consistently creative, with a variety of central themes reappearing in different voicing down the generations. Notable for their strong Christological emphasis and positive outlook, Hillsong's lyrics have often reflected a sense of mission and purpose and a comprehensive understanding of the traditional pentecostal model of spiritual empowerment for service to the world. I wonder, however, to what extent they have served as a public expression and recognition of the need for the

transformation of society and a theological motivating force for such work. To find out, I looked at the top 300 Hillsong songs featuring in the UK CCLI song list, and supplemented these with the top 25 songs credited to Darlene Zschech's authorship during her time as Hillsong Church's worship pastor, and sought to find evidence of any expression of interest in or commitment to social engagement activity in the lyrics. There are few, if any, references to specific social challenges or issues. Hillsong writing is typically very much more focused on the God who characteristically is conceived to still the storms of life rather than the difficulties themselves. There are some (often charismatic) songwriting traditions that tend to emphasize God's capacity to stand with believers in times of need and challenge and to show his love to them in the midst of their darkest moments. In contrast, however, Hillsong's approach is much more distinctively in line with the historical pentecostal position, stressing God's power to deliver from trials over his compassion in the midst of them. Their presentation of a "positional reality" appears to affirm the concept that the believer is "seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6) no matter what hardships they face. For the nonbeliever, then, the best solution is always to be understood as the need to turn to Christ and seek his help, since through relationship with him and coming to appreciate his perspective, one comes to rise above one's circumstances. Hillsong lyric writing offers plenty of hints at the recognition of need and the provision of a solution in Christ, which can easily be identified through certain key words and concepts. Central to these, at least it seems to me, is the idea of Hope.

Hope is a reasonably common theme of Hillsong writing, and reading the Hillsong back catalog together, it is clear that a fairly sophisticated and nuanced theological understanding of hope underpins the use of the word. The central message that we can have "hope" no matter what life might throw at us is a commonly repeated trope. For the Hillsong writers, hope, and certainly not despair, is the Christian's proper and fitting response to difficult or discouraging circumstances and the challenges of life ("Take Heart"). It is the security (or anchor, drawing on the biblical metaphor) for the believer's soul ("Anchor"). This hope is irrepressible and inexhaustible, so "When I'm lost there's always hope … in the fire there's always hope" ("Always Will"), and we are encouraged to "hold on to hope and take courage again" because "there is hope, should oceans rise and mountains fall" ("Take Heart"). It is also unlimited and unrestricted—it is available to "every heart" ("Endless Light"; cf. "God Who

Saves"), to "all the world" ("Jesus the Same"), and to the "nations" ("Mighty to Save"). It is a hope that sustains the believer through even the most impossible circumstance ("Oceans will Part", "All Things are Possible"), and comes entirely at God's initiative ("You reached for us from on heaven's throne when we had no hope" ["Alive in Us"]). Hope is to be found in Christ ("All My Hope", "Faithfulness", "Love Knows no End") and for that matter *is* indeed Jesus himself ("Forever Reign," "Hope of the World," "I will Bless you Lord").

For the Hillsong congregation, at least as confessed in these songs, hope comes from the presence of God ("Across the Earth"), and is "restored" through worshiping God ("Savior King") and found "in the love of the Father" ("Our God is Love"). Christ's presence in the life of the believer is "the hope of glory" ("Can't Stop Talking") and the hope that he brings "will never fail" and includes the hope of heaven ("Christ is Enough"). Hope is one of the privileges that come from putting our faith in Christ ("forgiveness, hope, I know is mine" ["And That My Soul Knows Very Well"]) and in his promises ("In God we Trust, You Are Faithful") and arises from an appreciation of the significance and authority of his name ("Jesus, What a Beautiful Name").

The songs I examined do not offer a comprehensive definition of hope (we would not expect them to), but we do learn that in Jesus, the "hope of the world," the believer can "stand" or withstand life's troubles, as hope indwells them ("For this Cause"). Hope is often paralleled with (and by implication, equated to) strength ("All My Hope," "None but Jesus," "You are my Strength"), "defense" ("Stronger"), "peace" ("The One Who Saves"), and the possibility of finding rest for one's soul in God ("All My Hope"). This is "hope for the lost" ("God of Ages") because it is an eternal hope ("King of Heaven") that guarantees our future ("Lifeline") and "shines beyond tomorrow" ("Relentless").

Most specifically and most directly soteriologically, hope comes from "the promise of the cross" ("Anchor") and is "built on … Jesus' blood and righteousness" ("Cornerstone"); it amounts to the forgiveness of sin and the possibility of new life ("Hope of the World"). And it is provided by the death and resurrection of Christ, since worshipers are told they can "find hope when all the world seems lost" by beholding "the triumph of the cross" ("No Other Name"); that the "hope of righteousness comes through the cross" ("You Saw Me"); and are encouraged to see ultimate hope in the empty grave ("Rule").

Significantly for our purposes, however, there are indications of a more specifically practical aspect to this hope in some Hillsong songs. "Oh You Bring" describes God giving "peace to the restless," "joy to homes that are broken," (a significant allusion to family breakdown particularly given the church's "Strengthening Families" tagline), rescuing "those in the valley" and healing "the wounds of my heartache," in an uncharacteristically full description of the difficulties life faces. "Glorious Ruins" invites the worshiper to "walk through the fire with … head lifted high" and "look to the cross" so that "the ruins" of their life will "come to life … rising up from the ashes." "Beautiful Exchange" describes how "only love could break [the] chains" of disillusionment and insecurity and talks of Jesus "trading" his life for the "offenses" of the writer.

Interestingly, too, "My Hope" begins with the affirmation:

> You are righteous
> You love justice
> And those who honor You
> Will see Your face

Followed by the expression of a positive choice to respond to God's expressed character by seeking his face:

> I will arise
> And lift my eyes to see
> Your majesty Your holiness
> And all I am will bless You

And drawn together in a final acclamation:

> My hope is in the name of the Lord
> Where my help comes from
> You're my strength my song

It seems to me that in this song, we find as clear an expression of Hillsong's theology of hope social engagement as anywhere. It relies upon three core principles: an assertion that God cares about the situation; a positive choice on the respondent's part to change their perspective and focus on God's presence rather than the negative circumstance;

and an expression of ultimate and fully requited trust in God which brings deliverance. Read in the light of the broader theology of hope we can identify in Hillsong lyrics, I think the emphasis on divine capacity, universal applicability, and individual responsibility are crucial themes, along with the message that hope for the world is found in an experience of the presence of God alone ("Touching Heaven, Changing Earth"; "God of Ages").

These preliminary conclusions are only further reinforced by consideration of some of the other key theological themes and keywords we might associate with social engagement (such as care, poverty, suffering, justice, brokenness—none of which are particularly common motifs, though they are present). The children's song "Supernatural" talks of God using people and signs and wonders "to show the world (he) care(s)." The power of perspective is significant—more than once "the poor" are invited to "say I am rich" and the weak that they are strong, drawing on the prophetic encouragement offered by Joel 3:10 in a positive affirmation of the power of faith to change circumstances ("What the Lord Has Done"; cf. also "All Things are Possible," "Savior King"). "Stay and Wait" tells us that the one "who lifts the poor and heals the blind, who trampled death for all mankind" and "who stands for all with arms stretched wide" is "my King forever Jesus Christ." Suffering and sorrow are words that are most frequently used in the context of the passion of Christ, but there is very much a theme that "Present suffering may pass" ("Oceans will Part"), that God has turned (and will continue to turn) the believer's sorrow into joy ("This is How We Overcome"; cf. also perhaps "Made Me Glad"), and that this means he is worthy of worship.

Justice is seen as a key aspect of God's character ("My Hope, Greater than All"), and a central characteristic that must be seen in the lives of those who seek to follow him ("From the Inside Out"). Equally, injustice must "bow to Jesus" as Christians shine as lights in the darkness ("Hear our Praises"), and part of the sign of God's eternal reign is that "In the Savior injustice (will be) brought to right" for God's glory ("The Lost are Found"). Singing about the need for justice is, for pentecostals, by no means a dereliction of their duty to work for change in society. On the contrary, it is understood as a prophetic declaration of their shared conviction that God will bring that justice about. Beyond that, in fact, they believe that the very act of declaring God's justice in their worship is central to that justice being brought to into being. The very act—and words—of worship recreate the reality they describe.

The concept of brokenness and the need for healing from God is, after that of hope, probably the most prominent theme relating to social impact and engagement which is found in the Hillsong corpus. In many instances, a spiritual brokenness before God in worship is clearly envisaged, but some passages very clearly imagine a rather earthlier vulnerability. So, God gives "peace to the restless, and joy to homes that are broken" ("Oh You Bring"); he is able to "take" that brokenness ("It is You"), and heal it ("Sing," "So You Would Come"); to "make the broken whole" ("Awesome in this Place") and "bind the broken hearted" ("I Simply Live for You"). Because of God's "kindness for the broken and the lost" ("Nothing Like Your Love"), God's "grace has overwhelmed … brokenness" ("To Know Your Name"), and the "pieces, broken and scattered" have been "in mercy gathered," "raising up the broken to life" ("Broken Vessels"; cf. also "King of Heaven"). God hears "The Cry of the Broken" and "mends" them by being "To every outcast a friend and comforter" because Jesus was "bruised" for their "shame" and "broken" for their "healing."

The only specific mention of the brokenness of society I could identify is an interesting one, though, proclaiming as it does:

> Now the boroughs have been opened
> And the broken have been chosen
> And the city is becoming alive in You ("Only You")

This speaks of the power of God in rejuvenating and reanimating the city, and his compassion in choosing "the broken" (presumably for his mission of bringing hope to the community).

Therefore, whilst Hillsong's writers do not tackle social challenges as directly as some others have done, they do very much emphasize the capacity of God to intervene and bring change. Actually I think we can offer a reasonably full summary of Hillsong's theology of social engagement on the basis of its songwriting, which I would summarize as follows: life is difficult sometimes, but the sacrifice of Jesus makes deliverance and healing possible. God cares intimately about the situations we face, and because of his mercy, as we put our trust in him, he will rescue us, and therefore (this is the crucial and distinctive point) *we need to take responsibility* for living our lives as delivered people who proclaim and live in the light of that freedom. This assertion of responsibility and the need to take action ourselves for our own good is very typical of traditional classical pentecostal theology, and is increasingly becoming, in the

progressive wing of the movement, a commitment to stand with, and care for those marginalized by society. It is, in the very best sense, a theology where God helps those who help themselves as well as those who are incapable of doing so. There is a need for conscious decision to move beyond suffering, and for a particular choice to trust God for the resource that only he can provide, but then confidence in his promise and power is enough to sustain believers through the challenges they face.

The Hillsong that *I* See

What I have presented here is clearly a long way from a fully comprehensive account of the church's culture and contribution. It does, however, offer some insights into the distinctive features of Hillsong thinking on and around social engagement. It does seem to me, on the basis of the publicly available information, that their practice is highly innovative and indeed sector leading (particularly, but by no means exclusively, in Sydney and London). It also appears that their motivation is theological as well as pragmatic, and that the theological foundations of their activity are quite distinctively pentecostal. This is interesting in particular given my starting point for this essay. Precisely the same rationale that invited the earliest pentecostals of all corners of the globe to retreat from social concern activity and focus on the proclamation of the gospel in its purest form appears to drive Hillsong's significant recent expansion of its engagement with society. I am sure, of course, that there are political, cultural, and other contextual imperatives encouraging the church's continuing investment in such projects, and their size and influence means their capacity to intervene is greater than that of most other congregations. But, fundamentally, Hillsong intervenes because they believe that Jesus, the hope of humanity, can make a difference in a world suffering from crisis and tragedy—by calling it back home to community. Whilst God's power is seen as "more than enough" on its own, capable in bringing deliverance in miraculous and unexpected ways, the role the church plays is essentially to support and sustain God's activity via less sudden or unexpected divine intervention by creating communities of intervention, developing a network of relationships around the needy person to ensure they stay in the right place for God to speak to them and to draw them beyond their difficulties. Those moments often occur in worship. God holds his hand out to the needy—the church helps them become attentive to that hand in the midst of life's distractions

and difficulties. Furthermore, the church encourages them to grab onto it with every ounce of their being, and thus, encourages helps them to understand or interpret their experiences within a broader context.

In many ways, the connection between what Hillsong seeks to do and how it motivates its action is crucial. Here, it seems to me, there is a positive alignment and evidence of a coherent strategy. The church's connection with society is very heavily informed by its theology, which in turn is reinforced by the influx of transformed individuals into the congregation, who themselves are then equipped for further service and sent out to make a difference in the world. All the evidence suggests that this is more than a mere narrative, but a very real insight into the church's distinctive contribution and significant achievements around social engagement.

However, it seems to me that the only truly fair and effective measure of a church's success is to consider its achievements in the light of the priorities it sets itself and the vision it identifies. In 2014, revising an earlier statement, Global Senior Pastor Brian Houston set out the next stage of his vision and priorities for Hillsong in his "The Church I Now See" document (http://hillsong.com/vision). He concludes the statement by observing:

> The church that I see is committed to bringing the love and hope of Christ to impossible situations through the preaching of the gospel and a mandate that drives us to do all we can to bring help and solution to a needy world.

This is undoubtedly the key paradigmatic statement expressing the church's understanding of its commitment to the needs of the world. It recognizes the reality of the "impossible" challenges society faces. It asserts the power of the gospel to deliver change. It recognizes that the church will not be able to do everything it might want—but it affirms their commitment to do all they can. All the evidence suggests that this is indeed the church Hillsong is building globally. Whether on account of the sheer numbers of individuals who are helped by the church's own work or because of the ways in which the church shapes the thinking and attitudes of its peers through its teaching and worship music, it is hard to see the church as having anything other than a considerable degree of success in this quest, to the glory of God and the benefit of many thousands of people worldwide. I hope others too will watch and learn and realize that perhaps they can, too.

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PART IV

What Lies Ahead?

CHAPTER 12

It Is (not) Alternative: On Hillsong's Vision as Sacrament and Spectacle

Dreu Harrison

This is a chapter of three movements. First, Hillsong's vision will be analyzed as a charismatic exchange, which allows Hillsong's leaders to envision an ideal and direct their followers toward achieving it. Second, the content of Hillsong's vision will be represented through a close reading of its two primary modes of presentation: the "founding" vision expressed in "The Church I See Now" statement and the "forward" vision communicated across Hillsong's annual "Vision Sunday" events. Finally, the effect of the vision statement and services will be interpreted and judged on their functioning as sacraments or malfunctioning as spectacles.

Vision as Divine Perspective

A Christian notion of vision is one aspect of the First and Second Testament's depiction of prophecy. Christian prophecy is difficult to define with any precision (Martin 2016). However, it is generally seen to originate in God's self-disclosure to select individuals, convey emotion

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as well as reason (Heschel 1962) and offer a divine perspective on the world (Moore 2004). It criticizes the social status quo and energizes an alternative consciousness of the world (Brueggemann 1978). This alternative consciousness is exemplified in the ministries of Moses and Jesus. By extension, Stronstad (2013) explains that, for pentecostals at least, because Jesus ministered on earth as a prophet and transferred the Spirit of prophecy to his disciples, his disciples can now minister as prophets.

pentecostals affirm prophecy through their praxis of charismatic gifts and life. As such, they usually give a prominent place to the prophetic in their churches, both word and Spirit. However, this identity marker is being effaced as certain contemporary pentecostal churches have all but removed the practice of prophecy and tongues from their congregational services. Dodson's (2011) assessment of certain pentecostal churches in the USA is just as applicable to Hillsong: "The practices of tongues and prophecy no longer hold a prominent place in the worship services…. These practices are embraced mostly in the context of extraordinary revival environments, small group settings, or individual, private prayer" (51).

This confinement of charismatic outbursts to forums beyond congregational services suggests a shift in what counts as visionary for Hillsong. We would expect vision in its originary sense—ecstatic experience and transcendent insight—to be highly valued in any pentecostal church. Yet, with the prominent eclipse of tongues and prophecy in its services, we must conclude that Hillsong now retains a more restricted notion of vision. The dreams and visions of the inspired community have been effectively displaced by the vision of the inspired founder-leaders. Stated this way, the equivocacy at work in the term "inspired" becomes clear. This equivocacy has come about as the meaning of inspiration shifted, in what C.S. Lewis (1964) described as the "great movement of internalization, and that consequent aggrandizement of man and desiccation of the outer universe … in which the psychological history of the West has so largely consisted" (42). The domestication Lewis outlines at a world-historical level is the very one that Hillsong has enacted at an ecclesial level: what was once outside us is now inside us.

Vision as Double-Bind

In acknowledging this, we are better able to see the ways in which the notion of vision has become increasingly overdetermined for Hillsong, as it fuses the biblical ideal of people led by the Spirit to the corporate

ideal of people aligned around a desired future goal. Those who attend to Hillsong's vision statements or its services will soon find themselves, knowingly or otherwise, subject to the logic of a double-bind. As Slavoj Žižek explains in an article for the website *Lacan Dot Com*, a double-bind:

> implies an unbearable subjective tension (the proverbial mother who explicitly enjoins her son to go away and start an autonomous life, but whose message between the lines is a desperate call to stay with her; the father who tells his son to act autonomously, so that if the son effectively does it, he thereby asserts his subordination to his father, since he followed his injunction)…

The notion of the double-bind was first developed by Gregory Bateson in his researches into schizophrenia as a window into the human experience of communication, especially in families. A double-bind has three semantic components: a primary negative injunction, a conflicting secondary negative injunction, and a tertiary negative injunction that prohibits escape (Gibney 2006). To demonstrate using Žižek's first example, let us imagine a mother communicating to her son in the following fashion:

> *Primary negative injunction*
>
> "You should just go on with your life."
>
> [Don't stay, be independent.]
>
> *Secondary negative injunction*
>
> "I'm used to people leaving me."
>
> [Don't abandon me.]
>
> *Tertiary negative injunction*
>
> "It's so typical of you to avoid facing your problems by running away."
>
> [Don't quit this situation.]

Transposing the "contradictory double imperative" (Pound 2008, 43) from the realm of family relations to contemporary pentecostal ministry, we find leaders at Hillsong enjoining their followers to live out their

freedom as disciples while, between the lines, enjoining them to live out their freedom as consumers. It is vital to offer up a caveat at this point. Gibney (2006) explains "the [double-bind] hypothesis does not 'blame' the family nor the parents, nor does it imply malicious, deliberate intent to those involved in the communicational maze. Rather, it describes a partial aspect of an overall observable pattern" (51). Framing Hillsong's vision as a double-bind cannot be taken to demonstrate that Hillsong's leaders are deliberately misrepresenting the gospel by cunningly conflating it with the imperatives of the market to broaden its appeal; it is not their intention that this double-bind emerges. Instead, the double-bind will be shown as an aspect of the systematic derangement of religious discourse under the conditions of the society of spectacle.

Applying the notion of the double-bind when interpreting Hillsong's vision is also important here in that it forestalls the introduction of a more obvious and familiar subjective tension: that of eschatological postponement. Christian eschatology proposes that that the life to come is at once "now" and "not yet," that the kingdom was established and is advancing but is not yet fully present. It is undeniable that this understanding is part and parcel of Hillsong's vision statements and services, as it is (with variation) with any Christian document or liturgical enactment. Yet reading Hillsong's vision along eschatological lines risks missing, or excusing, the bind that operates hidden in plain sight. In what follows, it will be shown that Hillsong's visionary injunction effectively shifts the emphasis of traditional eschatological expectation toward a "now" without difference. Where eschatology signals transformation, the double-bind ends up signaling *a confirmation of popular consciousness couched in the language of alternative consciousness.* Thus, we will find in Hillsong's vision a repeated injunction to do and give more matched to the exhortation that "the best is yet to come," with this best consistently defined as progressively greater global influence, prosperity, generosity, and numerical growth. Is this the mark of the coming kingdom or the globalizing market? Whatever the verdict, the effect of all this can amount the communication of performance anxiety in the language of prophetic anticipation.

So it remains to be determined if Hillsong's vision, as alternative consciousness, in fact converges on late modern or neoliberal[1] consciousness, thereby enacting a double-bind. To decide this, we must not only receive the vision but judge it. Borrowing from biblical precedent, prophetic words may be judged in two ways: according to their origin (the

source of the disclosure) or according to their effect (the outcome of the disclosure). "Discern the spirits" and/or "know their fruit."[2] In what follows, an attempt is being made to judge Hillsong's vision in terms of its effect rather than its motive, that effect being said to constitute a double-bind. To justify this choice, it is helpful to revisit an earlier point. It was stated that prophecy in general, and vision in particular, has at least two attributes: it originates from God and aims to establish an alternative consciousness of the world. If we were to judge whether Hillsong's vision statement and services "originates from God," we would be compelled to own up to theism or atheism at the outset and then argue the case predictably. It is not that this kind of apologetic is without value. Rather, it is that it has no place in this investigation on methodological grounds.[3] In place of the question of motive, we can look to judge the vision's effect, that is, the degree to which Hillsong's vision statement and services facilitate what Brueggemann described as an alternative consciousness. Our verdict depends on deciding the following: if the vision can be shown to found an alternative consciousness to the dominant one—and in the West this is surely neoliberal—then it has succeeded as a prophetic word; if it does not, it has not. What is being argued, and remains to be demonstrated, is that Hillsong's vision explicitly opposes and implicitly condones the neoliberal command to enjoy. It is (not) alternative—a double-bind.

Hillsong's "Founding" Vision

This inquiry into the Hillsong vision will proceed by investigating the vision's two modes of presentation: online and in services. While these modes overlap and inform one another, here it is enough to focus on how they serve different purposes. "The Church I See Now" statement (published in 2014, it is a revised version from the original "The Church I See" statement) presents the "founding vision" of Hillsong. It is an articulation of the church's mores in light of *missio Dei* and the senior leader's sense of the church's place within that overarching mission. By contrast, the "Vision Sunday" event presents the "forward vision" of Hillsong. It announces the Spirit's ongoing movement in the world and the senior leader's unfolding sense of the church's response to that movement as well as specifying certain concrete themes and initiatives for the year.

To begin with the "founding" vision, Brian Houston (here its implied author—the first person pronoun stating the vision) opens "The Church I See Now" as follows:

> The Church I See is a global church. I see a global family: One house with many rooms, outworking a unified vision. I see a church apostolic in calling, and visionary in nature; committed to boldly impacting millions for Christ in significant cities and nations throughout the earth with the greatest of all causes—the Cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Houston 2014)

Taking this preface as representative of the key components of what Hillsong aspires to be, we can see the following idealized outline emerge: the church will be global, unified, empowered, and growing.

In the opening of the statement, "a global church" cannot be mistaken for "the global church." Here, global does not indicate the community of all believers at the present moment so much as a geographically dispersed franchise united by a common vision, leadership, and brand (what Hillsong, and others, sometimes refer to as a "campus model" of church). From this we can surmise that the ideal Hillsong church has moved with the times, embracing globalization, and the "new form of social organization based on networking" (Castells 2005, 7). This new form allows Hillsong to be extremely flexible and scale in an unprecedented way. One important caveat to this is the acknowledgment that, given Brian and Bobbie Houston's exceptional status as founder-leaders, Hillsong does not operate in a strictly decentralized fashion (unlike, say, the network model of Internet). Hillsong Sydney is the hub and every other Hillsong campus or outreach is a node connected to, and referring to, this hub for its vision. In matching a directive style of leadership to a dispersed organizational form, the Houstons have successfully confected the most recent and prevalent mode of Western social organization with their charismatic leadership style.

A centralized-charismatic approach may also be inferred from the statement's first mention of a "unified vision," depending on how where we locate source of the unity. Just before this phrase occurs, it is stated that the ideal Hillsong church is "a global family: One house with many rooms." The mention of "family" and allusion to John 14:2 are perfectly consistent with the Christian notion that to be saved is to be part of the *oikonomia*, the "economy of salvation" (La Cugna 1973, 2), being

adopted into the *oikos*, the "household" or "family," of God (although, taken in its strict sense, the passage in John describes the Father's house, that is, Heaven, to which Jesus is departing and where the disciples cannot follow him). We can also surmise that the mention of "family" points to the very real warmth and care that marks so many relationships that Hillsong churches foster among their diverse church and community members. Yet what is explicitly called out as holding this family together is that it is "outworking a unified vision." What is striking here is the way the collision of familial and organizational language borders on mixed metaphor. Families do not outwork unified visions, corporations do. The church is, metaphorically, a family and a corporation. However, the tension inherent in naming the unity of the former in the jargon of the latter hints at the barely submersed logic of the double-bind mentioned earlier.

To describe a church as "apostolic in calling, and visionary in nature" is an unusual way to frame the role charismatic leadership assumes to empower the church for the work of ministry. Ephesians 2:20 explains that the Church is "built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets" (NRSV). If the phrase in the vision statement is seen to obliquely refer to this verse, then the vision statement may be read to exhibit a pentecostal understanding of charismatic continuity and legitimacy in the Pauline sense. Yet it is unclear how a church, as opposed to the leader of a church, can properly be called apostolic. Perhaps it means the leader of the ideal church is an apostle as well as a pastor-teacher, one who plants many churches, endures persecution, and provides guidance to many church leaders under their care.

The opening paragraph concludes by stating that this future church is "committed to boldly impacting millions for Christ in significant cities and nations throughout the earth with the greatest of all causes—the Cause of our Lord Jesus Christ." This statement gets to the missional heart of Hillsong and captures its reason for being. Hillsong, consistent with pentecostalism more generally, is intensely focused on proselytizing. The distinctive point mentioned here is that of "significant cities and nations," which suggests that Hillsong's church plant and campus strategies will be largely focused on prominent locations. Reviewing the locations where it has planted recently, we find London and New York, surely the cultural and financial axes of Anglo-American dominance, prominently featured, bearing out the vision's emphasis on "significant" urban centers and states as the places where Hillsong is called to be.

Hillsong's "Forward" Vision

Reviewing the "founding" vision of Hillsong prepares us to consider in more detail its "forward" vision, communicated annually in its "Vision Sunday" events. These services are held in February each year, and are significant events in Hillsong's calendar. They provide an opportunity to represent a compelling statement of church's vision that will in turn inform its strategy and direct key product and service tie-ins, such as album launches, for the year to come. Over time, these events have grown into major multimedia productions, reiterating Hillsong's core values and broadcasting its envisioned future to its national and international churches in its network as well as being available on the church's official YouTube channel after the event is held.

The service itself is run in a manner consistent with Hillsong's "convergent media environment," discussed in detail elsewhere (Wagner 2015, 31). A slick sensory experience that moves effortlessly from opening video, to worship music, to testimonial videos, to sermon, to close, it will be enough in this analysis of vision to focus on the sermon as a high point of the service. In 2016, Brian Houston took Isaiah 43:19 (NKJV) as his anchoring verse: "Behold, I will do a new thing" (Hillsong Church, 2016, 46:40). He opens with the gloss "Behold. That's the word of the Lord for Hillsong church this year. It literally means "stand in awe and be amazed." Putting it down into a three-letter word: "Wow"" (46:55). The mention of the "word of the Lord" up front indicates that the message being shared is prophetic, in that it is inspired and timely for the church for the year. The translation of "Behold" into "Wow" exemplifies the genius of Houston's stage persona and skill as a speaker: his energy, his conversational style, his humor, and his direct, often recursive, presentation of epigrams and anecdotes.

Houston goes on to rehearse key initiatives, such as a campus launch in Buenos Aires, a church takeover and rebrand in Phoenix AZ, and the global launch of a 24/7 Hillsong television channel that will reach up to 60 million homes in the USA alone as "wow moments" (47:20). In this way, he integrates and raises these otherwise singular programs into an overarching narrative of flourishing, "a global church with a strong Australian base" (37:45) that is proof of the ongoing realization of the founding vision. Throughout, Houston cuts to videos that represent the new Phoenix church or the future TV channel in look and feel. This highlights the way in which vision can be rendered in ever more

sensuous and on-brand ways in the age of digital reproduction; people can now literally see parts of the vision. Underlining the momentum of the church (and, inadvertently, in a paean to pentecostal myopia), Houston at one point emphatically states, "the future is where it's all at 'cause sentiment erodes significance'" (51:14). The past here is worse than an irrelevance, it is an impediment to growth.

With this update completed, Houston moves to exposit how "God made five amazing declarations in Isaiah 43" (57:13). He begins by declaring that God assures his people, through the prophet, that "I've got it, I've done it before, I'm going to do it again, I'm telling you what it is, are you up for it?" In outlining this sequence, he consistently challenges his audience to believe this word, apply it to themselves, and act on it. Houston draws on the imagery of roads and rivers in the passage to characterize what God is doing; He is establishing "roads winding upward to Heaven's purpose and rivers flow downward with Heaven's provision" (59:31). This can be interpreted to mean that God's promises and provisions will become ever more expansive in the life and ministry of the Hillsong church if it embraces change. Provocatively, using the Israelite liberation from Egypt and Babylon as precedents, Houston marks out what can count as an alternative culture at Hillsong: divinely bestowed "freedom, possessions, and land" (1:02:14). In more concrete terms, this means Hillsong, among other things, will graciously obtain more money and buildings to continue its global expansion (1:02:20).

God's acts in history, such as his liberations of the Israelites, are depicted as a sequence of "new things." Profiling the "new thing," Houston lists supernatural intervention (1:01:10), supernatural favor (1:04:15), supernatural fast-tracks (1:05:47), supernatural supply (1:10:38), and supernatural repositioning (1:12:26) as its features. He concludes with a challenge to those present to "put calling over comfort" and believe for "supernatural new things" (1:15:49). He closes with what, in recent times, has served as the benediction at Hillsong: "the best it yet to come" (1:16:36). To spell this conclusion out in the form of the double-bind we outlined earlier:

Primary negative injunction

"Put calling over comfort."

[Do not submit to the dominant culture.]

Secondary negative injunction

"Believe for supernatural new things."

[Do not miss out on freedom, possessions and land: the fixations of the dominant culture.]

Tertiary negative injunction

"The best is yet to come."

[Don't quit this situation.]

Vision as Sacrament and Spectacle

To reiterate, Hillsong's vision is idealized and integrative, imagining a bright future and summoning people to believe and work together to realize it. The integrity of the vision is reciprocated in the integrity of the people's will who are subject to it. From an "inside" point of view, Hillsong's vision unites Hillsong's people under their God-given leaders and for their God-ordained mission. From the "outside," the impulse to achieve unification or ordering of life under Christ can be framed as a sacramental impulse, with sacrament here still understood to be "a symbol of a sacred thing and the visible form of an invisible grace" (*Decree of the Eucharist* cited in Marion 2009, 89).

In positioning the communication of vision as a sacramental act, caution needs to be taken in the face of the prevailing view that pentecostalism possesses no sacramental consciousness (Kärkkäinen 2008). It is, therefore, worth taking a moment to consider what might be meant by sacramentality in pentecostal circles. There are three primary ways that various Christian traditions have come to explain how visible form (*sacrementum*) and invisible grace (*res sacramenti*) can be connected. How to explain the visibility of the invisible? Tradition has resorted the relation between substance and accident, cause and effect, and sign and referent, respectively (Marion, 2009). In accusing pentecostals of lacking a sacramental consciousness, critics almost certainly mean they have no recourse to the metaphysical dyads of substance-accident and cause-effect in explaining how the risen Christ is present in and to His Church. In this, they are correct, especially given pentecostal's spirited insistence on following "ordinances" rather than administering "sacraments" (Bicknell 1998). This leaves the semiotic model as a way forward.

In taking up this model, we can release the sacramentality of the sacrament from its connection to particular rituals or formulas and consider how it might operate across the Christian life as a whole (Chauvet 1995). In line with this, James K. Smith has suggested that pentecostal language be treated as surrealistic rather than realistic (Smith 2010). Evaluating Smith's position, Vondey concludes that for pentecostals:

> No matter how well we depict our view of reality, our image of the real is never identical with that reality. All we can offer is a representation of the real in which we allow the invisible to become visible or, in Smith's words, offer an aesthetic imagining of the world otherwise. The striking event of the indescribable becoming visible, the unspeakable becoming audible, the unexpected becoming reality, marks a central element of the Pentecostal view of the Christian life as between the reality of this world and that of another. (Vondey 2010, 250)

It is sufficient to say that, on this basis of Smith's and Vondey's descriptions, the vision in "The Church I See Now" or "Vision Sunday" provides the vehicle and occasion for "the invisible to become visible … an aesthetic imagining of the world otherwise."

So what of the double-bind? It emerges as we seek to precisely determine in what this "world otherwise" consists. Based on Houston's 2016 Vision Sunday sermon, it seems that the church succeeding per se is sufficient to constitute an alternative consciousness: instead of "being the tail and not the head" (1:03:24), instead of being "subservient to a dominant and sinful culture" (1:03:18), the church will experience God's new thing and go on to flourish. Certainly it runs against the grain of prevalent narratives around the "religious decline" and the rise of "new atheism" for any church to survive, let alone thrive, in the modern secular West. Hillsong's numerical growth and burgeoning media reach is a shock to the purported "inevitable" course of events. But are these features really sufficient to constitute an alternative consciousness in the present epoch? Or do these succeed precisely because they "outplay the players" in a game of market penetration and share? What happens when God's new thing is inscribed within the relentless and banal demand of modernity for novelty? When historical myopia proves to be the fitting prerequisite for embracing the churn of creative destruction? When "peace be with you" shifts to "the best it yet to come" without flinching?

In asking these questions, the very real liability of a semiotic understanding of sacramentality under the neoliberal condition comes into view. The figure whom most directly and acutely exposes this liability is Guy Debord, in his thesis on the emergence of the "society of spectacle." On first glance, Debord is an unusual figure to turn to, given his Marxist views and revolutionary agenda. It would be deeply hostile to interpret Hillsong according to Marx's, and by extension Debord's, broad denunciations of religion as material epiphenomenon and cultural opioid. Yet Debord's work can be taken up in two ways: as a system (generalizing from all 221 of his theses) or as fragments [zeroing in on one or two select theses in his *The Society of Spectacle* (1967/1995)]. Adopting the latter approach, we find Debord in fragments has much to add to an interpretation of Hillsong's vision; not only is his situationism consonant with surrealism (to Smith's point about pentecostal sacramentality and language) but certain of his theses can directly illuminate the visionary double-bind under discussion.

For Debord (1988/2005), the spectacle is "the autocratic reign of the market economy, which has acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty, and the totality of new techniques of government that accompanied this reign" (Theses II). This definition is important in shifting our focus from the use of mass media as the superficial apparatus of the spectacle (Thesis 24) to the spectacle itself; it also is suggestive for our purposes in framing vision as a "new technique of government." The effect of the spectacle is such that "the whole of life … presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*" (Debord 1967/1995, 12 emphasis in original). This drive to unify the whole of life through spectacle is a perversion of the drive to unify the whole of life through sacrament. Debord himself hints at this connection, opening *The Society of Spectacle* by quoting directly from the Preface to the second edition of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*:

> But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the things signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence…*illusion* only is sacred, *truth* profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness. (Feuerbach 1843/2012 xi–xii; Debord 1967/1995 11)

Feuerbach originally wrote these words to defend his thesis that religious supernaturalism is superfluous, having been exposed as the sublimated projection of human desire onto an imaginary Other. His claim that religion had an anthropological essence sparked an intense controversy, particularly over the status of the sacraments (Feuerbach 1843/2012). With the disappearance of the original thing signified (the grace of Christ) in the "great movement of internalization" described by Lewis, a transcendental signified was toppled. Debord assumes Feuerbach's humanizing agenda and his assumption that the thing signified (God) is an illusion but then extends the project by proposing that "the autocratic reign of the market" has become the modern *res sacramenti*, the illusion that is everywhere present to enforce order. Debord's critique of modern alienation and commodity fetishism follows from an attempt to reclaim life from sacrosanct commodity exchange, and to unify it as natural work without remainder. He makes all this explicit in Thesis 25:

> Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. Religious contemplation in its earliest form was the outcome of the establishment of the social division of labor and the formation of classes. Power draped itself in the outward garb of a mythical order from the beginning. In former times the category of the sacred justified the cosmic and ontological ordering of things that best served the interests of the masters, expanding upon and embellishing what society *could not deliver*. Thus, power as a separate realm has always had a spectacular aspect, but mass allegiance to frozen religious imagery was originally a shared acknowledgement of loss, an imaginary compensation for the poverty of real social activity that was still widely felt to be a universal fact of life. The modern spectacle, by contrast, depicts what society *can deliver*, but within this depiction what is permitted is rigidly distinguished from what is possible. The spectacle preserves unconsciousness as practical changes in the conditions of existence proceed. The spectacle is self-generated, and it makes up its own rules: it is a specious form of the sacred. (Debord 1967/1995 20)

There is too much in this to address in detail but, for the purpose of explicating the double-bind, Debord's differentiation between an early "sacred," with its frozen religious imagery providing compensation for what society could not deliver, and a later "spectacle," depicting what society can deliver but only within the scope of what the market permits, is crucial to understanding Hillsong's vision function as spectacle.

Conclusion

Having established the charismatic context of Hillsong's vision and teased out some of its elements, it remains possible to use what Debord outlines to finally expound the double-bind at the core of Hillsong's vision. If we grant that Hillsong's vision is Spirit-inspired then we must part ways with Feuerbach and Debord in their project to demystify all religion. Yet there is something in Debord's description of an immense and dynamic modern spectacle representing what is permitted, over and against what is possible, that rings true when examining why Hillsong's visionary alternative so easily signals a truce with our dominant economic model of life. The spectacle excludes true alternatives, reducing protests of its form to forms of protest fit for consumption. The spectacle does not repudiate any position, theistic or atheistic; it does not need to because it already enframes these and magnifies them as choices. Its incessant transvaluation can be seen most vividly in Hillsong's confident transliteration of miracles to wow moments, of deliverance to prosperity, of blessing to growth, of abiding peace to frenetic anticipation, and of proleptic vision to impending success.

In short, on the basis of the spectacle underpinning the society it hopes to win, and without in any ways impugning its claim to divine sanction, Hillsong's vision can be seen to ultimately manufacture the very alienation it should subvert. The now-not yet, between the lines and images, finally succumbs to the now-(not). This double-bind expresses itself at every turn. If this verdict is clear, it remains unclear what can be done in the teeth of such a deeply pessimistic conclusion. A return to the other two sacramental models would seem to require embracing a defunct metaphysical system and vocabulary that, anyways, are ill-fitted to pentecostal praxis. Moreover, there is no evidence that these models fare any better against the corrosive totality of the spectacle. Something must be done. But what can be done when everything is permitted, when a new thing is always and already passé?

Notes

1. In the 1990s, references to our "late modern" condition came to be translated into references to our "neoliberal" condition (Sahlins 2002). Narrowly defined, neoliberalism is a "system of 'accumulation by dispossession'" defined by privitization and commodification, financialization,

the manipulation of crises, and state redistribution of wealth upwards (Ortner 2011; Harvey 1989, 159–164 passim). While this depiction borders on the conspiratorial, it helps explain our present experience of economic capital as the dominant form of capital in modern societies and economically derived enjoyment and anxiety as the preoccupying features of modern living.

2. The first principle is a commonly cited paraphrase of 1 John 4:1, the second a quote from Matthew 7:16.
3. This amounts an assertion of methodological agnosticism because, in undertaking a social and discursive analysis of Hillsong's vision, it must be admitted that God is neither a social or discursive object and, as such, cannot be admitted as an object of the analysis (or, indeed, any kind of object at all).

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CHAPTER 13

The Contours of Hillsong's Socio-Ethical Engagement

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Hillsong Church Global[1] is a powerful instrument of change and renewal in the global ecclesia.[2] In the 30 years since its founding, Hillsong has gained a global profile. This has necessitated its interface with ethical issues that it is not theologically prepared for. The mantra, "we cannot do everything but we must do something" summarises the purpose and intention behind much of Hillsong Church's engagement with ethical issues. Whilst there will always be an endless number of tenuous pastoral circumstances and morally perplexing issues, Hillsong, with its "have a go" spirit has attempted to address *some* of the issues facing the twenty-first-century church. Hillsong Church is in a constant process of reimagining its approach to social engagement and ethical issues and demonstrates increasing energy for community mobilization.[3] The ACC movement has not been afforded the maturation of more established denominations in Australia, such as the Catholic, Anglican, and Uniting

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Churches. For better or worse, it has been institutionally separated from the mainstream power structures (unlike its Catholic and Anglican counterparts) and this has provided freedom to find its own ethical methods and practises free from governmental interference and cultural constraints.

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the theological and socio-ethical process by which Hillsong engages contemporary issues, and forecast its future trajectories through an ethnographic organizational study into its theological and socio-ethical engagement (Ybema et al. 2009). First, the chapter will highlight the need to formulate ethical statements for social issues. Second, it will assess the current approaches undertaken by Hillsong's leadership in local contexts to negotiate ethical positions. This is based upon my own participant-observation as a Hillsong staff member within the research and advisory team that creates "position papers" for discussion within the ACC denomination.[4] Finally, the chapter will critique these practices in order to establish future orientations that recognize Hillsong's global voice and influence with regard to moral issues.

The Need for Engagement and Theoretical Approaches

There is limited literature about Hillsong's social engagement. Similarly, there are very few works that specifically address pentecostal ethics.[5] However, there are a number of related concerns with the use of deontological methodology with regard to ethics raised by pentecostal scholars including Keith Warrington and Allan Anderson. Awareness of the current research on this topic will assist us in situating Hillsong's approach in this broader theoretical literature.

First, the growing complexity of society is producing an increasing number of situations not addressed directly in scripture (Warrington 2008, 208). Second, Allan Anderson reminds his readers of the intrinsic narrative theology that has carried pentecostalism from its origins into the twenty-first century.[6] He notes that pentecostal ethics isn't overtly articulated but modelled in sermons, which usually begin with, "The Bible says…". or sometimes even, "God says…". Thus, answers to highly

complex issues may be addressed simply by citing a passage from the Bible. Moreover, the prescriptions and commands in Scripture are often taken literally, leaving little room for anything other than a rules-based approach to ethics with its consequent brutal Old Testament biblical prescriptions such as stoning adulterers (Anderson 2013, 127).

Pentecostal ecumenist Veli-Matti Karkkainen addresses the question of ethics within a broader social justice rubric by connecting ecclesiology with eschatology. This connection is best seen in the institution of the church as "an anticipation of the kingdom" (Kärkkäinen 2009, 117–118). The incompletion of the kingdom of God is echoed in the ministries of the church and the church's social justice activities. The coming of this kingdom, which at the eschaton will take place through the sovereign intervention, will usher in justice and peace. Whatever noble activities Christians and other people carry out toward the goal are not irrelevant but neither are they instrumental in its realization. Thus, on a theoretical level, the church can be determined to "reach into God's rule" without necessarily achieving the "finality of God's rule" (ibid.). This places significance on participation in social justice but not necessarily on its wholesale success. The church, in all its ministry facets, is "a sign, pointing to a future society of peace and justice that no political system can bring into existence" (ibid.). As Pastor Brian Houston often proclaims, "The best is yet to come." Hillsong Church is continuously reaching into the future across of broad range of initiatives whilst recognising that present realities are to be finalized and perfected in the future.

Karkkainen contends that the pentecostal ideal of fellowship, or *koinonea*, is theologically rooted in the Trinitarian relations of Father, Son, and Spirit. This provides the ideal towards which Hillsong should model its behaviour in all aspects of its ministry. Quoting Green, Karkkainen draws attention to both the unity and diversity elements of Trinitarian theology, which is reflected in the practice of pentecostal ethics at the local level: "Furthermore, [pentecostals] believe that the Trinitarian life is the highest expression of the unity to which they aspire" (Green 2016, 98). Notwithstanding that this is the ideal that should be aspired to, the eschatological shortfalls of social justice initiatives mean that the correct balance of unity and diversity in ethical discussion is always deficient. The most significant challenge that is

experienced by Hillsong, therefore, is most likely ensuring the engagement doesn't swing too significantly in one of the alternative extremes.

The pentecostal church historically has had a complex relationship with social justice (Alexander 2012; Welsh and Alexander 2012). Notwithstanding the transformational effect of pentecostalism in the poverty-stricken global south (Chesnut 1997; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Freeman 2012; Gifford 2015), the nature of the church's evangelistic mission and social responsibility have often been misappropriated. Clifton suggests that often "social concern is seen as a method of selling the ministry of the church to individuals and society as a whole, rather than something intimately connected to the gospel" (Clifton and Ormerod 2007, 233–234; Clifton 2009). This points towards the need for a more nuanced understanding, like that of evangelical Ron Sider (1993, 180), who recognizes that although social justice initiatives can have a significant role in church evangelism, such initiatives should still remain ends in and of themselves and not simply means towards growth in church membership. The blurring of these two activities, or in some cases the engulfing of social justice initiatives into the rubric of evangelism, delegitimizes social justice as a key element of ecclesial mission (Prakash 2010, 72).

Pentecostal theologian and ethicist, Nimi Wariboko, has developed a pentecostal-centered methodological approach to ethics in *The Pentecostal Principle* (2011). Its goal is to initiate new theological and social conversations in the pentecostal movement. He is cognisant of pentecostalism's status as a young movement but concurrently positive regarding its ability to speak with moral authority into the public sphere. Wariboko's model provides a working pentecostal response to this complicated pluralistic situation: "The wind that blows anywhere it wishes cannot be confined and thus it analogically points to abundance of alternatives and possibilities" (Wariboko 2011, 22).

He observes that "pentecostalism is something new…" but not so new it is unintelligible, i.e. its historical antecedents provide some context: "while it is also protestant, it is not merely protestant" (ibid., 17). One of his driving motifs is the creative spark and innovation that sets pentecostals apart and maintains their distinction, manifesting in various practises including glossalalia. He argues that the pentecostal experience of tongues is both an opening of conversation (ibid., 110) and the decentralization of traditional methods and practices, not as the

answer to the world's problems but a new way of framing the question. Interestingly, his arguments are by no means passive, indeed the "Pentecostal Principle," in his view, is "…always at work resisting obstacles to human flourishing, and is committed to creating, broadening and deepening new possibilities of life" (ibid., 41). He envisions a pentecostal community, always "on edge" and "ready to respond" to life's complexities.

Subsequently, in The Charismatic City, Wariboko contends that the "emerging urban, cosmopolitan civilization, shot through with transnational spiritual energies" is the conduit by which human potentials can be actualized (Wariboko 2014, 5). His concept of the "Charismatic City" is not a geographical or cultural location but the transient "center of gravity" where the local and global interact in the form of "networks, new beginnings, new thinking, new energies, and renewed religious intensity" (ibid., 6). This compensates for the imperfect eschatological reality raised by Karkkainen by reminding us that amongst other things, the Charismatic City represents new beginnings. Although Hillsong Global's center of gravity is Australia and its founders Brian and Bobbie Houston (see Harrison, this volume), the church and its members are also denizens of the Charismatic City. (Riches 2016, 286) With regard to ethics, the Charismatic City provides both healing, for those who are victims of human suffering, and hope, for a better future, or as paraphrased by Hillsong, "the Best is Yet to Come." Where ethics committees determine to find the best answers, pathways, and means of assistance, situated in such a context of global flows, empowered by the creative work of the Spirit, the best ideas, innovations, and answers are yet to be discovered. This is the eschatological element of the charismatic city, "It is eschatological to the extent that the full realization of the Charismatic City remains distant in time, or rather at the edges" (Wariboko 2014, 197).

Wariboko thus sees pentecostalism as providing a positive and constructive approach to moral discourse that avoids the negative and absolutist motifs propelled by common evangelical trends. Moreover, provides a methodology that both makes sense of, and reckons with, pentecostalism's complexity and diversity (2005, 22). The Hillsong movement has a long way to go with regard to the substance of its ethical engagement, but what I argue, and what Wariboko notes, is that globalising churches are well placed to address and dialogue with a changing

world. pentecostal ethics, to use Wariboko's language, is inherently one of innovative, creative, and futuristic possibilities.

Systematic Theologian Karl Tangen has conducted an ethics study into one of Hillsong's global congregations[7] situated in a metropolitan context. Therefore I will assess his contribution in light of Wariboko's proposal. He identifies Hillsong as a "trans-local church, but with a formal power center located in Sydney" (Tangen 2012, 53–54). By this he is referring to Hillsong Global's governance, Houston, and the Eldership. He draws together two unique qualifiers regarding the leadership of pentecostal churches. First, Peter Wagner's contention that megachurches like Hillsong represent a "new apostolic reformation"; these churches "are pastor-led and often 'planted' by an entrepreneurial leader" (Tangen 2012, 27). Second, Clifton's argument that a combination of local church autonomy and national level leadership by megachurch pastors have led to greater efficiency in the organization and "allowed the movement to adjust to changes in the Australian culture" (Clifton in Tangen 2012, 28). I however disagree with Clifton's assumption that these organizational changes have led to the wholesale silencing of minorities (small churches, groups, and women) (Clifton 2005, 284–289). Whilst this might be a valid critique in terms of leadership, it is not true in terms of ethics, where, for example, Hillsong continues to reckon with the subject of human sexuality in and amongst its various localities.[8]

With regard to Hillsong's approach to ethics, there is an undeniable "strict center" to use Tangen's terminology when it comes to matters of theological significance. Thus, Hillsong's theological leadership manifests itself in a small number of doctrinal positions, theological statements, and the occasional press release outlining a stance on a controversial matter. The "strict center" can alternatively be described as a "strictly limited center" limited insofar as the number of people who can speak with theological authority for the church in media or publication—very few statements and documents of this nature are released. It seems to be the case that the "strictly limited center" functions as a PR contingency rather than machinery of control. It remains the case, according to Tangen, that some, whilst belonging to this group, do not have to adopt uniformity or conformity in any sense. Furthermore, his research indicates that the leadership may allow processes to take place outside of the center, consistent with the model applied in Australia (Tangen 2012, 280).

The local/global tension is a fascinating dynamic, and in Tangen's study he summarizes this relationship using his fieldwork interviews of the church staff in London: "there is one defining geographical power center in Sydney, and more importantly, the experience of relational qualities, which is so important in terms of identification, relies heavily on face-to-face relations in the local context" (ibid., 282). What seems to mark Hillsong's ecclesiological structure is its ability to be *simultaneously* local and global. Hillsong's use of media, international networks, television stations, renowned international speakers and preachers in its global conferences nurtures the relationships between the "rooms" and fosters a new sense of being "a cosmopolitan Christian versus being Australian" (ibid., 172).

There is one final observation of Tangen's that has a bearing upon this chapter, and that is the nature of a globalized church with a global vision. He argues that one of the most attractive qualities of Hillsong London was that it "presented a God with a vision that could match the size of the metropolis" (ibid., 143). This magnitude of potential social engagement captures the hearts and minds of its congregation members. He writes of one of his interviewees that "altruistic and communal care is intertwined with Hillsong's larger vision. [Brittany] dreams about contributing to the welfare of the big city" (ibid., 133–134). Furthermore, he argues that people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and complimentary multi-cultural experiences, find their place in a "multi-cultural church in what they experience as a multi-cultural world" (ibid., 191). The Hillsong movement, in this regard is indeed a religion made to travel, both in the global sense, capturing now multiple cities and continents around the world, and in the local sense, where individuals can find meaning and purpose to their church engagement in their local contexts, taking their church experience into their everyday lives.

Process—The "Position Papers"

There is a plural function in both the creation and publication of these position papers. First, the papers are an articulation of the ACC's, and by extension Hillsong's voice in a concrete positional statement regarding these ethical issues. Positional papers can function to provide clarity to external groups such as the media, or other denominations as to what position the church holds on a particular issue. Second, they provide points of internal reference for the organization

itself. For example, pastors seeking clarity as to how best to advise a congregation member experiencing a difficult situation or dilemma. Finally, they are opportunities for issues to be debated within the movement, where various voices are considered and heard, and consequently critiqued. The diversity of voices and the access to ACC members from across the country ensure that the discussion remains open and egalitarian.[9]

In the cases of other denominations, such as Catholicism, a pronouncement about the morality of an ethical issue is the expected norm. In pentecostalism, the expectation is different in that agency and discernment is given to the pastor, via the Holy Spirit, and not the church. For Hillsong to make pronouncements about moral issues would be to deviate from the pentecostal sensibilities surrounding matters of ethics. Denunciations are not done at the global level but priority is given to the local communities. As Peter Wagner says of the rise of pentecostal Apostolic leadership, "the recognition of the (amount of) spiritual authority delegated by the Holy Spirit to individuals" (2006, 25).

The default response to questions on ethical issues is to refer to the denomination's theological and ethical statements, made available to ACC clergy for this purpose. The revision of these papers is important because first, there is no indication that some documents had been re-examined since their publication date.[10] Second, one or two positional papers addressed very broad issues, such as the *"Sanctity of Life"* (1992) or *"Human Sexuality"* (2007), which, whilst presenting some material for theological discussion does not satisfactorily provide enough practical insight into how theological ethics should be outworked within particular pastoral situations. Finally, the pastoral concerns raised in the church are of increasing complexity and particularity. For example according to IVF Australia's website, currently 1 in 6 couples of reproducing age are diagnosed with infertility (IVF Australia 2016). The availability of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and the waiting list time experienced by couples wanting to adopt children for reasons of infertility, make the use of IVF and other forms of ART a popular alternative for infertile couples. The positional papers available to the ACC do not begin to cover the breadth of issues that are being faced by church congregation members and their respective pastoral teams.

The statement "We cannot do everything but we must do something"[11] captures the cultural sentiment behind Hillsong Global's approach to social justice whilst recognising the magnitude of need that

the church could assist with—"We will always have more vision than resource" (Houston 2016). Hillsong has retained a dual priority: "soul-saving" and social justice, contributing significant financial and human resources towards both endeavours. In commenting about the church's approach to social engagement on the Australian Story, Houston says: "We work in a whole broad spectrum of community initiatives with people with all sorts of issues: sexual abuse issues, grief, divorce. We work with the indigenous communities in helping. We have a health center. We have a drug and alcohol center. We run personal development programmes in schools. We work in the prisons. We do a lot of street teams." Nevertheless due to increasing ethical complexities, society is now demanding a tangible response from the church on many issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, and poverty.[12]

As the largest church in the ACC, Hillsong was asked to contribute to the positional papers. Not only is there a diversity of Pastoral and Academic staff across the various Hillsong Australia campuses, but the diverse congregation compels the ACC to address a wide variety of ethical issues for pastoral purposes. In this regard, then, the ACC was harnessing the expertise and influence of its largest group of constituents. Robert Fergusson, who holds the role of Teaching Pastor at Hillsong, selected and coordinated seven Hillsong staff in the working groups, connected them to their particular areas of ethical interest, and monitored the conversation and substance of staff contributions. Particular ethical discussions were: *Human Sexuality, Sanctity of Human Life, Human Reproduction*, social issues (such as *Gambling* and *Pornography*), political issues (such as *Immigration and Asylum Seekers*, *Environment, Poverty and Injustice*, *Child Safety*, and *Religious Freedom*).

I have constructed the following diagram to represent the process that was agreed upon by the ACC National Executive and then communicated to those involved (Fig. 13.1):

I volunteered to participate in the *Human Reproduction* positional paper, which included the issue of surrogacy. I was one of three contributors participating in the deliberation over reproductive issues and the process was conducted entirely via email correspondence. Our particular paper covered several subordinate issues pertaining to human reproduction including; contraception, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, and adoption. A preamble to the specific discourses included an overview of the movement's position and a subsequent theological rationale. There were several noteworthy theological motifs that framed the draft document;

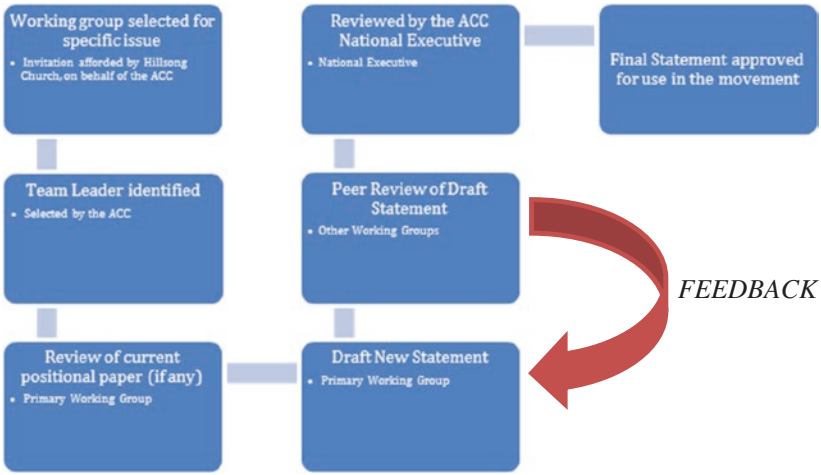

Fig. 13.1 ACC positional paper approval process

the sanctity of human life, the blessing of children, the bible as a normative and authoritative basis for moral assessment, and the unique genesis of human life found in conception.

With regard to contraception, some important ethical issues were raised: a recognition that the bible (as the already stated source of moral authority) is silent on this issue, but that care should be taken in the use of certain types of "contraceptives" which use abortifacient biochemistry, and that regulating human reproduction in this way should always be considered in the light of biblical injunctions such as "fruitfulness" and "multiplication."

The discourse that took place around the issues of IVF included several references to a separate statement regarding the sanctity of human life, which covered abortion among several other related issues. Although IVF is primarily an issue of reproduction, there were concerns regarding conception of life and the nature of the embryo. Whilst many of these issues are delegated to conscience, some of the concerns raised were: the discarding of unused fertilized embryo's, the eugenic selection of some embryo's over others, the potential of sex selective IVF (even though this is currently illegal in Australia), and the use of unwanted embryo's for experimentation (a practice that is currently legal in Australia). Whilst not giving a definitive yes/no answer to this topic,

the material discussed in the dialogue gives the readers some understanding of the complexity and scope of this issue.

The discussion of surrogacy in the working group proved to be the most complex, not only because this was the first time this issue was considered by the ACC, and by extension Hillsong, but because the working group took a variety of positions on this particular topic. As it is a new issue for the ACC to consider, we took the decision to ensure that terms were explained so that a reader could understand the distinction between commercial (both local and international) and altruistic surrogacy. With regard to the Biblical injunctions, we recognized there were no clear prohibitions or prescriptions on this topic, whilst acknowledging the complications of including a third party into the married couple's relationship to bear their child. We decided to incorporate a reference to the UN Convention of Human Rights, not because this is an authoritative document levelled against the Bible, but to recognise that amongst the most important consideration in many of these discussions is the well-being of the most vulnerable party, which in the case of surrogacy, is the child. This view is consistent with Hillsong's position on Child Safety, as evidenced in their policies and procedures as well as being reinforced by the value that they, and the ACC place on human life demonstrated in their published positional papers. Another concern raised was the connection of surrogacy with global demand and international markets and the legal complexities of this issues resulted in a strong recommendation to seek legal counsel in the text that was submitted.[13]

Finally the issue of adoption was addressed; we cited biblical examples of adoption as well as addressing the motivations behind adoption and the importance of the conditions into which a new child is welcomed. Adoption, in general, is seen favorably by the ACC.

Evaluation and Efficacy

The strengths and weaknesses of the process (including a critique of the contextual factors) will now be reviewed before assessing the success of the outcomes. The make-up and nature of my particular working group was effective in that there were diverse voices contributing to the dialogue. The inclusion of men and women of different ages, ensured gendered perspectives (particularly important in issues relating to human reproduction). Members from three different Australian states, a beneficial context considering the variable nature of the legislative frameworks

and the complexities that arrive in different geographical and cultural milieus. The three primary members were from diverse professional contexts, one an academic in the education sector, another working in the Queensland state government, and the third a key member of a church plant team and an academic director at a Christian College. All three members of the group are also active in pastoral ministry, one holding an eldership position at her church, which also includes a preaching and teaching role.

In the midst of the diversity lending strength to the conversation, we shared a common theological paradigm and a commitment to the biblical text as a normative source for addressing life's concerns. Justification of moral principles and prescriptions were done with reference to specific scriptures, and amidst the dialoguing community, a "biblical" position is the desired outcome of the process. Another point of similarity was that each committee member was approaching ethics not simply from a pastoral perspective, informed by the practical ministerial involvement, but within a pentecostal pneumatological paradigm: a unique "perception" of the world informed by a pentecostal world view (Yong 2005, 267). This self-understanding marked a departure from particular evangelical and fundamentalist perspectives on ethics that has dominated moral discourse in pentecostal churches historically.

This is where the Hillsong leadership in Australia remain key in the development of statements regarding ethics, despite a communitarian approach to the dialogue. There are several key players that should be briefly noted. Lee Burns, who is the Executive Vice-President of Hillsong College makes recommendations to the Church's leadership as to who from his academic team should be involved in the process, Joel A'Bell, the Lead Pastor of Hillsong Australia and a member of the ACC national executive, and Robert Fergusson, the Teaching Pastor at Hillsong. Fergusson plays a distinguished role on the local level advising and mentoring the younger generation of preachers and teachers as well as teaching at Hillsong Church's college.[14] These three stakeholders are all based in Sydney, but perhaps the most significant voice in the ethical discussion, is the Hillsong Global Senior Pastor, Brian Houston. Houston rarely makes statements about ethical matters personally, but when he does, the individuals noted above are receptive to what is said. It is not his occasional statements that make the most difference in moral dialogue however, but Houston's ability to hold together the diverse global community that then creates space for the discussion to occur.

Having participated in this process, it is my contention that the populist notions of a monolithic and episcopal style Hillsong Church are misleading, especially when referring to its theological and ethical engagement. Each ethical issue and theological topic is discussed in a variety of contexts, cultures, and leadership levels. There is no suppression of discussion, nor censoring of positions. By not making frequent statements or issuing regular press releases, the discussion is liberated and democratized at the local level. This empowers each campus to reckon with localized issues and ethical discussions pertinent to their contexts, as well as address broader issues with their cultural and social dynamics in mind. A comparison can be made between the urban setting of Hillsong New York City and the suburban context of Hillsong Baulkham Hills. This is demonstrable from the working group and committee structure that the ACC established for the creation and development of position papers. The brief was not to articulate a particular position, but to engage all the issues and to deliberate over certain positions and conclusions. Whilst the conclusions are still moderated by the ACC National Executive, space is created for dialogue.

Despite these opportunities, two problematic elements were revealed. First, taking a general approach to such a broad group of ethical issues highlights the potential areas of weakness and lack of professional knowledge within the ACC, and specifically Hillsong Australia. Amongst the range of topics considered by the working groups, there are likely to be positional papers that do not reflect the same level of quality engagement as others. Second, depending on how they are developed and the nature of the scrutiny over the ethical content of the statements, many of the papers might only reinforce the previously held positions, potentially making some cultural motifs of Hillsong Church self-actualising, such as its perspective on a "traditional" family unit.[15]

It is important to remember that this activity occurs on the local level. For Hillsong Global, documented theological positions and ethical statements are rare, as the primarily oral culture of the church is simultaneously created and managed by Senior Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston. Few other individuals are endorsed to speak on the Church's behalf. This may appear to be monolithic, but in actuality liberates the various campuses to make their own assessments, and pastoral response, i.e. the decentralization fosters and encourages greater individual participation. In this respect, it is remarkably consistent with the classical pentecostal approach to ministerial engagement, the biblical notion of the

"priesthood of all believers," and the conviction that anyone can minister (1 Peter 2: 9). Partnered with the charismatic belief that all people can exercise spiritual gifts (or the prophethood of all believers) the context of Hillsong Church's ethical engagement now presents a third opportunity, "the academy of all believers," that all may engage in the academy, in spite of their qualifications or standing in the world and the church. This is a dynamic that seems to be at play at the local level, but encouraged and maintained at the level of its global operations. Whether this is idealistic or realistic remains to be seen.

Where some may see the church's engagement as "ad hoc," lacking methodological integrity and a shallow understanding of the theological and social issues involved, it is my contention that this approach to engagement secures freedom and creativity in responding to increasing complexity. The macro approach described above ensures independence from outside interference, and at the micro level, secured by Houston's leadership, permits a bottom-up grass-roots engagement in the academy that is consistent with pentecostal sensibilities.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the way Hillsong Church engages in ethics. This was done by examining one of the formal processes in place by which Hillsong Church Australia, working with its denomination, is able to weigh into ethical issues and influence the dialogue of the denomination. The position papers function to give the ordained ministers in the ACC some language and framework to use in their pastoral and ministerial capacities.

Having explored this particular method of engagement, it became evident that the Hillsong movement, as it stands globally, is structured in such a way that allows conversations regarding ethics to flourish outside of any formal power structure. We discovered that this interface operates on two separate but related strata. First on a local level, exemplified by Hillsong Australia who contributes to the ACC's ethics committees in the formation of positional papers on ethical issues. Second, the global Hillsong Movement empowers it local communities to engage with the challenges unique to their cities by recognising that the church exists as a trans-cultural and globalized institution whose governance is centralized but whose theological discourse is not. This tension seems to be primarily maintained by the presence of a strong oral culture, where

the lack of documentation liberates the church to converse on issues not often addressed in formal proclamations. Perhaps more critical than Fergusson's role in the social and ethical engagement of Hillsong Church is the role of the Global Senior Pastor, Brian Houston. Along with his wife Bobbie, Houston directs the culture and vision of the church whilst leaving the socio-ethical engagement to the various localities. This allows each location to address the specific contextual issues in ways and means that are grassroots driven, and locally unique.

This chapter's investigation demonstrates that the globalization of Christianity in the Hillsong movement is not controlled by globalism per se, but utilizes its currents to build a global church without eclipsing local identities. In terms of its social and ethical engagement, it is truly a cosmopolitan approach, allowing local contexts to drive the needs and the global dynamics to safeguard and create the freedom to respond.

Notes

1. The author of this chapter has been a member of the faculty at Hillsong College since 2010 and is pursuing doctoral studies on the relationship between pentecostalism and ethics. It should be noted that his role in the ACC ethics committees is voluntary and is unrelated to his professional role at Hillsong College. He is also not the official spokesperson for Hillsong Church with regard to ethical matters (as hopefully will be made clear in this chapter) but a participant in the dynamic and interactive social engagement activities of Hillsong Church along with thousands of others.
2. Hillsong Church Global is the transcontinental family of Churches led by Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston. This global movement has local churches in various cities. The "home" church is based in the Hills District in Sydney, where the Houston's are based. To distinguish, I will use Hillsong Australia when refereeing to this Sydney locality and "Hillsong" or "Hillsong Global" when referring to the entire movement.
3. Such as local social justice projects, global prayer initiatives like #middaybabymidday, and Homes of Peace—a Hillsong Australia anti-domestic violence engagement arm.
4. Therefore, the primary resource for this chapter is autoethnographic (Ellis et al. 2011).
5. But see (Castelo 2012; Tangen 2012; Wariboko 2011).
6. This reliance of pentecostals on storytelling and oral traditions may correlate with the rapid growth of pentecostalism. It is particularly contextual

to the global south where pre-modern cultures, which rely heavily on narrative, have enhanced its reach and influence. (Hefner and Berger 2013, 14).

7. Organizationally, the Hillsong church in London is an extension of the mother church in Sydney, which is led by Senior Pastor Brian Houston. The church in London is led by Gary Clarke, and supervised by Houston and a board of elders located in Sydney. The same applies to other daughter churches in Europe, and it is therefore impossible to draw a sharp line between Sydney and London (Tangen 2012, 53–54).
8. "This may be illustrated by Gary Clarke's story (told in one of his sermons) about his encounter with a homosexual friend. He said, 'I will introduce you to Jesus, and then Jesus and you can talk about sexuality.'" (Tangen 2012, 279).
9. There is one further notable outcome of the process that bears on the public context in which church members and leadership may find themselves. Often moral issues are discussed in the dual frames of morality and legality. This distinction (nothing new in ethics discourse) enables churches to comment and weigh into issues that might be permissible, but not believed to be good or beneficial, for example, abortion. The positional papers comment both on issues that possess a much-debated legal framework, such as abortion, or one that has no framework at all, such as surrogacy. The benefit of moral reflection in the Church community for those issues for which politics has yet to scaffold a comprehensive approach is that these documents allow individuals to engage with the issue, pre-empting public discussion, and establishing a moral frame without the tensions created by the impending legal framework. This is particularly relevant for discussion on asylum seekers—a debate constantly shifting and changing amongst its interlocutors. The importance of continually emphazising these distinctions between legal and moral frameworks prevents those engaged in discussion from conflating them in an ethical issue. It also protects participants from hiding behind a legal framework as if this equates to morality, and this protects both religious and secular public officials from deferring to the law as the final moral arbiter.
10. This statement particularly concerns those that date back to the early 1990s, which seemed to have not received review or revision for those 20 years.
11. http://hillsong.com/africafoundation/about/.
12. Consequently, the need for the church to do something is complemented by the need for the church to think about these ethical and social challenges.
13. In the Australian context there was a widely publizised situation regarding the use of a Thai surrogate by a couple, known as "the Baby Gammy

case" (The Daily Mail 2014). In this scenario, the couple employed an overseas surrogate to bear and give birth to their children. The surrogate gave birth to twins, one of whom had downs syndrome. The Australian couple collected the twin who did not have this genetic condition but left the downs syndrome baby (Gammy) behind in Thailand with the surrogate (Sydney Morning Herald 2014). This already complex situation was further exacerbated by the surrogate's claim that the couple requested she abort the baby at seven months gestation, and by the biological father's problematic criminal record. Not only did this scenario cause social and political uproar amongst both conservatives and progressives, if faced with questions of the ethics of surrogacy, the ACC had nothing published on this issue. Demands such as these necessitate the process whereby Hillsong Australia was able to contribute towards the development of an ethics positional paper.

14. For further discussion on the college, see Soon, this volume.
15. Which can vary depending on the cultural context. For example, Hillsong Church Baulkham Hills Campus, being in the suburbs of Sydney, would draw upon a Western nuclear family as the ideal.

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CHAPTER 14

The "Powerful" Hillsong Brand

Tom Wagner

On June 26, 2012, Robin Hicks posted an article on the Australian media and marketing website Mumbrella that claimed Hillsong was "Australia's most powerful brand" (Hicks 2012). In it, Hicks analyzed keys to Hillsong's success, including, "the music brand Hillsong United," "customer acquisition," "messaging and language," "the service (brand experience)," and "brand story." In her conclusion, Hick's pointed towards the power of religious branding using the language of consumerism and the market:

> And let's be clear. The Hillsongers I have met, or who know through other people, are not brainwashed members of some cult. They are normal, intelligent people who have *bought into a way of living. A brand*. The difference between the Hillsong brand and others is that it is not just part of their life, like a Qantas flight or a Tim Tam. *It is their life*. (Hicks 2012, my emphasis)

Brands are powerful cultural artefacts. But what does a marketing term imbued with religious significance say about religious practice and experience in neoliberal political economy? Claiming that the Hillsong, or

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any brand, is anyone's *life* probably is an overstatement. However, if we approach Hillsong's brand from the view of media ecology—that is, if we understand the brand not only as a collection of media[1] but also a medium through which faith is practiced and embodied—then we might posit it (and by extension, market ideology) as an important, if not central, part of how they experience themselves and the world as Christians.

In this chapter, I approach Hillsong's brand from the perspectives of media ecology and critical marketing.[2] In the first part of the chapter, I review the popular and academic literature on religious branding. Both perspectives offer insights into the relationship between religious brands and consumer culture. However, most contributions stop short of developing a theory of religious branding in relation to political economy. I begin to do this in the second part of the chapter by exploring Hillsong's brand through the lens of media ecology, which is the study of how dominant forms of media *in and as* environments affect the ways in which people relate to the world. Starting from the assumption that branding[3] is one dominant mode of cultural communication in the environments in which Hillsong operates, I suggest that Hillsong's brand is more than just a series of clever marketing techniques; it is a collection of media through which meaning is communicated and a medium through which meaning is experienced. Hillsong's brand is an environment with both symbolic and sensorial properties. In the third part of this chapter, I discuss the implications of a symbolic/sensorial brand environment. From a critical marketing viewpoint, participants in branded environments make and experience meaning while simultaneously (re)producing the brand and its ideology (e.g., Carah 2010)—an ideology that is dialectically attuned to the market context in which it is embedded. If the "medium" of the brand is also—at least in part—the "message," then we can begin to understand how religious experience and political economy feed into and reinforce each other. I therefore conclude by drawing on anthropologist Birgit Meyer's notion of "sensational forms" to suggest that experiential religious brands such as Hillsong can be particularly powerful because the experience of the brand and the experience of God are so closely associated that they become co-productive, self-reinforcing and, ultimately, inseparable from its political economic context.

When reading this chapter, it will be useful to remember two things. First, like all brands, Hillsong's brand is co-constituted; it is the product of constant negotiation between many different stakeholders. It reflects, and reproduces, power relations (as several chapters in this volume have

discussed); however, it is neither organized completely from the "top-down" nor built entirely from the "bottom up." Second, for those who attend Hillsong, worship is a *lifestyle*. Hillsong's members work to "hear God in everything," and the brand is something they use to facilitate this experience. This is to say that the brand-building work that Hillsong's members and other stakeholders do through their everyday engagement with the church and its brand is a valuable (and valued) part of their Christian life journeys.

Branding in the (Neoliberal) Religious Marketplace

Religious branding is one of the latest forms of communication and experience in an ever-evolving "religious market." As R. Laurence Moore observes, religion has always incorporated commerce. From the markets that flourished in cathedral towns to the sale of indulgences, Christianity has always engaged with, and often relied upon, worldly economic activities to further its goals (Moore 1994, 7). Indeed, one of the central paradoxes of Protestantism is that, although it seeks to transcend worldliness, it cannot do so except through the cultural codes and artefacts of the world (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012). Yet the epistemologies of the "market" have varied dramatically throughout human history (Arendt 1958; Cf. Leshem 2016). In pre-Socratic times, *oikonomia* (economy) was thought of as a good for all, subordinated to and in support of politics and ethics (Baloglou 2012). In contrast, under contemporary neoliberal political economy, the ideology of the market does not only dominate politics and ethics, but subsumes it, colonizing it in ways that render all actors, to some extent, "neoliberal subjects" (Foucault 2008, see also Harrison this volume).[4] Under these conditions, religious branding is something much more powerful than simply a way to "sell" religion; it is a medium through which spiritual efficacy and neoliberal ideology meet at sites where the self is constructed, communicated, and experienced.

There is a burgeoning literature on the extent to which "the market" is implicated in the ways we communicate, conceptualize, and experience ourselves. There are two particularly salient ways to approach the synergies between religions and brands. The first is the "popular marketing" perspective, which posits that successful companies and successful religions share many of the same attributes, such as that both are composed of participants who share an intense corporate culture and set of

values. For example, in *Primal Branding: Create Zealots for Your Brand, Your Company, And Your Future* (2006), Patrick Hanlon posits a seven-piece "primal code" of corporate communication that is shared by successful companies and religious organizations. Similarly, Jesper Kunde's *Corporate Religion: Building a Strong Company Through Personality and Corporate Soul* (2002) uses case studies of brands like Virgin and Harley-Davidson to find the "right formula" to create a "brand religion." This discourse underpins the marketing blogs that breathlessly present Hillsong's marketing strategy as the gold standard (In her Mumbrella article, Hicks advises: "Marketers. Watch and learn."). The strength of popular marketing accounts is that they highlight the power—or at least the imagined power—that brands hold in contemporary consumer culture by drawing parallels between religious conviction and brand loyalty. However, in doing so they underestimate and undervalue the seriousness of religious convictions. For those who are committed, the choice between Coke and Pepsi has little bearing on the fate of the eternal soul.

A second way to approach religious branding is from sociological perspectives.[5] In the academic arena, sociologically oriented approaches tend to focus on the ways that religious organizations appeal to consumers in a "religious marketplace." A few of the many works in this arena include R. Laurence Moore's *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (1994), Wade Roof Clarke's *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (1999), and Finke and Stark's *The Churching of America 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (2005). It is telling that each of these tomes focuses on religion as practiced in America, although the "religious marketplace" is now used to analyze religiosity around the world from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (e.g., Adogame 2000; Selka 2010; Dolan 2013). The "religious marketplace" approach focuses on how well religious organizations address the "needs" (spiritual and otherwise) of worshipers, but few works explicitly engage religious branding as a method of doing so. Those that do so include Mara Einstein's *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age (2008)*, Gauthier and Martikainen's *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets* (2013), and Usunier and Stolz's *Religions as Brands: New Perspectives on the Marketization of Religion and Spirituality* (2014). Outside of my own work (Wagner 2014a, b, c, d) and that with Tanya Riches (Riches and Wagner 2012) few academic articles on Hillsong explore the sociological significance of relationship

between marketing and religious experience in depth. One that begins to do so is E.H. McIntyre's "Brand of Choice: Why Hillsong Music is Winning Sales and Souls" (2007). In it, the author notes that Hillsong's success:

> … illustrates that religion can be viable, successful and even subversive when armed with tactics borrowed from the dominant secular competition of consumerism, materialism and individualism, which is manifest in the principles of public relations, marketing and business. (McIntyre 2007, 178)

In contrast to popular marketing perspectives, sociological approaches to religious branding assume the seriousness of faith, and delve into the market mechanisms that religious individuals and organizations leverage to inculcate and deepen faith. However, while acknowledging the importance of the role of consumer culture in the religious experience, they do not consider how neoliberal political economy (i.e. "the market" as an ideology) is implicated in the epistemology and phenomenology of religious brands.[6]

In this respect, Marion Maddox's article "'In the Goofy Parking Lot': Growth Churches as a Novel Religious Form for Late Capitalism" (2012) comes the closest. For Maddox, growth churches such as Hillsong utilize the logic and ethos of consumer capitalism, and in doing so, they reproduce it:

> Seized by the vision of growth, [megachurches such as Hillsong] share the entrepreneurial spirit, the hierarchical corporate structures and the marketing techniques of entertainment, conversion and branding. Growth churches are the purest demonstration that, as Walter Benjamin and others have argued, capitalism has become the unassailable global religion. In growth church campuses, no less than in advertising offices, consumerism re-enchants the world according to its own lights. (Maddox 2012, 155)

Maddox is correct to note that churches such as Hillsong do, at least to some extent, reproduce consumer capitalism and neoliberal subjects. However, her top-down institutional perspective ignores the bottom-up actions of individual participants and therefore misses a key part of how market ideology is reproduced and normalized. For this we need to turn to media ecology and critical marketing, which the remainder of

this chapter explores. In doing so, I will integrate ideas from my previous work (Wagner 2014a, b, c, d and 2015).

A Media Ecological View of Hillsong's Brand

Media ecology is the study of how dominant forms of media in an environment affect the ways people relate to the world. It is therefore a useful way to approach the dually media(ted) nature of Hillsong's brand because it takes a holistic view of the relationship among marketing, media, and experience.[7] Media ecology views *media as environments* but also *environments as media* (Lum 2006, 31). It furthermore considers such environments to be concomitantly symbolic and sensorial.

Viewed as a symbolic environment, every medium (and brand) is "systemically constituted by a unique set of codes and syntax" (Lum 2006, 29). For example, the use of English as a communication medium requires an understanding of (and facility with) its vocabulary (that is, its symbols and their assigned meanings) as well as its grammar (that is, its syntax and rules that govern the construction of meaning) (Lum 2006, 29). Similarly, the way Hillsong's brand is "understood" requires familiarity with the cultural codes that give it meaning in a given context. For example, the various components of Hillsong's worship service include recognizable language (Ingold 2014), technology (Klaver 2015), people (Evans, this volume), music (Riches 2010; Riches and Wagner 2012), and even the venue itself (Goh 2008). Each component "speaks" to worshipers, yet what is "heard" is complicated for at least two reasons. First, communication is culturally coded and intertextual (Kahn-Harris and Moberg 2012); second, no medium is value-neutral. This can be seen in, for example, in the ways different churches use, or choose not to use, Hillsong's music to worship according to (or in spite of) their theological outlooks.[8] Similarly, technologies are never value-neutral, so religious actors will (or will not) use them to achieve ends that are compatible with their idiosyncratic worldviews (Campbell 2010). Thus, Hillsong's "brand" of worship, which operationalizes the cultural codes, communicative techniques, and technologies of commercial and popular culture, is hotly contested according to different sets of values, ethics, and theologies.

Media acts on—and to some extent shapes—our sensorial apparatuses. Thus, viewing media (and brands) as sensorial environments has physiological-perceptual implications (Lum 2006, 28–29). We experience

ourselves relative to the constant flow of information from our external world and our internal states. According to McLuhan (2001), every medium engages the user's senses differently, and thus embodies a unique set of sensory characteristics. For example, reading primarily engages the visual senses, while listening to the radio primarily engages auditory capabilities. McLuhan's student, Walter Ong (2012), suggested that a society's dominant communication medium determines which of its people's senses are most acute, and that this has far-reaching cultural implications because it influences the way people comprehend the world around them. Thus, media as sensorial environments influence the ways in which we experience the world and ourselves. This has profound implications for the experience of Hillsong's brand, which is an affective, associational gestalt not only comprised of different media but *media in and of itself*. One can see that this branded symbolic/sensorial environment might be a powerful context for the affect-encouraging, embodied charismatic practices embedded in the pentecostal tradition from which Hillsong draws.

Hillsong's ecosystem of branded communication platforms affords participants different, mutually informing ways of knowing (Wagner 2014a). As with the worship service discussed above, components of this ecosystem include not only old and new media technologies, but also commodities, people, places (both physical and virtual), and institutions that will be engaged with by different people, in different contexts, for different reasons. For example, Hillsong communicates to those who attend its services through print media such as the seat drops in services, and to the larger Christian community through books by its founders Brian and Bobbie Houston and articles in its lifestyle magazine *Relevant*. Demographically targeted CDs and DVDs circulate both sonic and visual tropes that are repeated, recombined, and elaborated as elements of worship services and conferences. Hillsong's pastors and worship leaders are also important parts of its message: they function as both local ministers and mediated celebrities whose images and personalities are co-branded Hillsong (Riches and Wagner 2012; Wagner 2014a, 79). Additionally, Hillsong maintains a network of institutions including name-brand churches in major cities around the world, its "family" of affiliated churches, and Hillsong College. Finally, an important part of Hillsong's brand ecosystem is its online infrastructure of both official and unofficial websites and social media. These platforms are connected by mutually reinforcing sonic, textual, or visual references.

An example of this is the "Scarlett Thread" theme of Hillsong's 2011 liturgical calendar.[9] Hillsong's communication proceeds largely in yearly cycles that begin with "Vision Sunday." On Vision Sunday, every Hillsong congregation views a video introducing a central theme to be explored during the year, with reinforcing visual imagery.[10] The 2011 video was entitled "The Scarlet Thread."[11] The central image of the video was a red thread that symbolized, among other things, Jesus Christ as the cord that holds together the tapestry of humanity—the red colour symbolizing His blood. Interspersed throughout three short "chapters" were scenes of a tapestry being hand-woven on a loom along with the testimonies of three congregation members (two Australians and one Londoner who had moved to the New York church).

The Scarlet Thread motif appeared throughout 2011, in, for example, print adverts, in-service videos, pastoral messages, and at Hillsong's conferences.[12] It was also the central trope on the cover of the 2011 Hillsong LIVE release, *God Is Able*. The Scarlet Thread provided a way of "knowing" that was distributed across a fragmented media landscape; it wove together Hillsong's communication threads to create a branded tapestry.

A View from Critical Marketing

When viewing The Scarlet Thread through the lens of media ecology, the question arises, "Who is doing the weaving?" Certainly, Hillsong provided the discursive thread and the contextual loom, but it was individual worshipers who, through participation, constructed and experienced the final product. This is where we may return to Maddox's assertion, discussed above, that Hillsong reproduces neoliberalism. In one sense, she is correct—growth churches like Hillsong do reproduce, to some extent, neoliberal ideologies. However, in her account, the church shapes its constituents, but not the other way around.[13] This leaves out a crucial ingredient of neoliberalism's hegemonic recipe: individual agency (or at least the appearance of it[14]). In the final section of this chapter, then, I will explore how Hillsong's media environment—its brand—provides both the material for and the context within which spiritual experience is produced.

The media(ted) nature of brands and branding offers advantages in communicating to (post)modern subjects in that, as a collection of disassembled signs, the "reassembling" process through which meaning

emerges is always fluid, multiple, and co-produced. One feature of these co-productive processes that is particularly important for religious brands is what I have elsewhere called "the prosumption of values" (Wagner 2014b). This is a process in which actors simultaneously produce and consume content imbued not only with their values and ideologies but also those of their media environments. This becomes clearer when the practical marketing and critical marketing perspectives of branding are compared.

Both practical marketers and critical marketers recognize that branding is an activity that relies upon and (co)produces different kinds of value. Actors derive intrinsic value from the social aspects of participating in activities such as crowd-sourced advertising campaigns and open-source software development, and they also reap tangible rewards such as, for example, bespoke products. Simultaneously, companies derive economic value from the participation of "the crowd" in the form of new (and often better) products and the development of an enthusiastic brand community. In prosumption activities, then, various kinds of economic and non-economic value are conflated.[15]

Because participants derive value from prosumption activities, practical marketers claim that is this kind of branding activity is a "win" for everyone involved. Critical marketers object to this assertion, however. A critical marketing perspective questions the power structures and inequities that perpetuate neoliberal capitalism, and therefore views branded environments as re-inscribing the ideology of "the market" ever more deeply into our cultural fabric and consciousness (Carah 2010). Drawing on observations similar to those of media ecology outlined above, critical marketing points out that the self-referential nature of branded environments delimits the symbolic/sensorial ways in which branded material can be used and understood (Arvidsson 2005; Carah 2010; Lury 2004). Because brands are embedded in neoliberal capitalist environments, then, the co-production of brands cannot help but be a hegemonic process through which neoliberal political economy is perpetuated.

Both the practical and critical perspectives of marketing are helpful when looking at the co-productive processes of religious branding, an example of which is Hillsong's annual † = ♥ campaign.[16] † = ♥ is a three week endeavour, largely conducted though the social media, that promotes Hillsong's Easter message. Originally conceived in 2008 by Hillsong Art Director Jay Argaet and Worship Pastor Joel Houston as "a simple way to explain the Gospel" (Email to author, April 30, 2014),

the † = ♥ concept has since evolved from a largely local campaign to a global Christian "meme," as it has been adapted to the practices and logics of its media ecology. Every year since 2012, when the campaign went global, participants have been encouraged to share images of the † = ♥ symbol on social media, hashtagging the posts #crossequalslove. Participants are encouraged to create their own versions of the † = ♥ symbol in novel ways and in novel places (e.g., † = ♥ drawn on toast or homemade jewellery). However, since most social media users only share ready-made content, Hillsong has created a bank of Instagram-friendly images. As I discovered during my fieldwork at Hillsong London, the message and imagery of † = ♥ is reinforced by topical preaching, reading, and discussion at local "connect groups," and through the release of an Easter single by Hillsong Worship.[17] It is also embedded in the overarching yearly tropes. For example, early renditions of † = ♥ were made from the Scarlet Thread discussed above.

With the † = ♥ campaign, Hillsong leverages the culture and logic of its media ecosystem to build and operationalize its brand. As Jay Argaet noted in an email to me:

> I guess what is the point of difference for this campaign [from previous years] is we utilized marketing in a way that really worked. We understood that there is [a] *two-way* approach in marketing Easter—Internally to equip the church to be bringers and interact with the campaign and externally to inspire people who are yet to experience Jesus to find about Him. (Email interview with author, April 30, 2014; Emphasis added.)

Two important ideas are expressed in this email. First, Argaet acknowledges that the "two-way" nature of Hillsong's branding is important for communicating *with* (instead of *to*) stakeholders internal and external to an organization; in other words, its ecosystem is dialogic with its political economic context. Second is that the act of engaging with (and in doing so building) Hillsong's brand is a gateway to the experience of Jesus. As noted above, the productive agency of branded communities provides personal "value" to stakeholders. All of the participants I interviewed during the 2013 campaign at Hillsong London described their involvement as personally valuable. For example, Jalen,[18] an 18-year-old woman from Surrey, told me that:

> It [participating in the † = ♥ campaign] was really good! It helped me understand how deep Jesus' love for me is. … One of my friends at uni really liked the pictures and she's going to come [to church] next Sunday! (Interview with the author; April 1, 2013)

This young woman described the value derived from her participation in terms of both "inward" and "outward" facing evangelism. In line with the evangelical emphasis on a personal journey, she emphasized the "educational" aspects of the campaign. The ultimate benefit came not so much from sharing the † = ♥, but from operationalizing the associated discourse that circulated in Hillsong's media ecosystem in the form of, for example, preaching topics, discussions, and song lyrics. She also emphasized that the campaign helped her spread the Gospel by giving her a way to engage a friend. I have suggested elsewhere that by positioning its music as an evangelical resource, Hillsong imbues it and, by extension those who use it, with the evangelical power of the Spirit (Wagner 2014b). Similarly, I suggest that the "two-way" nature of the † = ♥ campaign, as part of Hillsong's brand, afforded a real, immediate experience of God by virtue of its participants' agency.

Conclusion

Hillsong's brand is comprised of media, and is simultaneously a medium. Participants engage with a Hillsong brand that is intertextual, sensorial, and symbolic, and furthermore is dialogically made meaningful within its political economic context. The brand is therefore inescapably a product of neoliberal political economy; it is hegemonic because it anticipates certain kinds of meanings, and predetermines certain kinds of actions and attachments through a kind of framing (Arvidsson 2005: 74; Lury 2004). For the members of Hillsong church, the brand is imbued with particular power because it is implicated in the creation, maintenance, and experience of the (Christian) self.

I suggest Hillsong's experiential religious brand is what anthropologist Birgit Meyer calls a "sensational form." Based on her observations of media use in pentecostal worship in Ghana, Meyer posits a "paradox of immediacy": as an immediate spiritual experience is realized repeatedly through a medium, the medium begins to transcend its materiality,

and becomes "invisible" through social processes. Furthermore, as the medium is repeatedly used as a vehicle of transcendence, it becomes "authorized," that is, imbued with spiritual efficacy:

> It is via particular modes of address, established modes of communication, and authorized religious ideas and practices that believers are called to get in touch with the divine, and each other. Sensational forms do not only convey particular ways of "making sense" but concomitantly tune the senses and induce specific sensations, thereby rendering the divine senseable, and triggering particular religious experiences. (Meyer 2008, 129)

The paradox is that the more the medium becomes "invisible" (i.e. spiritually efficacious), the more "realizing" the experience depends on its being visible. Following Meyer, I suggest that Hillsong's brand functions in this way. Hillsong's brand is a media environment that leverages the familiar communicative practices and logics of consumer culture to afford participants ways to actively engage in the immediate experience of God. In doing so, the brand becomes a necessary precondition for that experience. "Form" and "content" do not exist in opposition; rather, "form is necessary for content to be conveyed" (Meyer 2011, 30).

When I began my study of Hillsong in 2011, I was curious about how its brand "added value" to the worship experience. Did worshipers, I wondered, "find God" more easily or have a more intense worship experience, when engaging with Hillsong's brand? For some, religious brands such as Hillsong's may render powerful experiences. However, media ecology and critical marketing raise an important question: What is the "value of values" in relation to religious experience in neoliberal political economic contexts? On the one hand, participants derive value from their participation within the brand. On the other hand, participation (re)inscribes the values and ideologies of not only the brand, but also the neoliberal political-economic environment in which the brand is dialogically rendered meaningful. In this context, we must ask: What is the true "power" of (and behind) religious branding?

Notes

1. By this, I am invoking the McLuhan-esque notion that the marketing messages that comprise the brand are bound up with the media (magazines, websites, videos, etc.) through which they are communicated.

2. As with most academic fields, Critical Marketing is ill-defined, contested, and contextual (Saren et al. 2007). For the purposes of this chapter, I adopt Janice Denegri-Knott's observation that "critical marketing … adopts a multidisciplinary character in order to appropriate and adapt conceptual tools best suited to understand marketing as a social reality. So-called 'post modern'/critical theorists are summoned here to help ground conceptual and empirical explorations." (Quoted in Schroeder 2007, 25)
3. The terms "marketing," "branding," and "brand," are often conflated. For the purpose of this chapter, the brand is the "object," so to speak (Lury 2004). Branding is the process through which the brand is experienced, of which marketing is an important communicative aspect.
4. Thank you to Katerina Paramana for alerting me to this.
5. Marketing, of course, draws on a variety of sociological and anthropological methods and theories. Here I am mainly focusing on perspectives from the sociology of religion.
6. While there is not much work that explores the relationship between religion and neoliberal political economy from a branding perspective, much has been written about the religion and neoliberalism in general (see Martikainen and Gauthier 2013 for an excellent introduction), as well as on neoliberalism and pentecostalism specifically (e.g., Wightman 2008; Barker 2007; Newell 2007).
7. For a discussion of how this works through congregational music, see Wagner (2015).
8. See, for example, Herwig (2015).
9. Elsewhere, I have discussed how the form and content of Hillsong's communications—its liturgy—is dictated not only by traditional Christian events such as Easter and Christmas, but also by events such as its album recordings and releases. See Wagner (2014a), 56–61.
10. See Wagner (2014a), 53–58.
11. Video available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnG1si3xLto; accessed January 5, 2012.
12. It both figuratively and literally took center stage at Hillsong's European conference, where a giant loom was erected.
13. A similar tendency to ignore the individual and the internal diversity within Hillsong is found in Maddox (2012).
14. See Arnould (2007) who notes there are several problems with the concept of "agency," not the least of which is that, as an idea rooted in Western theology and the attendant emergence of a market-driven economy, agency is inseparable from institutional and cultural constructions of authority (142–144).

15. For an excellent account of the fraught nature of value(s) under neoliberalism, see Graeber (2001).
16. For an article length treatment of this, see Wagner (2015).
17. See Wagner (2015).
18. I have changed this name for anonymity.

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CHAPTER 15

Afterword: Hillsong Church Response

Lee Burns

Hillsong is a global church often described as "one house with many rooms." As followers of Jesus Christ, we have a desire to build the local church as an expression of that commitment, and in faithfulness to the biblical narrative of Acts when believers gathered regularly together.[1]

Our Senior Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston similarly began a small gathering of Christians in the Hills district of Sydney in 1983. Parts of this story are written within Pastor Brian and Bobbie Houston's books, and our senior leadership's continuing vision statement for Hillsong Church is found within *The Church That I Now See* (See http://hillsong.com/vision/).

In addition, as a Christian congregation, we are affiliated with the Australian Christian Churches (ACC), a movement of 1100 churches and more than 250,000 believers across Australia. Each congregation is self-governing and works together with other churches in the movement for the purpose of mutual support, social justice, and evangelism. We are also connected with many other churches around the world, both, from within and outside the pentecostal movement. It has always been our intention to build a positive, faith-filled environment for people to flourish in all aspects of their lives.

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Because growth and increased visibility invariably invites questions and criticism, scholars from around the world have sought to study our church. To this point, we have not pursued these endeavors. However, in the case of this volume, a long-term member of our church, Tanya Riches, approached our leadership about her desire to host an academic work that engaged various scholars from around the world and encouraged conversation. A desire that emerged from a dialogue with her colleague Tom Wagner, and fostered by pre-eminent pentecostal theologian Amos Yong. Her intention was that we as a church organization respond to, rather than edit, these papers.

As such, this written response is not an affirmation of the details of the content held within the chapters, but instead, an affirmation that such dialogue is important, necessary, and beneficial for both "insiders" and "outsiders" of Hillsong Church. In particular that, an academic discussion of such, will continue to foster invaluable conversation and mutual appreciation for the greater Body of Christ across the earth.

Hillsong Church is a remarkable, modern-day Australian story. We ourselves are amazed and often perplexed, by how God has blessed our church. We stand in awe at the extent to which the songs of our church are sung by millions of Christians around the world each week. We are astounded by thousands of people across the world who attend our services and call Hillsong their church "home."

It is a story of God's grace and faithfulness that we now have campuses in 15 nations (to date), each one with their own story of local and national impact. We are humbled by the global influence God has opened to us. We are diverse in gender, in ethnicity and race, in economic status, in language, and in political affiliations and ideology. And yet, we gather under the one name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Because of the rapid growth and the global interest in our church, we are often surprised when we appear in the media for issues that other churches perhaps do not. The church has put effort into listening and responding to various external criticisms, including placing our annual reports online for those who would like to review them.

The primary function of Christian churches across the world—regardless of denomination—is to build people's lives. They facilitate the functions of our faith: biblical discipleship, teaching, worship, missions, and church planting. On top of these basic spiritual building blocks, Hillsong Church is committed to youth and children's programmes, ministries for all ages, pastorally supporting families and marriages,

counseling services and hospital visitation, as well as general pastoral care to thousands within and beyond our church community.

In addition, Hillsong Church has a thriving social justice arm solely focused "outwards" to both our local and global communities. The generosity of our people over many years has enabled us to build homes in Africa, provide anti-retroviral drugs to AIDS patients, sponsored thousands upon thousands of children, rescued and rehabilitated trafficked sex workers, and provided food and education for thousands of less fortunate children in nations such as India and Uganda. Each week, hundreds of families in Australia and our other locations are provided with emergency relief services including, food, basic household supplies, and utility vouchers free of charge from our City Care department. This local arm of our church also provides free counseling to members of the community by qualified individuals. Our partnerships with such organizations as World Vision Africa,[2] Compassion,[3] Mission Australia, and the Salvation Army are paramount to our ongoing commitment to the community.

Hillsong Church runs an Australian government accredited Bible College with approximately 2000 students attending from all over the world each year. Many of these students gain a practical, hands-on ministry training experience, and contribute as a part of the life of our church under our vocational education and training courses. In recent years, the undergraduate and graduate dimension of our college has been growing significantly.

As we continue to move into this space, we recognize that the thinkers across the breadth of our church are developing their skills, and will be more and more available to respond to the scholars that are drawn to study our church, such as those found in this volume. It has also been an honor to have two of our own faculty at Hillsong College, Chris Parkes, and Isaac Soon, contribute to this volume.

We look forward to engaging with, participating in, and contributing to projects such as this in the future.

Notes

1. A more comprehensive list of our belief statements can be found online at http://hillsong.com/what-we-believe/.
2. vimeo.com/127437450.
3. vimeo.com/99691683.

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