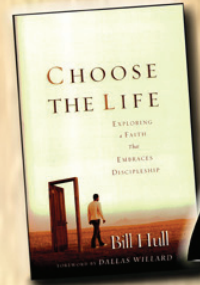


Discipleship Deterioration



Bill Hull's Mad Rush to Rome and Mystical Disciplines



by G. Richard Fisher

"Until just a few years ago evangelicals wouldn't touch the spiritual formation movement because of its liberal and Catholic roots," writes Bill Hull in his book, *Choose the Life*. "I am thrilled that now, thanks to Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard, James Houston, and many others, the call to lifelong spiritual transformation is being restored to the church."¹

In the 1980s and 1990s Hull, of the Evangelical Free Church, was known for his books on discipleship. He built a paradigm of discipleship based on Jesus' dealings with His Apostles in a book titled *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*.

Hull's approach was not new and one could argue that Hull's suggested phases of discipleship were contrived and formulaic. Given the diversity and complexity in humans, there is no one size to fit all. But, regardless of how on or off target Hull's earlier books were, evangelicals welcomed the idea of keeping salvation and sanctification tightly connected. After all, Jesus commanded that we make disciples and not just converts.

THIS TIME THIS IS REALLY IT

Hull now says he was only part way there with his earlier writings and in his new work tells what he

believes should be the content given out to disciples. In *Choose the Life*, he pulls out all the stops. Hull, like others, made a fairly good start and had discipleship running along the line of Matthew 28:20 regarding our teaching disciples what Jesus had commanded. But now the new party line is that we are to teach our disciples what the mystics of the Dark Ages taught and practiced. There needs to be a blend of the old and the new, Hull says. But these mystical practices (now called "spiritual formation") cannot be found in Jesus' teaching. Jesus was a disciple maker, not a mystic maker. The words "spiritual formation" may sound good, but it depends on who is doing the forming and what is being formed.

Hull's new book has a foreword by Dallas Willard and an endorsement by Brian McLaren, both leading lights in what is called the emerging church movement. They love Hull's new digression and his race to Rome. In the emerging church our experiences are king and doctrine gets little or no notice. We should not question our emotions, but by all means question our beliefs. Rituals are cool and doctrine is passé.

NO LESS THAN GOD HAS SPOKEN

Hull makes a strange claim early in the book about a time when the church he was pastoring was in decline:

"It was the most painful experience of my pastoral life, and so many times I wanted to run away. But God spoke to me very powerfully one morning as I lay prostrate on my office floor: 'Bill, I am going to break you. Don't run.'"²

Hull also wrote, "God encouraged me through words of prophecy that he would bless our church."³ Even more startling is Hull's claim about the origin of this new book: "I wrote this book because I couldn't hold it in. More than any other book I have written, God called me to this one."⁴ If God truly called — even inspired — Hull to write this book, then we must assume that it would square with Scripture because God cannot contradict Himself. However, Hull's book does not.

Hull wrote that we can hear God's voice and get direction from somewhere other than Scripture. He tells us that meditation and centering are the route to hearing the voice of God,

“This requires a commitment to set aside time to study, pray, and meditate in order to hear the voice of God and to take on the mind of Christ.”⁵ He went so far as to write that if we do not do the above we “are practicing a Christ-less Christianity.”⁶

LEAPING WHERE?

Hull indicates he is taking a leap. “I invite you to jump with me. You won’t be sorry,”⁷ he says. Where he is going or jumping becomes clear early on as he repeatedly cites Henri Nouwen.⁸ Before his death, Nouwen, a Catholic theologian, combined universalism with Hinduism. Nouwen’s writings attempt to blend Christianity and medieval mysticism with Buddhist and Hindu thought.⁹ Nouwen’s best-known quote is from his book, *Sabbatical Journey*:

“Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God.”¹⁰

Then in Nouwen’s book, *Here and Now*:

“The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is also the God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being.”¹¹

BEATING UP BELIEVERS

Early on in *Choose the Life*, Hull writes what he thinks is wrong with the Church at large. We can agree with Hull when he writes, “The whole point of the gospel is to be transformed into the image of Christ,”¹² but his plan for transformation is not the way to go.

Hull writes, “Those who are well-read and highly educated can experience spiritual transformation through reading *The Confession of Saint Augustine*, *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila, or more contemporary works by Henri Nouwen or Thomas Merton.”¹³

Though Hull acknowledges that while the above will not work for everyone in exactly the same way as the ancient mystics, “our quest is to find ways to practice spiritual disciplines in different ways and levels.”¹⁴ It is like the old idea of throwing everything in but the kitchen sink to see if it works.

Citing Merton is a dead giveaway as to where Hull is trying to lead us. In a prior issue of *The Quarterly Journal*, PFO tried to sound the alarm regarding Merton and others in an article on the marriage of evangelical-

formerly evangelical bookstores. It is amazing that nearly no one objects when Merton is quoted favorably by one considered evangelical, namely Richard Foster.¹⁶

WHO IS DOING THE LEADING?

Hull asserts that discipleship is “an intention to live the way Jesus lived.”¹⁷ The above, that is the example of Nouwen and Merton, is clearly not the way Jesus lived or taught. Mysticism and all that goes

God leads us through His Word, not through the meanderings of mystic teachers such as Nouwen and Merton. Hull’s major flaw becomes obvious. In the end discipleship is not just about following Jesus, but is rather, according to Hull, “following someone who can teach you to follow Jesus.”

ism to Catholic mysticism.¹⁵ On Merton in particular we pointed out:

“Not surprisingly, the books of Trappist monk Thomas Merton began to sell briskly. Merton, who died in 1968, became the new spearhead of Catholic mysticism. He had been making forays into eastern mysticism for years. He was a profound mystic who ultimately became a recluse. His ideas were so old that many thought they were new. Merton merged Buddhism and Hinduism with non-violence and Christianity, although Christianity got short shrift. His *The Seven Storey Mountain* (a spiritual autobiography) ‘became a world best-seller.’ Marketing pushed Merton into

with it is clearly a departure from the faith and true discipleship. Hull writes, “I humbled myself and asked God to lead me.”¹⁸ God leads us through His Word, not through the meanderings of mystic teachers such as Nouwen and Merton. Hull’s major flaw becomes obvious. In the end discipleship is not just about following Jesus, but is rather, according to Hull, “following someone who can teach you to follow Jesus.”¹⁹

We need teachers who are godly and biblical. We need mentors. People need others to disciple them. The Apostle Paul said, “Be followers of me as I also follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The heavy implication there is that we can follow and imitate Paul *only as far as he follows and*

imitates Jesus. As noted in the *New Geneva Study Bible*, "The apostle does not set himself up as an absolute example; he is to be imitated to the extent that he imitates Christ."²⁰ It appears Hull is pointing us to models who are not biblical models, but mystics and universalists. He can speak all he wants of finding the right kind of models in the Church, but he undermines his own advice by endorsing and quoting all the wrong people.

IMITATION CHRISTIANITY

Hull also cites the work of Thomas à Kempis, a 14th century monk. While à Kempis' authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* is under debate, most believe he is the writer. Born Thomas Hammerken in 1380, he and those of his era were strongly influenced by German mystic Johannes Eckhart. Eckhart taught that people could be absorbed into the Divine Unknown.

Thomas à Kempis lived in the seclusion of a monastery his whole life. *The Imitation of Christ* was written by à Kempis for monks and the monkish life. It is hardly related to the world most of us have to face every day. He definitely believed that human merit was the way to heaven, as all good Catholics did. He was committed to what every monk and priest of that era was committed to: the celebration of the Mass, the priesthood, and the priests' ability to turn the communion bread into the physical body of Christ (transubstantiation).

The Imitation of Christ crossed over into the evangelical world — thanks to John Wesley — in spite of the fact that it is not orthodox in key areas and its mysticism deviates from central issues related to Christ and the Gospel. In Wesley's defense, one might argue that he did not fully understand Catholicism and read into the language of à Kempis his own understanding of certain words and concepts. Perhaps Wesley read his own understanding, rather than the Catholic meanings, into the words. Also, Wesley had a mystical bent and also held to at least a form of

perfectionism, which helped him resonate with à Kempis.

À KEMPIS CRITIQUED

Lorne Zelyck has made an in-depth study of à Kempis and his book *The Imitation of Christ* and concludes:

"I do not believe that every component of *The Imitation of Christ* is erroneous; I appreciate his attempt to take discipleship seriously. Yet I do believe that there are enough problematic statements which cause me to question its benefit to the Christian community. While Jesus bestows value upon humanity, à Kempis seems to eradicate it. While Jesus calls us to follow Him, à Kempis calls us to mortify ourselves. While Jesus calls us to complete, undivided devotion to God which expresses itself through acts of love, à Kempis calls us to sinless perfection, and views it as attainable. Moreover, while Jesus assures His followers of eternal life through believing in Him, à Kempis provides no assurance of eternal life, for the infusion of grace can be lost. In conclusion, I believe *The Imitation of Christ* was simply a product of its times. Honorably, à Kempis sought to understand God the best he could, and apply his knowledge to his context. McBrien notes that the Middle Ages were, '...wrought with mysticism. The lack of intellectual and theological substance produced numerous problems: superstition, ignorance of the Bible, fascination with reports of visions, exaggeration of the value of relics, emotionalism, inordinate fears of the after-life and of God's judgment, and devotional excesses unrelated to the central mysteries of Christian faith.' Whether or not the Christian community has made any progress in these areas, I can not say. What does seem apparent is this: the Christian community needs to be diligent in reading its

authors carefully, filtering everything through the clear teachings of Jesus as found in the Scriptures, and applying it to our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit. I believe that in doing this, we would truly imitate Christ."²¹

LIVING IN THE DARK PAST

A bit further into his book, Hull actually proposes some helpful things. There he writes about habits, habit formation, and perseverance. These things can be of help if one is able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Yet right in the midst of some good advice, Hull throws in the following:

"This is where the spiritual formation movement comes in. It has now emerged from behind the walls of monasteries and out of the neoorthodox seminary classrooms to become a force in the mainstream. It brings a rich history of great contemplative writers, scholarship, and an emphasis on spiritual disciplines. ... There is also a resistance by evangelicals to Catholic teaching and liberal theology that has been the home for the spiritual disciplines for the last few hundred years. The interesting development of the last ten years is the emergence of a very healthy spirituality from those traditions."²²

Hull tries to make this a bit more palatable by throwing in the caveat that we cannot view these medieval mystical practices as earning salvation, but otherwise the mystics are fine. Many would disagree strongly and for good reason.

Hull's view is that whatever we have been doing in the past — including reading his past books — is deficient and incomplete:

"Much good has been done through the content and structure approach, but it has lacked the depth and mystical element in the faith that the historic spiritual formation movement has provided. Spiritual formation

has been largely a product of the monastery and the academy, but now it is coming out of those closed environments and is joining forces with the classic disciple-making movement. ... I believe this combination created by the Holy Spirit will sweep the nation and transform the church in America."²³

Hull claimed to have the answer before, but now he is informing us that it was the wrong answer or at least deficient. Given the evaluation of his new system so far, a strong suspicion that he may be wrong again is warranted.

Hull also throws in the following suggestions as he speaks of what he perceives as God's external activity:

"God also works outside in when we serve or fit into a prescribed external regime such as church worship, service projects, and even the wearing of special clothes (i.e., clerical robes, choir robes, monks' or nuns' attire, and religious school uniforms that all have religious significance)."²⁴

It is hard to fathom how anyone could think that clerical robes reflect God's external activity. Jesus condemned all the religious and external paraphernalia of the Pharisees (Matthew 23). Choir robes are simply benign and may be nice for appearance and uniformity, but can in no way identify spirituality in a person. Hull's premise is simply foolish as he tries to sanitize some aspects of the liturgical Catholic tradition. "Special clothes" mean absolutely nothing.

BULIMIA, ANOREXIA, VISIONS, AND STUPORS

There seems to be no limit to Hull's imagination:

"Much like Teresa of Avila's interior castle analogy, Jesus draws me further and further in, toward the center room of his presence. The less I fear, the easier it will be for me to follow him."²⁵

Hull's argument here is very misleading. He prefaces his introduction to "Saint" Teresa by talking about the Apostle Paul not being afraid to follow Christ (even if it meant suffering). However there are many things we should be afraid to follow, especially if they are heretical and wrong. Pushing through the fear to follow Jesus, at least in Hull's view, means we should not be afraid to follow the mystical meanderings of Teresa of Ávila. God-given fear of wrong ideas and teachings is to be ignored from what Hull says. Healthy fear can be God's fire alarm of discernment and protection.

In a footnote, Hull explains at least a bit of Teresa's *The Interior Castle*:

"This is based on a *vision* she had on Trinity Sunday, 1577. She saw a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of a very clear crystal in which there were many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. Each room moves us closer to the center where the King of Glory dwells in the greatest splendor."²⁶

So now discipleship means following the visions of others. This removes us far from the discipleship command of Jesus and His teachings. Nowhere in Hull's book does he tell us to read and reread the Gospels, which contain all that Jesus taught and commanded. Jesus Himself said that all he commanded was to be the context and content of discipleship (Matthew 28:20).

We need to look further at Teresa of Ávila and really understand who and what is being recommended and who and what we are dealing with:

"**Saint Teresa of Ávila**, known in religion as **Saint Teresa of Jesus** and baptized as **Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada**, (born March 28, 1515 at Ávila, Old Castile, Spain, died October 4, 1582 at Alba de Tormes, Salamanca, Spain) was a prominent Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun,

and writer of the Counter Reformation. ... She claimed that during her illness she rose from the lowest stage, 'recollection,' to the 'devotions of peace' or even to the 'devotions of union,' which was one of perfect ecstasy. ... Around 1556, various friends suggested that her newfound knowledge was diabolical, not divine. She began to inflict various tortures and mortifications on herself. But Francis Borgia, to whom she made confession, reassured her of the divine inspiration of her thoughts. On St. Peter's Day in 1559, Teresa became firmly convinced that Christ was present to her in bodily form, though invisible. This vision lasted almost uninterrupted for more than two years. In another vision, a seraph drove the fiery point of a golden lance repeatedly through her heart, causing an ineffable spiritual-bodily pain. The memory of this episode served as an inspiration throughout the rest of her life, and which motivated her life-long imitation of the life and suffering of Jesus, epitomized in the motto usually associated with her: 'Lord, either let me suffer or let me die.' ... Her plan was the revival of the earlier stricter rules, supplemented by new regulations like the three disciplines of ceremonial flagellation prescribed for the divine service every week, and the discalceation of the nun, or the substitution of leather or wooden sandals for shoes."²⁷

Today, someone this mentally unbalanced would be put on medication and perhaps institutionalized. It is difficult to conceive of such a person being held up as a model for Christian discipleship.

TORTURED INTO SPIRITUALITY

Teresa dreamed up four levels of devotion that she described as the ascent of the soul:

“The fourth is the ‘devotion of ecstasy or rapture,’ a passive state, in which the consciousness of being in the body disappears (2 Corinthians 12:2-3 ...). Sense activity ceases; memory and imagination are also absorbed in God or intoxicated. Body and spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence and unconsciousness, and a spell of strangulation, intermitted sometimes by such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. This after half an hour is followed by a reactionary relaxation of a few hours in a swoon-like weakness, attended by a negation of all the faculties in the union with God. From this the subject awakens in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, productive of the trance. (Indeed, St. Theresa herself was said to have been observed levitating during Mass on more than one occasion.)”²⁸

This sounds like a combination of a drug high, altered states of consciousness, and demon possession. No wonder Joseph Breuer referred to her as the patron saint of hysteria.

In regard to the seraph and spear we find in her biography that Teresa claims an angel came to her with a spear that had a fiery tip and “he plunged this into my heart several times, so that it penetrated all the way to my entrails,” and she says that the intense pain united her to God.²⁹ She turned sadomasochism into a spiritual art. Teresa, like many of the passion mystics of her day, was both anorexic and bulimic and induced vomiting with twigs from an olive tree.³⁰ She claimed visions and went into stupors, having visions of the devil.³¹ She was a pathetic creature who did automatic writing, believing her penings were inspired by God.³² She also claimed ecstatic states and what she described sounds like an out of body experience.³³ At one point there was even a claim that she was “literally swept off her feet during Mass”

and that the host (or communion wafer) “was miraculously transported to her lips.”³⁴ Perhaps some of her hallucinations were produced by the frequent bloodletting practiced in those days.³⁵ There were visions of hell and a “spiritual marriage” said to be “the permanent union of her soul with God.”³⁶ The erotic bridal motif was a bizarre stock in trade for female mystics.

The sick, sinful, and macabre nature of that era is illustrated by Jerónimo Gracián, the head of Teresa’s order. On Teresa’s death, Gracián used a hacksaw to remove her left hand, which was then taken to churches as a “relic” capable of curing stomach ailments.³⁷

How anyone could not condemn all this activity, but rather affirm it or ignore it, is a real mystery. Hull probably would say he does not affirm all that the mystics say or do. These mystics were not in their right mind. People like this should not be promoted, but strongly denounced.

BUT FAITH IN WHAT?

Hull’s view of faith is a bit misleading as he says, “we have defined *faith* as action based on confident belief.”³⁸ The idea of confident belief conveys more the word “hope.” Hope (*elpis* in Greek) is confident expectation. “Faith as action” is a description of what genuine faith does, not what it is. Genuine faith will issue out in works. Hull’s idea of confident belief is so generic he illustrates it in a subjective way: taking a basement apartment over a more desirable one higher up. Biblical faith is not about subjective choices on any given day.

The word faith (*pisteuo* in Greek) means “trust.” That trust is directed to God and His Word. God and the Scriptures are the object of my trust (my faith). As New Testament lexicographer Joseph Henry Thayer points out, faith is “to trust in Jesus or in God ... the credence given to God’s messengers and their words ... joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah.”³⁹

More importantly:

“Faith in God involves right belief about God. The word faith in ordinary speech covers both credence of propositions (‘beliefs’) and confidence in persons or things. ... for trust in a thing reflects a positive expectation about its behavior, and rational expectation is impossible if the thing’s capacities for behavior are wholly unknown. Throughout the Bible, trust in God is made to rest on belief of what he has revealed concerning his character and purposes. In the NT, where faith in God is defined as trust in Christ, the acknowledgement of Jesus as the expected Messiah and the incarnate Son of God is regarded as basic to it.”⁴⁰

Hull also introduces Madame Guyon into his gallery of mystics and refers to one of her books, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. Perhaps Hull is ignorant of who Guyon really was and what she believed and taught. The book he refers to is possibly more benign and less revealing of the real Guyon. Like Teresa of Ávila, Guyon taught and practiced some frightening things that were far outside the Bible and a healthy spiritual life. PFO did a thorough investigation of her, drawing from her autobiography.⁴¹

Madame Guyon’s real name was Jeanne Marie Bouvier De La Motte. She lived from 1648-1717. The main culprit for spreading her lunacies happens to be Moody Press. D.L. Moody would be horrified to have his name attached to such madness. Guyon practiced essence mysticism (a form of deification), believing that one could sink into a mindless state and literally merge with God. This heresy confuses the Creator with His creatures. Other forms of it taught that one could go into mindless meditative states and merge with and almost become Jesus. This is also referred to as Theosis or Christological fusion.

At age 15, Guyon married a man who was 37. By her own telling, things were miserable. She was

abused by her mother-in-law. Extremely unhappy and depressed, she sought mental withdrawal by imagining she could meditate her way into release by perfect oneness with God. At times, she even convinced herself she had been absorbed into God. Today we would see her as a very confused teenager in need of help and counseling. She would carry these dark ideas into her adulthood. In a day when Roman Catholic legalism was not being countered by the balance of the Bible, many fell into unrestrained and extreme subjectivism and sought experiences for experience sake.

After the death of her husband, Guyon, who was then about 27, fell under the sway of a mystic named Father LaCombe. After joining his group, Guyon ate and slept little, which triggered mind-altering delusions. She believed that she could plunge her soul “wholly into His own divine essence.”⁴² Once one loses the understanding that humans are totally different than God, heresies will abound. People cannot become divine. That error was introduced by Satan in the garden when he offered to Eve the possibility that she could become like God (Genesis 3:5).

Guyon believed for a time that she and LaCombe could communicate by mental telepathy. In trance states she was unable to speak or communicate for days. She believed that her writings were inspired by God and practiced occult automatic writing. She claimed she had within her all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge thereby usurping the place of Jesus (Colossians 3:3).

Another promoter of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, referred to Guyon as a medium who exhibited clairvoyance, prophecy, and telepathy. So far afield was Guyon that she was imprisoned by the Catholic Church for 10 years.

EXPERIENCING ME

Many parts of *Choose the Life* are about Hull’s feelings and experiences.

He even refers to himself in the third person:

“I would be happy to be remembered as a writer, but there is something even more important about Bill Hull. The writing speaks of my perseverance, drive, and ability to think, but it leaves out my personal influence on others. As I like to tell my friends, it is wonderful to be honored but even better to be loved. An even more important legacy than my writing is Bill Hull the person and how other people experience me.”⁴³

It is really troubling to read that Hull will follow the Catholic mystics anywhere they take him:

“As part of my quest to understand more of the history of spiritual formation, I read *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. I didn’t think much of the exercises that called for contemplation of bodies burning in hell, the wearing of hair shirts or chains, or flogging myself with a whip. But there was a passage that struck me as helpful, even though it goes further than Scripture requires.”⁴⁴

The passage from Ignatius had to do with saving one’s soul through sickness and poverty — in essence teaching salvation by works. Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuits and fiercely loyal to the pope and the Virgin Mary. Hull is willing to overlook it all and writes, “One must make allowance for excessive theological beliefs and practices suitable only to such a time as they wrote.”⁴⁵

Hull provides a recommended-reading list. It includes a number of medieval mystics, writers for the emerging church, and Quaker mystic Richard Foster.⁴⁶ Foster recommends mystics such as Madame Guyon and French priest François Fénelon. In Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, he advises occult techniques including visualization and meditation. He

refers to this new age in which we can relish fantasy games, visions, and dreams. He endorses mindless meditation and occult centering, which produces altered states of consciousness. He also advocates a form of out of body experience. These things are far beyond the pale of the Bible and Christianity, and would dovetail more with Hinduism and heresy than they would evangelicalism.⁴⁷

VAIN REPETITIONS

Hull also recommends Bruce Demarest’s teaching on what is called *lectio divina*.⁴⁸ *Lectio divina*, which means “sacred reading” in Latin, is an ancient Roman Catholic practice that surely qualifies as vain repetition. *Lectio divina* seems to begin well as one is advised to open the Bible. However, one does not read the Bible in context, trying to understand the sense and apply it to life but rather:

“When you find a word or phrase or sentence that speaks to your heart, pause in your reading. ... meditate or mull over the word or words. ... The final stage is resting in the Lord’s presence.”⁴⁹

Other practitioners call this centering prayer and describe it as an art or technique. Chanting the mantra (a word or words from the Bible) is supposed to create oneness with God and fuse the soul with the Divine. It is supposed to end in wordless rest.⁵⁰ Real Bible reading should result in comfort, assurance, prayer, and praise. It provides direction as we become doers of the Word.

Lectio divina is a deceptive substitute for reading and studying the Bible. It has parallels in mysticism, occultism, and Buddhism. It is more about how we feel than it is about God’s glory. Stoking our emotions is not the primary purpose of the Scriptures; telling us how to live is (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Lectio divina can only leave one empty, confused, misdirected, and malnourished. It would be like going to a favorite restaurant and having a

steak dinner set down, but being told to cut only a tiny piece of steak from one corner and roll it in your mouth for a while without swallowing it. Meals are meant to be eaten. Nourishment comes from the whole meal. Satan is stealing the food and replacing it with junk food doctrine or even poison.

HOW DID THIS ALL START?

What has puzzled many is how and why extreme asceticism was able to thrive in the medieval Church. While as early as the third and fourth century of the Church men began to withdraw to the deserts of Southern Israel and Egypt, it certainly was the opposite of "go into the world and preach the Gospel."

Paul condemned those who teach such things:

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own consciences seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

The ascetics recommended by Hull are the very ones Paul refers to. Their practices are morbid and self-destructive.

The deserts of Egypt and Israel were, for the most part, conducive to reclusive living. These practices may have started innocently enough as some had to flee to the wilderness areas during times of persecution.

Consider the following religious and historical reasons for many accepting the abnormal lifestyles of those who became known as anchorites (a recluse who is alone, most often dwelling in a cave) and cenobites (withdrawal with others into a convent or monastery). These practices began as early as A.D. 270. Paul

of Thebes, Anthony and Pachomius from Egypt, and Hilarion from what was then Palestine seem to be the key figures.

In that era there was an imbibing of Greek philosophy from Alexandria, Egypt. Some of it was left over from the Hellenism of the B.C. era, which looked at the body as evil. If the body was worthless, then it made sense, at least to some, to starve it, mortify it, beat it, and deny it. Punishment of the body was seen as good and even godly. The Greek mindset made anorexia, masochism, and self-torture appealing to some, even though it was a form of slow suicide. Once the practice and tradition set in, the philosophy that triggered it was forgotten. This laid the groundwork. The following erected the structure:

I. There was a growing belief that as the cities were "Christianized," Satan had been driven out and therefore began residing in deserts, the wilderness, and other remote places. Therefore if one were to encounter and defeat Satan one would have to go out to his turf. It was an early form of geographical spiritual warfare or territorial demonology. This made all the more sense to the ancients because Jesus Himself went to the wilderness to encounter Satan. What they failed to remember was that Jesus talked of Satan's activity in the Pharisees in Jerusalem (John 8:44) and even in Peter while in Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:23). Christ's temptations did not limit Satan to the wilderness.

II. There was a growing celebrity status of the reclusive class that affirmed that lifestyle. City folk would go out and observe the austerity, which gave it a higher honor than it deserved. Some considered the monks entertaining, but some took them far more seriously.

III. Withdrawal from normal life was now seen as the one major way to obtain deep spirituality. As well, it recaptured the old martyr's spirit. A belief grew that a reclusive lifestyle could recapture Adam's innocent condition before the fall. It followed in

many minds that if these people were willing to sacrifice so much and be homeless and destitute they had to be a saintly class.

IV. The next step was the growing belief that desert living was the only way to be really spiritual. With a growing ignorance of the Bible more than 200 years after its completion and an acceptance of a perverted form of sanctification, this lifestyle was seen as the genuine way to salvation.

V. If then these monks and hermits were the closest thing to God on earth, it made sense that they could pray for and intervene for the less spiritual both in life and in death.

VI. The claim of frequent visions and voices affirming the lifestyle was not investigated or questioned. Sleep loss, starvation, and isolation, which are sins against the body and a violation of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, could easily account for the "supernatural" occurrences, but these destructive and negative effects were not known then.

This last step locked all the above into place. The only way out was a return to a biblical understanding of salvation and sanctification.⁵¹

OFF THE TRACKS

Hull's earlier writings may have at one time appeared evangelical and on track, but no longer. Apparently his earlier writings did not work well or he would not be moving on into this new direction. He has left the pastoral ministry after an admittedly bumpy career. He is endorsed by and is now aligning himself with the emerging church movement. His new relational and emotional emphasis seems more important than truth and doctrine.

Hull obviously reads and recommends without care and discernment. He may sincerely believe he is helping people with this new direction, but in the light of the Bible he is sincerely wrong. If a writer, no matter what his or her background, says something that appeals to Hull, then that is all that matters. No author is

held to a biblical standard. Hull's new discipleship content is a mixed bag of mysticism and visionary hallucinations. Hull is moving in the wrong direction.

Going back to old errors is not discipleship. It is not choosing life, but confusion. It is amazing that the emergent church leaders accuse conservative evangelicals of being out of touch. One cannot be more out of touch than when trying to revert to pre-Reformation practices that spawned error upon error. One is much safer choosing another discipleship author who is more concerned about staying on a biblical track rather than the track of the so-called emerging church. The Church needs to go forward, not backward. The rush to Rome is a race into the dark.

Endnotes:

1. Bill Hull, *Choose the Life*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007, pg. 44, note 2.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 97.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 19.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 202, 210, 215, 221.
9. See further, Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*. Silverton, Ore.: Lighthouse Trails, 2002, pp. 64-65, 134-136.
10. Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing

- Company, 1998, pg. 51.
11. Nouwen cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*. Silverton, Ore.: Lighthouse Trails, 2007, pg. 90.
12. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 24.
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 48.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 49.
15. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "What a Marriage! Why Did Evangelicalism Marry Catholicism's Stepchild?," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2005, pg. 16.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 35.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
20. *New Geneva Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, note on 1 Corinthians 11:1, pg. 1812.
21. Lorne Zelyck, "An Evaluation of Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 2005, pg. 88, ellipsis in original.
22. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pp. 62, 68.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 130.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 96.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 100.
26. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
27. "Teresa of Ávila," from Wikipedia, bold in original. Document available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Teresa_of_Avila.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Cathleen Medwick, *Teresa of Avila*. New York: Doubleday, 1999, pp. ix-x.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 32.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 61, 63-64, 185-186, 204-205.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 104.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 126.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 127.
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 207, 169.

37. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.
38. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 94, italic in original.
39. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1966, pg. 511, italics in original.
40. Everett F. Harrison, Editor-in-chief, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973, pg. 209, italics in original.
41. G. Richard Fisher, "The Mindless Mysticism of Madame Guyon," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1997, pp. 4, 12-15.
42. Madam Guyon, *Madame Guyon An Autobiography*. Chicago: Moody Press, no date, pg. 239.
43. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pp. 128-129.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 203.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 217.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.
47. See further, "What a Marriage!," op. cit., pp. 17-18.
48. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 218.
49. *Ibid.*
50. See further, Gary E. Gilley, "The Lure of Mysticism," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2005, pp. 18-19; and Gary E. Gilley and Brian E. Gilley, "The New Mystic Youth: No Longer Just Pulp Fiction," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2007, pp. 8-10.
51. For a well documented and in-depth treatment of the desert monks and desert communities from a favorable perspective, see Derwas James Chitty, *The Desert A City, An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999).



NO PLACE LIKE ROME?

(continued from page 1)

launches it into the next stage is what some call "ancient-future faith."

ORIGINS AND LEADERS

The themes found in ancient-future faith have always been part of emergent but are taking on additional weight as the movement matures. The term seems to have been coined by the late Robert Webber, professor at Wheaton College and Northern Seminary. Webber wrote a number of works that are foundational to emergent philosophy, including his 1999 *Ancient-Future Faith, Rethinking Evan-*

gelicalism for a Postmodern World. *Christianity Today* calls Webber the "father of the ancient-future movement" and mentions the Robert E. Webber Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future, which he founded.¹ Chris Armstrong, associate professor of Church history at Bethel Seminary, says the movement "exploded in a 24-month period in 1977-1978, which saw the publication of Richard Foster's bestselling *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* and Robert Webber's *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*."²

Armstrong documents other evangelical leaders during this same period who came to similar

conclusions. Among them were Bethel College and Seminary president Carl Lundquist, Campus Crusade leader Peter Gillquist, Drew University's Tom Oden, and theologians Donald Bloesch and Thomas Howard. The latter two were instrumental, along with Robert Webber, in penning "'The Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals,' whose prologue declared evangelicals' 'pressing need to reflect upon the substance of the biblical and historic faith and to recover the fullness of this heritage.'"³

In 1982, *Christianity Today's* sister publication *Christian History* (now *Christian History & Biography*) began to encourage interest in Church history