

The Dangers of the International House of Prayer (IHOP)

by John Park
(Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry)

The International House of Prayer (IHOP) was started on May 7, 1999 by Mike Bickle in Kansas City. [1] It is well known for its 24/7 worship and prayer ministry. Now it has grown substantially to include international ties, its very own seminary, and undergraduate program. People from around the globe are flocking to IHOP, but do they actually know what they are getting into?

Cultic Origins and Goals

It is clear that almost all of the participants in IHOP do not have an understanding of what they are getting into. Many of the participants, including many genuine Christians who are being deceived, believe it is a place to go pray and worship, while not knowing what the theological distinctives are that make IHOP unique. The true origin started in 1982 after a man named Augustine approached Mike Bickle and said an audible voice told him to prophesy to his congregation. Later that year, Mike Bickle claimed to hear an audible voice speaking to him while on a trip in Cairo, Egypt. The voice told him, "I am inviting you to raise up a work that will touch the ends of the earth. I have invited many people to do this thing and many people have said yes, but very few have done my will." [2]

This is parallel to how many other cults of Christianity are born. They follow the basic formula:

(Blank 1) said God told him/her a message, and he/she and starts the (Blank 2) church.

For Example:

Joseph Smith said God told him a message, and he started the Mormon church.

Ellen G. White said God told her a message, and she started the Seventh Day Adventist church.

Mary Eddy Baker said God told her a message, and she started the Christian Scientist church.

Sun Myung Moon said God told him a message, and he started the Unification church.

Witness Lee/Watchman Nee said God told him a message, and he started the Local Church.

Mike Bickle said God told him a message, and he started the International House of Prayer.

Not only is IHOP origin akin to many other aberrant groups, but their ultimate goals follow suit. Mike Bickle has been quoted to say the church brings on the great tribulation:

We're not absent for the great tribulation, now listen carefully, the church causes the great tribulation. What I mean by that – it's the church, it's the praying church under Jesus' leadership that's loosing the judgment in the great tribulation in the way that Moses stretched forth his rod and prayed and loosed the judgments upon Pharaoh. The church in the tribulation is in the position that Moses was before Pharaoh but it won't be a Pharaoh and Egypt, it'll be the great end time Pharaoh called the antichrist and the book of Revelation is a book about the judgments of God on the antichrist loosed by the praying church. [9]

Even worse, Bickle proposes that an elite end-time church defeats God's enemies, and Jesus is "held in the heavens" until it happens.

Right now the prayer movement is growing fast....really fast! But when I say it's growing fast instead of one percent of the Body of Christ taking hold of it, maybe 10 percent. It's....you know it's like 10 times bigger than it was a generation ago, but beloved as fast as the prayer movement is growing, where people are getting hold of it, still for 90 percent of the Body of Christ it's not even on their mind. Jesus is not coming until the Body of Christ globally is crying out "Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus" and they don't just say "come and forgive me" they are crying out in the understanding of who they are as the one that is cherished by Jesus in the bridal identity. [9]

The Power of Emotionalism, Mysticism, and Gnosticism

The major draw of IHOP is experience. People often come to me citing their experience and go back again and again to experience "God" and the "Spirit" - no different than an emotional high. This is analogous to mysticism, which is defined as "the pursuit of deeper or higher subjective religious experience," and "that spiritual reality is perceived apart from the human intellect and natural senses." [13] They practice what is known as centering or contemplative prayer. This is defined as "the practice of relaxing, emptying the mind, and letting one's self find the presence of God within." [10] In fact, they had an article titled "Contemplative Prayer" on their website, but after much negative press they have taken it down. [13] However, the contents of the article have been preserved by a former IHOP staff member's website and is available for all to see here:

(<http://gospelmasquerade.wordpress.com/2009/08/01/contemplative-prayer-continued/>)

One of the highest criticisms would be IHOP's insidious Gnosticism. Gnosticism is derived from the greek word gnosis, meaning "knowledge." The hallmark of Gnosticism is the idea of having "hidden knowledge" of the spiritual realm that is unavailable to others. This knowledge comes via prophecies, visions, and dreams that God specifically gives to a certain privileged group of people - in this case IHOP.

In fact, IHOP has their own “prophecy rooms” where one can receive “prophecies,” and they used to have a practice of mailing out recorded tapes, of which I was asked by my friend’s mother to translate!

This is something the Apostle Paul discusses in Colossians 2:18. “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind” (NASB) [11].

Great experiences with our Lord are a gift from God, but one needs to exercise caution concerning the authority he/she gives personal experiences. More often than not, the people who go to IHOP do not have a strong theological foundation and so they rely on their experiences to dictate what the Bible says and not the other way around. Here are some words (from Dr. John MacArthur's sermon "Are Experiences a Valid Source of Truth?") of wisdom regarding experiences:

There is the ploy they use, "Well, we would expect you to be against it since you haven't had the experience." That is Gnosticism. That is believing that you have been elevated to a higher level of comprehension which the uninitiated have no understanding. Rodman Williams, who has written a number of books and who was once the president of a local Charismatic school, and I quote said, "Any vital information concerning the Gifts of the Spirit, the Pneumatic Charismata, predisposes a participation in them. Without such a participation, whatever is said about the Gifts may only result in confusion and error." If you haven't had it, you have no right to talk about it. One pastor said to me, "You talk exactly like one who never had the experience. You are speaking out of ignorance." I wonder if they feel that way talking about Heaven, Hell, murder, adultery, homosexuality, and numerous other subjects. Do we have to have that experience too? [5]

The IHOP Dilemma

When someone comes to you and say that God gave him a clear audible and/or visual revelation (dream, vision, prophecy, etc.), you are now in what I will call the IHOP Dilemma.

Due to the seriousness of disobeying genuine prophecy and the heinousness of proclaiming a false one, you are in an IHOP Dilemma when you are now forced to choose:

1) If this person is actually speaking truth from God. If so, we are bound to listen or face incurring the steep penalty of disobeying God's very own commands via His prophet.

or

2) Whether or not a person is proclaiming falsehood in God's name and thus incurring the steep penalty of false prophesying and being a false prophet.

Unfortunately, this puts the rest of Christianity in a hard situation, because we now have to make the determination whether IHOP is full of false prophets or true prophets and to treat them as such. We cannot merely remain neutral. How can we be neutral on God's revelation or on such an egregious sin as false prophecy within the church? It is like someone saying the pastor cheated on his wife or that he murdered someone and saying, "Hmm... let me think about that and get back to you later." No, you're now in a tough situation and you now have to make a hard decision!

Unfortunately, many of those in IHOP have no idea what they are doing when they are supposedly "prophesying." As I said before, they do not have a strong Biblical foundation and do not pause to think of the gravity of what they are actually proclaiming. [8]

A Sampling of the Prophecies

Lest you think the prophecies at IHOP are like ones in other mainstream charismatic churches or similar to prophecies noted men like John Piper, Vern Poythress, or Wayne Grudem believe, please read the following quotes other authors have noted:

1. On disc 7 of *The Prophetic History*, Bickle describes a visitation to the throne-room of God as he is told that God will be restoring the apostles to the church. Let me preface this by saying that before getting to this point in his message, Bickle described the experience as being on par with the Apostle Paul's experience in the Third Heaven in 2 Cor. 12 as well as John's visions.

They've been told by church leadership that it is up to them to "usher in" the Second Coming of Jesus. They've been encouraged to do away with discernment concerning mystical experiences. They've been told that they are "forerunners" of Christ in the same way that John the Baptist was. They've been told that the orthodox views of Christianity are weak and it's up to them to restore the "true" message of the Gospel, using their new "powers from God" to start a revival that will win souls for the Kingdom." [6]

2. They could hear from God, and speak forth God's words, prophesying of great events soon to transpire on planet earth. And they could have flipped a coin as to whether what God allegedly told them would actually come true. Often they didn't come true. Some of the main prophets and/or leaders in the movement included Paul Cain, Mike Bickle, Bob Jones, Rick Joyner, John Paul Jackson, Francis Frangipane, and others...However, he was quoted as saying that the general level of prophetic revelation in the movement's "prophets" had an accuracy level of about 65 percent. Some prophets were as low as 10 percent accurate, he said, with some of the "most mature" prophets having a rating "approaching 85 percent to 95 percent." (Steven F Cannon, "Old Wine in Old Wineskins: A Look at Kansas City Fellowship," *The Quarterly Journal* 10, no. 4 (October-December 1990): 8. [7]

3. Bickle claims that a "voice" spoke to him in September 1982, directing him to a ministry to touch the ends of the earth. (Albert James Dager, Vengeance is Ours. Redmond, Wash.: Sword Publishers, 1990, pg. 127.) Bickle's account is as follows: "The Lord simply said, 'I will change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the earth in one generation.'" (Mike Bickle, Growing in the Prophetic. Lake Mary, Fla.: Creation House, 1996, pg. 30) [7]

4. Bickle speaking, "...but the fact is God showed me that it was truly a healing anointing. It was a tremendously, ah, dynamic dream for my own personal history and what I can understand for the life of this church. There's a healing anointing He said would be second to no other movement. That's what He told me directly, it would be second to no other movement in this whole generation, the healing anointing that will come upon this people. . .He (BJ) [Bob Jones] says 'They took a banner and He (God) put a banner upon you last night and it spoke of the entire movement.' Then he told me the dream I had and he said the Lord says there will be no movement that will be superior to the healing power that comes forth from this movement . He goes, 'There will be nothing in the earth that this thing will be second to in the generation.' I said, 'God, this is incredible.'" (P.His 2, p. 15 - 17) [3]

5. "I (Mike Bickle) stood there and I was at the Lord's left hand, and it was not a dream--this was as real as life here and like I said, I don't know that realm... He (God) was speaking so sternly to me, He said, 'If you are impatient...you will cause great turmoil and much trouble for many people.' I was ashamed and I was broken with sorrow that He said that so harshly to me. And then what happened is that I start falling so rapidly--I mean like--S-H-O-O-O-M, it takes about five or six seconds, and fall down to my bed, right through the ceiling--I mean it was right through the walls and things--S-H-O-O-O-M, I hit my bed and it wasn't like an instant I was there--I had knowledge of travel for five or six seconds. Have you had that?"

BJ: "Yes."

MB: "And I was falling so rapidly and I was going like 'A-H-H-H-H.' I was coming right down through the black sky...And I come right through the ceiling and I hit my bed and I looked for like a half a second, I goes S-H-O-O-O-M right back up again, I go. . . right through the ceiling again! And I understood immediately the impatience was of setting in leadership premature without permission. He said...'You cannot put leadership in that I do not say, because the leadership will divide and cause much division and many people will suffer great harm and I will hold you accountable for it. '...So what happens is this golden chariot, it appears--S-W-O-O-O-P-and it comes right there. . . and I under--I knew intuitively, instantly--it was an apostolic ministry, though it's only the invitation. It was not a commission. The Lord was not calling me an apostle. He said He was thinking, 'The days to come, if you're faithful, you have an opportunity in the grace of God to fill an apostolic calling if you're faithful to the full measure.' And I set in the chariot and I went shooting right into a blue sky and I knew as I was going up that it was revelation. He said, 'I'm going to bring you to divine revelation in the days to come.'...There would be an end-time measure of

apostolic ministry that would come out of the fruit of the intercession...so like it's a number of years down the road. But the Lord said that I'm going to bring forth apostles—champions--if the people will live in intercession and ask for them to come...And so that was no small visitation in terms of the promise of what God said to this movement...And the Lord says, 'Now you have the word in yourself now and you will not go running after other movements and other places because I have spoken to you face-to-face. '...But I know that at that time I owned,..from the voice of God--face-to-face (but I never saw His face), but I mean standing next to Him, I owned the word myself and it was not just a matter of me believing Him. It was amazing how the revelation turned after that time.' (F88, p. 81 - 84) [3]

The Denigration of the Bible and Sola Scriptura

One of the biggest issues of this movement is their denial of one of the bedrock doctrines of the Reformation and evangelical Christianity: Sola Scriptura, or Scripture Alone. Sola Scriptura is the notion that the Bible is the revealed will of God and all that is necessary for faith (all teachings are contained within the Bible) and practice (the things we need to govern our church and everyday life). For an excellent explanation of this by Dr. Greg Bahnsen go here: (<http://www.christiantruth.com/articles/bahnsen.html>). Basically, God does not need to give us anymore revelation, and this was first used in the Reformation against the Roman Catholic church that said we needed their traditions and clergy, but now it is under attack by IHOP. They might say they believe in it, but their actions outright deny it.

When people from IHOP make decisions, they do not use the Bible as the only revealed revelation from God because they supposedly still get direct revelations from Him. They deny this very doctrine that defines the protestant and evangelical faith. Sadly, this is rampant at IHOP.

Indexed as a Cult by Multiple Ministries

There are certainly many different theological distinctives in the Christian church, and many of us do differ. However, we do not go so far as to label each other cults or heretics. On the other hand, IHOP has been labeled dangerous, cultic, false, and heretical by many ministries, former members, apologetic groups, and Godly men. In fact, other charismatic Christians have stood up to oppose them as well. A small listing of these groups include:

The Apologetics Index
 Apologetics Resource Center
 Critical Issues Commentary

Pastor Ernie Gruen (a Charismatic preacher) who was written a manuscript entitled "Documentation of the Aberrant Practices and Teachings of Kansas City Fellowship (Grace Ministries)." Kansas City Fellowship (Grace Ministries) is Mike Bickles former ministry prior to founding IHOP.

Pastor Bill Randles (a Pentecostal preacher) has written a book titled "Weighed and Found Wanting."

The Gospel Masquerade is a website created by a former staff member of IHOP.

All these resources are available in the references section. I especially recommend The Gospel Masquerade website, Pastor Gruen's manuscript, and Pastor Randles' book.

Conclusion

A quick review of the main offenses include:

- Cultic origin, worship style, and goals
- Emotionalism
- Mysticism
- Gnosticism
- The IHOP dilemma
- False Prophecies
- Effective Denial of Sola Scriptura
- Opposition by multiple Godly Christian Groups

Though it may seem like a place that is on fire and passionate for God, this is simply not the case. Many of the people that do go there are sincere Christians, but they have been overcome by the lies and experiences they have there. In short, the people I have communicated with ignore the things above and simply hold on to what they have experienced and point the finger at me saying, "you don't know about us." Unfortunately I do know, and I hope this article persuades or helps you convince someone else who is going down a destructive path. It breaks my heart to see so many young people fall victim to this place, and all the people who waste their lives and God given talents to expand IHOP's kingdom and not God's Kingdom.

References:

[1] <http://www.ihop.org/Group/Group.aspx?ID=1000036203>

[2] Randle, Bill. "Weighed and Found Wanting: The Toronto Experience Examined in the Light of the Bible. Cambridge, UK. 1996.
<http://www.apologeticsindex.org/docs/WeighedAndFoundWanting.pdf>

[3] Gruen, Ernie. Documentation of the Aberrant Practices and Teachings of Kansas City Fellowship (Grace Ministries). Shawnee, KS. No date.
<http://www.deceptionbytes.com/AberrentDoctrinesKCF>

[4] <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/b56.html>

[5] <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/CHAOS1.HTM>

[6] <http://signofjonah.wordpress.com/2006/07/13/ihop-and-cultural-influences>

[7] <http://www.pfo.org/growingpains.htm>

[8] <http://thepredestinedblog.blogspot.com/2008/10/ihop-manifesto.html>

[9] <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue107.htm>

[10] <http://carm.org/centering-prayer>

[11] The Lockman Foundation. New American Standard Bible. La Habra, CA. 1995.

[12] MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon. Chicago, IL. 1992.

[13] <http://gospelmasquerade.wordpress.com/2009/08/01/contemplative-prayer-continued/>