

When Hillsong Offends the Naked Cowboy

The primary website reporting on the Hillsong, Naked Cowboy fiasco (which I'll explain shortly) has also attacked me, writing, "One person in the NAR [New Apostolic Reformation] that ticks the box as a governing Apostle and Prophet ... is the apostate Dr. Michael Brown—someone who played a significant role in the man-made NARismatic Pensacola revival, started by International NARpostle and Prophet, Yonggi Cho."

By God's grace, I did have a significant leadership role in the Pensacola revival, the most glorious, Jesus-exalting, Word-based move of the Spirit that I have witnessed in almost 45 years in the Lord, a move that literally touched millions around the world with wonderful fruit that remains to this day.

Aside, then, from stating accurately that I "played a significant role in the revival," everything else in the paragraph was patently false.

So much for accurate reporting and for being a "watchdog" for the church.

Nonetheless, when websites like this do report accurately, the facts stand for themselves, and this time, when it comes to a recent Hillsong event, it appears their reporting is true.

First, the relevant background.

According to Wikipedia, "Robert John Burck, better known as the Naked Cowboy, is an American street performer whose pitch is on New York City's Times Square. He wears only cowboy boots, a hat, and briefs, with a guitar strategically placed to give the illusion of nudity."

What does this have to do with Hillsong?

Well, during an I Love New York celebration at a recent women's conference hosted by Hillsong in New York City, a Hillsong youth pastor was onstage, dressed up as the Naked Cowboy, meaning that he too was wearing nothing but a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, briefs and a guitar.

But hey, after all, what's wrong with that? We don't want to get religious now, do we? What's wrong with a youth pastor standing onstage in his underwear during a women's conference? (Sarcasm fully intended.)

In the past, both privately and then publicly, I have offered my assistance to Hillsong New York, wanting to help them appreciate and embrace the beauty of holiness.

That offer remains today, and for any readers who want to brand me "religious" for having a problem with this "naked cowboy" display in a church setting, I can only say this: You need a fresh encounter with the living God.

Yet this is only the beginning of the story.

According to this same website, Burck, aka the Naked Cowboy, was also upset with Hillsong.

His representative, Todd Rubenstein, issued this statement: "I represent Naked Cowboy and own Naked Cowboy Enterprises, LLC. I am the sole administrator of the Naked Cowboy® registered trademarks. I am the only person who can provide license of use of anything associated with Naked Cowboy and Hillsong has never requested any right to use our registered trademarks or Naked Cowboy's likeness."

Did I say already that I wish this whole thing was just made up?

But it gets worse.

According to the statement, “Mr. Burck is an Ordained Minister & would NEVER attend church in the house of the Lord in his Trade Dress and is EXTREMELY offended by this activity due to his deep Christian beliefs and respect for the process of gathering in the name of Jesus Christ and in the presence of God to worship and praise the Holy Father.”

So Burck is not only upset because of the alleged copyright violation, with Hillsong imitating his likeness without permission, but he is “EXTREMELY offended” because he is a deeply committed Christian minister who would never show up in church in his trademark underwear outfit.

While this is certainly a commendable attitude—can you imagine any gospel minister in his right mind appearing like that in a church service?—isn’t it a little odd that Burck has no problem appearing as the “Naked Cowboy” on the streets of New York before countless thousands of onlookers every week?

I guess I’m just being “religious” again, thinking somehow that a deeply devoted gospel minister would not want to show up in a church service in his underwear any more than he would want to perform on a street corner in his underwear.

The irony of all this is that what Hillsong and Burck would greatly benefit from is the very thing that the website that attacked them would benefit from: a revival like the Pensacola revival, a repentance-based, holiness-empowered, grace-offering outpouring that would bring countless thousands of New Yorkers to their knees.

Such a revival would also touch many others around the nation, since the sins of the world have become the sins of the church, which is why repentance must begin with us.

It would also touch the Christian critics who, in their zeal to expose the counterfeit, often miss the authentic, bearing false witness against other believers in the process.

And so, while it is easy to criticize Hillsong (and the Naked Cowboy and this “watchdog” website), we would do well to search our own souls before the throne of God, asking Him to expose the darkness in our hearts, to restore us to our first love, to grant us deep repentance, and to open our eyes so that we can see Jesus afresh in all His glory. I pray this for myself as well!

The sad truth is that this most recent debacle is simply an exaggerated picture of the church of America.

May God have mercy on us.

(One final note: I had decided to write this article before I read the attacks against me on this same website, which actually closed with a challenge to me to see if I had the “spine” to address these issues. Despite the website’s misguided provocations, I decided prayerfully that the issues did need to be addressed, hence this article.)