

Truths We Believe about God 13

A Biblical & Theological Rejection of Wm. Paul Young's book, "Lies We Believe About God" (Thirteenth in a series.)

"For we have not followed *cunningly devised fables*, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And this voice which came from heaven *we heard*, when we were with him in the holy mount. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." [139]
—Emphasis added, The Apostle Peter, 2 Peter 1:16-21, KJV

Conclusion: Part 3

UNIVERSALISM

The Emerging Evangelical Metanarrative

Metanarrative: An overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences. The Big picture! [140]

Born of pantheism emerges an inebriating belief called universalism, that because we're all part of God now we shall all be part of God forever. God can't live without us, even though it seems the Trinity did quite well without us in eternity before creation. This is the evangelical metanarrative emerging out of pantheism . . . UNIVERSALISM! But before there can be a new narrative explaining our reality, the old narrative must be dismissed and a new metanarrative introduced. [141] In other words, a new story must replace the old, and *The Shack* is just such a new story.

The Old Narrative: *The Scriptures*

Man needs personal communications from God, in this instance a hand written note from God to Mack. So God wrote to Mack, *The Shack's* lead character. "Mackenzie," *Papa* goddess tells Mack, "It's been awhile. I've missed you. I'll be back at the shack next weekend if you want to get together." Signed "Papa" About receiving this note (perhaps meant by Young to mimic his conversations with God which he wrote down on pads of yellow legal paper), Young creates this thinking which went on in Mack's mind:

Try as he might, Mack could not escape the desperate possibility that the note just might be from God after all, even if the thought of God passing notes did not fit well with his theological training. In seminary [Young graduated from Bible college, ed.] he had been taught that God had completely stopped any overt communication with moderns, preferring to have them only listen to and follow sacred Scripture, properly interpreted, of course [expository preaching, ed.]. God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects [i.e., theologians, ed.]. It seemed that direct communication with God was something exclusively for the ancients and uncivilized . . . *Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was it gilt edges?* (Emphasis added, *The Shack*, 65-66)

Young's derogatory swipe at Holy Scripture (that people prefer God in a book, especially an expensively bound leather one with "gilt edges") is self-indicting. He too puts God in a book—his book! He too has put God's voice on paper—his paper! He too has put God in a box—his box! He too interprets what his book means. So the question for seekers after truth is: whose book, paper, box or explanation are they going to believe, Young's or God's? Again, via musings of his main character, the author takes another swipe at Scripture. "To his amusement" reads the story, Mack "also found a Gideon's Bible in the nightstand." (*The Shack*, 115) Regarding his derisive jab at Holy Scripture (that Mack found his discovery of a Gideon Bible to be "amusing" if not irrelevant), I would point to personal testimonies of those who, finding themselves in desperate straits in life, found God's comfort for their soul from reading a Gideon Bible they found in a drawer in a nightstand next to the bed in a hotel room where they were staying. But to Young the Bible is the old and unacceptable story emphasizing sin, guilt and the Savior. The church needs a new narrative, one exclusively based upon love, universal reconciliation and relationship. Enter . . .

The New Metanarrative: *The Shack*

In his book *A New Kind of Christian*, as he does in other of his many writings, emergent church leader Brian McLaren calls for a "new framing story." [142] In his book tellingly titled *The End of Evangelicalism?*, one scholar summarizes what McLaren wants, that he "calls for an awakening to this new framing story, the 'creative and transforming story' of Jesus, where God's love, reconciliation, sacred beauty, restoration, justice, and renewal take shape among us and the world." [143] David Fitch's description of what McLaren desires to see in a new framing story fits, I think, the story Wm. Paul Young creates in *The Shack* in which he portrays what a new kind of Christianity and Christian might look like. About his new story Young admits:

Please don't misunderstand me. *The Shack* is theology, but it is theology wrapped in story, the Word becoming flesh and living inside the blood and bones of common human experience [Note how Young usurps Jesus' incarnation, ed.]. If you believe, as I do, that everything finds its meaning, value, identity, worth, security, and significance inside relationship, and foremost in one's relationship with God, then all life falls within the purview of theology, the living word of God's reality and presence. [144]

The Shack (as also his books *Eve* and *Cross Roads*) is Young's new metanarrative and *Lies We Believe About God* explains the frame or template of it. In *Lies* Young claims to expose the deceptions of the old story while in *The Shack* he creates and communicates the truths of the new story. This is why Eugene Peterson praised *The Shack* as follows: "This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!" (*The Shack*, front cover) There you have it . . . Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is the "old inactive story" for his generation indicating the old way of looking the Christian faith; and Young's *The Shack* is a "new interactive story" for this generation explaining the new Christianity. Clever . . . To employ an oxymoronic illustration, this may explain why people formed Bible study groups to study *The Shack* which is neither in the Bible nor biblical. *Bible studies on The Shack?* Go figure.

The Shack constantly pictures imaginary conversations taking place in heaven between Papa, Jesus, *Sarayu* (i.e., the Spirit), Sophia and Mack. But to sell this myth of imagined conversations with God, the Bible has to be discredited, and by innuendo the author, as has been pointed out, does this in *The Shack*. To communicate this new metanarrative, Christianity needs a new story and theology to enrapture and capture human hearts, and what better entry point is there than getting into vulnerable human hearts by developing concepts about God's relationship to the mystery of suffering where immediate explanations often escape us (Why me, God?). To this issue the Bible speaks about suffering and contains a book called Job.

Nevertheless, Young's new metanarrative attempts to explain the new Christianity by shedding light on the darkness which surrounds suffering, and to do so Young invents interactive conversations between the members of the Trinity to shed light upon the issues of life, faith and tragedy. But about doing this, A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) cautioned in his classic book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, that, "It is a real if understandable error to conceive of the Persons of the Godhead as conferring with one another and reaching agreement by interchange of thought as humans do." [145]

The Basis of the New Story: Vain Imaginings

On this point and to Tozer's warning, we note Paul Young bases the origin of his religious allegory about suffering upon personal and private conversations ("notes" he received from God?) he had with God on his daily work-commute from Gresham to Portland, Oregon. In these conversations, Young like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah or Daniel assumes the role of a prophet. He forgets that God entrusted the Jews with His "oracles" (Romans 3:2). Nevertheless, *World* magazine reported that, "Young used 80 minutes each day . . . to fill yellow legal pads with imagined conversations with God focused on suffering, pain, and evil." [146] Some who knew Young believed his conversations with God were more authentic than imagined. But whether imagined, arising within, or authentic, coming from without, who really knows? Nevertheless, Young admits that *The Shack* is his theology about suffering wrapped in a story! [147] So there you have the new story: from God, to Young to his readers. Oh, really? But from whence did he derive his theology? One can only conclude that the story was sourced within himself and his imagined conversations with God, and that the explanation about suffering was his, not God's.

The Bible does have something to say about sourcing God's Word in human imagination, and it's not good, especially if the imaginings become a "makeover" for God which people in their

opinion think He needs and they believe. In his description of idolatry and after growing “unthankful,” the apostle Paul places “imagination” to be the next step into idolatry. He wrote that even though they knew God, the heathen “glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became *vain in their imaginations*, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Emphasis mine, Romans 1:21, KJV). The word “imagination” (Greek, *dialogismos*) literally means, “the thinking of a man deliberating with himself.” [148] Other versions translate imagination by “speculations” (NASB), “thinking” (NIV, NRSV), and “thoughts” (NKJV). *The New Living Translation* communicates:

Yes . . . they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused. (Romans 1:21, NLT)

Dial a god

Note: The Apostle states that idolatry germinates out of people imagining about God from within themselves. Like using our cell phones, we can simply “dial a god,” oh, and by the way, we can make up any number (mystical-spiritual discipline) we want to reach out and touch the immanent-one, whether God be he, she, her/him, it or whatever. Theology needs authority, and that authority Young finds within himself and his claimed conversations with God. This “authority” allows him to picture God however he wants. So to accommodate society's sensitivity to patriarchal and racial prejudice, Young ingratiates himself to readers by picturing the Father (i.e., “Papa”) as an androgynous large African woman all the while ignoring Jesus’ statement that “God is Spirit [He’s above and beyond race, ed.], and those who worship Him [Jesus patriarchally talked about, prayed and called God His Father, ed.] must worship in spirit and truth ” (John 4:24). In his “shack” (The book’s title represents the author’s parochial dig at buildings of organized churches.) Young neither worships God in Spirit nor truth, and admittedly, neither do many congregants who might worship in nice buildings. But does not such a caricature of God qualify as a fable?

To this point we can be informed that the word “fable” (Greek *mythos*) means myth and refers to “a purely fictitious narrative involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena.” [149] So in reality, Young’s story is a cleverly crafted and “cunningly devised fable,” a myth which reads into who God is and therefore either embellishes or contradicts God’s self-disclosure about who He is in Scripture (See 1 Timothy 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:4.). In evaluating Young’s book *Lies We Believe About God*, it has been demonstrated that the author portrays God to be whatever or whoever he needs, wants or imagines Him to be. This is idolatry, which is where the Apostle Paul moves next in his description.

Pagans turn from worshipping the Creator to worshipping creatures, including themselves. Claiming mystical enlightenment derived from inward deliberations—the unthankful source their understanding of God from what they imagine Him to be. They can’t leave God alone. They won’t let God be God. So they mess with Him, and

Their foolish hearts become darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools as they change the pristine glory of the uncorruptible God into idols made like

corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.
—My paraphrase, Romans 1:21b-23, KJV

In this “spiritual” exercise they think they’ve become enlightened, but the reality is that their prideful hearts become darkened. It can be noted that out of this spiritual chaos will emerge the end time world super-man, the Anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). **[150]**

Universalism: The Emerging Evangelical Metanarrative

In the staging process involving the idolatry of imaginations, as the Apostle Paul describes in Romans chapter 1:18-27, humans break with theism to embrace naturalism. Naturalism in turn gives birth to evolutionism. Evolutionism can lead to atheism, but more “naturally” it ends in pantheism, in nature worship, that God’s in everybody and everybody’s in God (i.e., monism). Teilhard de Chardin called this divinization of creation “pleromization” or as Young and Kruger conceptualize it, “trinitization.” But pantheism needs spirituality, and what can be more “spiritual” than communing with nature and the God within? So to get spiritual, the naturalist must move into mysticism, to seek out conversations with God. These mystical communications assure mystics of their *oneness* with nature (i.e., monism, all is one and one is all). So they meditate upon nature and it or spirits talk to them. There is no real separation between them, the rest of humanity and God—no separation in the past, no separation now, no separation after death. No separation from God ever and forever. God can’t separate himself from nature, including all humanity, because to do so would mean God would have to separate himself from himself, that being an impossibility because nature and God are “one.” So in the end the human heart must fixate upon pantheistic naturalism, in which universalism based on monism becomes the culminating belief. And if the popularity of the book and movie *The Shack* give any indication, universalism is now the emerging evangelical metanarrative!

Footnotes

[138] I should like to point out Peter's words, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” More sure than what? More sure than the testimony that he James and John heard when from heaven the voice of God said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” In other words, in Scripture God speaks to us in a voice as certain as when He authenticated His pleasure in His Son to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) and to the crowd at Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:21-22). In the prophecy of Scripture we have a “sure word” of God. The transcendent God of (not in) the universe speaks to us from heaven, all the while the precious Holy Spirit bearing witness to and personalizing the testimony He inspired to be written about the Lord Jesus. The Spirit brings the Word home to our hearts. As such, we don't need myths men invent for us about God, “cunningly devised fables” like *The Shack* (2 Peter 1:16).

[139] A metanarrative may be explained as, “an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.” (https://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4V ASV_enUS570US570&q=metanarrative+definition). Through Mack's experiences in life and

at *The Shack*, Wm. Paul Young gives just such an interpretation of and meaning to life.

[140] See Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001). Throughout the book McLaren declares the need for “new framing story.”

[141] David E. Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011): 190.

[142] Wm. Paul Young, “Foreword,” C. Baxter Kruger, Ph.D., *The Shack Revisited: There Is More Going On Here than You Ever Dared to Dream* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2012): xi.

[143] A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961): 30.

[144] Emphasis added, Susan Olasky, “Commuter-driven bestseller,” *World*, June 28/July 5, 2008, 49.

[145] Young, “Foreword,” *Shack Revisited*: xi.

[146] John Henry Thayer, “*dialogismos*,” *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975 Reprint): 139.

[147] Ronald Bridges and Luther A. Weigle, *The King James Word Book* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994): 127. *The Oxford English Dictionary* entry “myth” is quoted.

[148] Andrews, *Christianity and Anti-Christianity*: 264-283.