

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO 2012?

In August 14, 1968, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS)* titled their *WATCHTOWER* magazine article on page 494: “Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?” The article started off like this:

What about all this talk concerning the year 1975? Lively discussion, some based on speculation, have burst into flame during recent months among serious students of the Bible. Their interest has been kindled by the belief that 1975 will mark the end of 6,000 years of human history since Adam’s creation. The nearness of such an important date indeed fires the imagination and presents unlimited possibilities for discussion.¹

As it turned out, *all* of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW) discussion concerning 1975 was based on spectacularly flawed speculation by the “anointed” leadership in Brooklyn, NY. It turned out to be a life-changing wild-fire of false hopes for many individual JWs of that time. So certain that the end would come in October of 1975, many Jehovah’s Witnesses sold their homes, businesses, quit school, put off marriage and child bearing or needed medical and dental procedures to go into the door-to-door “ministry” full-time and maximize their proselytizing efforts in the few “**remaining years**” before the “end” would come. But the end did not come as prophesied, and the JWs put the best face they could on their disappointment and trudged on...

This was not the first time the WTBTS had predicted the end and put their followers in a bind. The Society has always used end-times prognostications as their main recruitment tool since their founding. Charles Taze Russell, their founder, predicted 1914 as the year when Christ would return and usher in the tribulation and millennial kingdom. As the time approached and his readers—known as “Bible Students” or “Russellites” in that era—asked if he would modify his claims, Russell confi-

By L.L. (Don) & Joy A. Veinot

dently asserted he couldn’t change them if he wanted to because they were “**God’s dates, not ours.**” (*Zion’s Watch Tower*, July 15, 1894, p. 1672, reprints) But, as the end stubbornly refused to materialize on God’s date, 1914, Russell ended up changing the divinely mandated dates to 1915 and then 1916. But dang, nothing happened then either... ☹ However, for Russell personally, the end did come in 1916. He passed away on a train on Halloween night in 1916.

His death did not signal the end of the date-setting game for the Russellites. The newly minted year for the end of everything in Russell’s posthumously published work—*The Finished Mystery*—was 1918; which, as you might have noticed, also came and went. The new president of the WTBTS, Judge Joseph Rutherford, then launched the “**Millions**” campaign in 1920 with the publication of his booklet *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, and the new date for the end was 1925. Most of those millions, of course, are now long-dead ... 1925 came and went—no end, no Armageddon—shoot! Later, Rutherford set other dates, thinking that WW2 would culminate in Armageddon. Rutherford died without seeing the end, then as earlier noted, 1975 came and

went. The entire history of the WTBTS is one of dashed hopes and Armageddon delayed.

Rallying followers around end-times predictions did not originate with Russell or later WTBTS leadership. Russell learned the date-setting game from the Second Adventists. His original partner in publishing *The Midnight Cry and Herald of Christ’s Presence* magazine was Adventist prognosticator Nelson Barbour. They borrowed their ideas and dates from earlier Adventists, who received their inspiration from the end-times ruminations of Baptist pastor William Miller who had predicted

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the end for 1844 and then 1845. The failure of 1844 and 1845 to produce Armageddon was called "**the Great Disappointment**" and many of the greatly disappointed went on from there to greatly disappoint others. ☺ One of those greatly disappointed by Millerism was Ellen G. White (then Ellen Harmon), who was the founding prophetess of Seventh Day Adventism. She claimed that God revealed to her that Miller's dates were correct, but the event was wrong. Uh-huh ... Christ's return to earth was not a literal, but rather, a spiritual event. Christ returned to "**cleanse the temple**" (E.G. White *1888 Materials*, 725, 726) and then "**the door was shut**" (E. G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. IV, 268) to any who were not already believers. Of course, no one *SAW* it happen because it was a "spiritual" return... Wink, wink...

So far, we have enumerated the prophetic date setting of cults such as the JW's and the Adventists. Cult leaders tend to claim they are prophets of God—speaking God's own word to the people. Therefore, the dates they set are seen—not as mere speculation based upon human interpretation of prophetic Scriptures—but rather, as Russell openly admitted: "**God's dates.**" This puts them on very dangerous ground. It likely will make you look foolish, but it is not a capital crime to assert that *you think* the end of the world is going to happen March 25th or some other favorite date of your choosing. Supposing, guessing, and/or speculating about the future does not a false prophet make. A false prophet, though, says that *God told him* (or speaks through him) that such and such is going to happen on a certain date, drawing followers to himself, and making *God* look foolish or a liar when his or her prophecy fails. The Bible is clear that to claim prophet status—to say you are literally speaking for God—is a very solemn assertion indeed. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 tells us that if you prophesy in the name of God, and your prophecy does not come true, you are a false prophet. Most cult leaders easily fit into this category. In Old Testament times under the law, you would have been stoned to death.

However, Christians, particularly Dispensational Christians—who believe the events of the book of Revelation, along with many other Biblical prophecies, have yet to be fulfilled—are not immune from end-times mania either, even though they generally avoid claiming prophet status.² For one example, there was great excitement by some Evangelical Dispensationalists in anticipation of 1988. That time period signified a generation (40 years) from when Israel was again founded as a nation in their promised land. As the date approached, many who had not attended church in years were suddenly streaming back in due to a little booklet which came out in the spring of 1988:

Beginning in the early Spring of 1988, a 56-page booklet entitled, 88 REASONS Why The Rapture Will Be In 1988 began to be mass-distributed across America. The basic premise of the book was that between the dates of September 11 and 13, 1988, the Rapture of the Christian Church would occur (p. 34).

Aside from this auspicious prediction, Edgar C. Whisenant, author of the book, went on to make such august prognostications as the beginning of World War III "at sunset 3 October" 1988 (p. 36).³

When nothing happened in 1988, Whisenant (former NASA engineer and Bible student) made some modifications, and he came out with the 89 reasons why it would be 1989. If you were around, you know the Rapture did not happen in 1988 or 1989. Presumably, many were disappointed by this non-happening. Whisenant faded into relative obscurity and died in 2001.

Y2K Mania

Many of our readers surely remember the Y2K hype of 1999. Many people—Christians as well as non-Christians—were in a veritable panic that the world's computers and electronic devices would shut down at the tick of the clock from 12:00 midnight to 12:01AM on January 1, 2000. Michael Hyatt, vice president of Thomas Nelson Publishers, reaped great financial rewards selling his books, survival kits, and other paraphernalia to equip Christians for survival when the world would be plunged into darkness. Early in 1999, we wrote an *MCOI Journal* article titled "Y2K – Genuine Crisis or Over-Hyped Circus?" (See *MCOI Journal* vol. 5, no. 2.) Ministry support dropped somewhat, and some readers responded with notes like, "Don't you believe the Bible?" Prophecy programs and prophecy conferences pointed to the turn of the calendar as the time when the events of the Book of Revelation would kick into gear. Some, such as Christian author

Dave Hunt, tried to bring some sanity to the discussion, but others were busy selling videos, cassettes, books, and survival gear.

However, when the clock rolled over to the year 2000, nothing of note occurred. It is not entirely clear whether this outcome could be called a great disappointment or a great relief, as the world rolled on and our hair dryers still worked.

There are many more examples of prophetic speculation disappointments over the years, and these disappointments have brought Bible prophecy into some measure of disrepute, and even open derision.

What About 2012?

Recently the *Los Angeles Times* carried the short piece, "Countdown to 2012: End of the Maya calendar?"⁴ by Deborah Bonello. Her opening paragraph is:

Fueled by a crop of books, Websites with countdown clocks, and claims about ancient timekeepers, interest is growing in what some see as the dawn of a new era, and others as an expiration date for Earth: Dec. 21, 2012, reports CNN.⁵

She continues:

The date marks the end of a 5,126-year cycle on the Long Count calendar developed by the Maya, the ancient civilization known for its advanced understanding of astronomy and for the great cities it left behind in Mexico and Central America.⁶

The speculation on why the Mayan calendar ended in December of 2012 has given rise to web-sites, survival guides, books, and even an upcoming film.

On November 3, 2008, the *Los Angeles Times* carried the story: "Many gather to ponder end of Maya days"⁷:

Hundreds of people gathered near the Golden Gate Bridge over the weekend to ponder the enigmatic date of Dec. 21, 2012, the last day of the ancient Maya calendar and the focus of many end-of-the-world predictions.

In these times of economic distress, participants shelled out \$300 each to attend the sold-out 2012 Conference, where astrologers, UFO fans, shamans and New Age entrepreneurs of every stripe presented their dreams and dreads in two days of lectures, group meditations, documentaries and, of course, self-promotion.⁸

Books—with titles such as *The Mystery of 2012: Predictions, Prophecies and Possibilities* by Gregg Braden; *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl* by Daniel Pinchbeck; *Apocalypse 2012: An Investigation into Civilization's End* by Lawrence E. Joseph; *The Complete Idiot's Guide to 2012* by Synthia Andrews and Colin Andrews; and *2012* by New Ager and promoter of aliens living among us, Whitley Strieber—are selling well. Not to leave all of the financial gain to authors and publishing companies, Hollywood has jumped in with:

"2012," a special-effects flick starring John Cusack and directed by Roland Emmerich, of "The Day After Tomorrow" fame, is scheduled to be released this fall. The trailer shows a monk running to a bell tower on a mountaintop to sound the alarm as a huge wall of water washes over what appear to be the peaks of the Himalayas.⁹

It is hard to imagine that Christians will jump on the 2012 bandwagon in great numbers; however, the date has excited the interest of one of our more dubious Dispensational end-times teachers, Jack Van Impe. Van Impe's latest DVD *Not End of World, but Rapture in 2012?* is certainly meant to capitalize on the popular hype:

Multiplied seers, prognosticators, and self-proclaimed prophets covering 2,020 years of history all predicted the identical date for the world's demise! This information was presented on television's "History Channel" ... and the date they predicted for the "end of the world" is December 21, 2012. As soon as I got a video transmission of the program, I studied and dissected the prophecies hours on end ... and was startled. I also noticed that the same spokesman for the world's end on December 21, 2012, also presented the signs occurring on earth and space preceding this mysterious date.

Rexella and I immediately made a video on this subject, dealing with every sign the History Channel handled from these multiplied prognosticators. I was amazed and stunned to see how many of these signs they proclaimed for 2,020 years were, and are, the identical ones I've taught for years ... I want you to know: the world will not end in 2012 because the Scriptures clearly show that the world will never end. But could 2012 mark the time we have been longing

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HAVE NOTHING
TO DO WITH THE
FRUITLESS DEEDS
OF DARKNESS, BUT
RATHER EXPOSE
THEM.

~EPHESIANS 5:11~



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for—the Rapture as revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52?”

We don’t know squat about what may or may not happen in 2012, but we must point out we doubt Jack Van Impe does either. We recall that Van Impe was very caught up in the Y2K hoopla, and he has been making other wildly speculative prognostications that never have come to fruition for as long as we can remember. And we don’t think Hollywood, New Age writers, or bloodthirsty pagan Mayans hold the keys to the future either.

Why Are End-Times Scenarios So Popular?

Life is difficult and many people—Christians and non-Christians alike—look for relief and deliverance from life’s day-to-day hardships. Thinking and talking about the future, even a possibly dark one, can be a welcome distraction from the present. There is also something we might call the “amusement park” syndrome (inventing new syndromes is always fun). People go to amusement parks to enjoy thrill rides. The rides are designed to make you feel like you are in danger, while you fully know deep down that you are not. End-times scenarios are much like that. It is fun trying to figure out the “when” and “how bad” the end times will be in the safety of our homes and among our friends who enjoy the same past time. I’m going to admit I enjoy watching Discovery channel “documentaries” depicting killer asteroids bearing down upon earth, killer tsunamis that may (any day now!) wipe out the northwest United States, or horrendous plagues on the horizon that may decimate humanity. Why? I don’t know, I must be sick, or twisted ... likely both! But I, like many human beings, enjoy drama and vicarious danger. Real danger, however, sends me right under the bed!

Should Christians Just Ignore Bible Prophecy?

In light of the many speculative errors and downright embarrassments caused by these speculative errors, many have concluded that Bible prophecy should be avoided at all costs. It is obvious, or should be by now, that *no one* knows *when* future prophetic events—such as the Lord’s Return or the various judgments of the Tribulation period—will be fulfilled. Of course, that is exactly what the Bible actually *says*—that no one knows the day or the hour of end days fulfillment—but that passage (Matt. 24:36) has obviously been largely ignored. Not only can we not know *when* these things will happen, but we do not know exactly *how* many of these events will play out. Prophecy experts disagree significantly in their interpretations of prophetic Scriptures. The Bible just isn’t clear as we might like about the order of events, or the identity of the players. So what is a Christian to do? Many Christians have decided just to ignore the entire end-times issue and proceed as if such Scriptures simply are not in the Bible at all. Why waste time thinking about or risk looking like a nut talking about scary events that may not occur in our lifetimes? Let’s face it: The Bible paints a bleak picture of the future time known as the Tribulation. Do we really want to dwell on such a negative topic? And do we want to be lumped together with people who are widely and justifiably ridiculed over wildly speculative end-times predictions that did not come to pass as they had forecast?

And yet ... if we are not to study Revelation and Daniel, for two examples, and try to discern their meaning, why did God put them in the Bible?

Only God Knows The Future

Yes, God is the only One Who knows what the future holds, and that is exactly the reason why Bible prophecy is truly important. The fact that God foretells the future in the Bible is a major proof of His existence, and a major proof that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. Isaiah 44:6-7 states:

This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come. (NIV)

Pagan Mayans, Nostradamus, or any other false god or supposed “oracle” cannot foretell the future—only the true God can do that. And He proceeds to do just that throughout the many prophetic passages in the Bible. The Birth, Death and myriad details about the First Coming of Christ were forecast and came to pass, *exactly* as foretold. This is reason enough to believe the Bible in its predictions concerning the Second Coming of Christ as well.

Jesus also showed Himself to be God by the fact that He had God’s ability to foretell the future. After predicting to His disciples who of them would betray Him, Jesus said:

I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am He. (John 13:19, NIV)

The betrayal happened just as foretold, which again means we can believe what he foretold about his Second Coming and the dark events that will lead up to His return. In Matthew 24, Jesus details for us and His disciples that there will occur wars and famines and apostasy and earthquakes and betrayal and false prophets and deceivers and stars falling and sun darkening and fleeing to the mountains ... these are not pleasant events, friends! And He says, “*See I have told you ahead of time*” (Matt. 24:25). Jesus did not shrink back from giving this prophecy, no matter the negative and fearsome nature of his forecast. Wasn’t he worried about looking like a kook? It seems not... If Jesus told us these things, isn’t it a good idea for us to be aware and awake? Now admittedly, wars and earthquakes and famines have been occurring in all the centuries since Jesus spoke these words; and indeed, He says of these signs that we should see to it that we are not alarmed, because “*these things must happen, but that is not yet the end...all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs” (Matthew 24:6-8, NASB, emphasis ours).*

However, if you are alive when the day comes that stars are falling and the sun darkens, that would be a good clue that the birth pangs are advanced, the “baby” is crowning, and the end is *really* near.

Jesus went on to encourage His disciples to “*learn the parable of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door*” (Matthew 24:32-33, NASB).

This says in no uncertain terms that we are to be aware of the state of the fig tree and recognize the signs of the times.

Israel The Eye Of The Storm

We are not prophecy experts, but it seems to us that Israel is the “fig tree”—the key to future events. In the Bible, God foretold that His people, Israel, would be uprooted from their land and scattered among the nations for their disobedience and, fi-

nally, for their rejection of their Messiah. This, indeed, came to pass in 70 AD, and Jesus addressed this future diaspora in Matthew 24 when He prophesied that the magnificent Jewish temple would be destroyed with **“not one stone left upon another which will not be torn down”** (Matt. 24:2, NASB). Jesus did not deliver this bad news happily; indeed, He mourned the fate of Jerusalem and her children:

Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you. How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling. Behold, your house is left to you desolate! For I say unto you, from now on you shall not see me until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Matthew 23:37-39, NASB)

Notice that Jesus did not say that they would *never* see Him again, but only *until* they were willing to welcome Him there. God is certainly not done with His people Israel. In fact, the Bible clearly says that in the last days, Israel would be regathered into its ancient land, and that God will deal with His people, whom He loves, and the unbelieving world there:

For behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah, says the LORD. And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. (Jer. 30:3, NKJV)

... Hear the word of the LORD, O Nations, And declare it in the isles afar off and say, He who scattered Israel will gather her. (Jer. 31:10, NKJV)

Israel, of course, was regathered into her longed-for ancient homeland in 1948. What an amazing fulfillment of God’s Word! There are many more passages in the Bible outlining the scattering and regathering of Israel; for brevity’s sake, we have included only a few. It is hard to see how people could read these Scriptures and not be absolutely astounded at the God of the Bible Who predicted these events so many centuries past. But it seems that the Mayans have more credibility in our world today than does the God of true miracles.

The Bible goes on to foretell that the nations surrounding Israel would be very angry at her presence back in the land and seek to destroy her:

For behold, Your enemies make a tumult, And those who hate you have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel, against Your people, And consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, Come, let us cut them off from being a nation, That the name of Israel shall be remembered no more ... let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for an inheritance. (Psalm 83:2-4 & 12, NKJV)

Eventually, not just the surrounding countries, but the whole world, will be against Israel. She will stand all alone. God Himself will defend and save her, which will open the eyes of the Jewish people to recognize her Messiah, Whom she had rejected centuries past:

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding people’s reeling ... on that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves ... on that day, I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack

Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me Whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zech. 12:2, 3, 9-10, NIV)

These events will climax with the return of Christ to earth, to the Mount of Olives:

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west. (Zech. 14:2, 3, NIV)

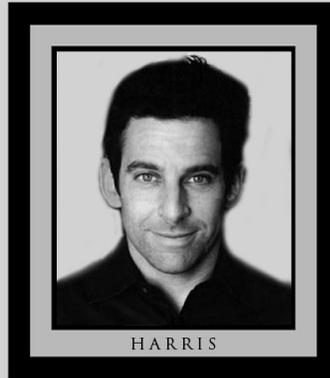
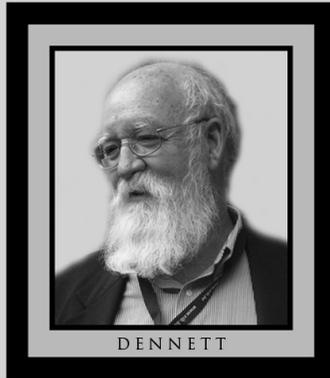
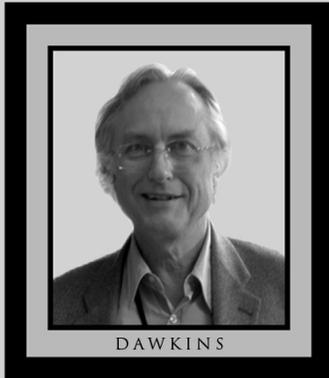
Can you not see this happening? The whole world is turning against Israel just as the Bible foretold would happen. Israel increasingly stands alone—even as she desperately tries to avoid war and to gain acceptance by the world. This is not going to succeed. Anti-Semitism is greatly on the rise in Europe as Europe becomes more and more Islamized, with Israel’s desire to defend herself and remaining an identifiably Jewish country being labeled as “racism.” American liberals, even significant numbers of Jewish leftists, have in the past few years turned against the state of Israel and are more and more sympathetic to Israel’s adversaries.

Jamie Glazov (managing editor of *Frontpage Magazine*), writing in the online magazine, *World Net Daily*, asks the obvious question:

Why so many left-leaning Jews in the West make excuses for—and even support—regimes and ideologies that seek to annihilate Jews. We just witnessed how the Left rushed to the defense of Hamas in Gaza while Israel took action so that Palestinian rocket fire would stop terrorizing and killing Israeli civilians. This leftist behavior was, of course, a continuation of events in the summer of 2006, when the Left rushed to the defense of Hamas and Hezbollah after Israel went into Gaza and Lebanon to try to counter terrorism. During that time, American academia spearheaded the anti-Israel movement. One thousand leftist professors signed a petition that denounced Israel for its “brutal bombing and invasion of Gaza” and its “acts of Israeli state terrorism” in Lebanon. There was, typically, no denunciation of Hamas or Hezbollah in that petition, only a call for the immediate release of jailed terrorists (whom the petition described as “Palestinian and Lebanese political prisoners”) and a condemnation of “Israel’s destructive and expansionist policies,” which the petition said were “primarily to blame for the seemingly perpetual ‘Middle East crisis.’” Three of the most prominent signatories of this Jew-hating petition were themselves of Jewish ancestry: leftist guru Noam Chomsky, Holocaust denier Norman Finkelstein, and terror-apologist Joel Beinin. Why would certain Jews engage in behavior that strengthened the forces that seek to annihilate them? The answer is what “United in Hate” explains: These leftist Jews perfectly represent the self-hate and instinct for death in which the Left’s overall solidarity with totalitarianism is rooted.¹⁰

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The New (Emergent) Atheists



By Mariano Grinbank

Have you heard the saying, “If it’s true, it’s not new; and if it’s new, it’s not true?” Well, the “New Atheists” fit the bill—they are not new, and they are not representing what is true.

“New Atheists” is a pop-culture and media term for a group generally represented by four celebrity Atheists: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens. While there are many popular Atheists, these four are the leaders of the New Atheist movement. A videotaped conversation that took place between the four is sold under the title: *The Four Horsemen*.¹

But who are they? What are their claims? What is their appeal? What is the New Atheist movement? These are some of the questions I seek to answer in this article.

Who Are The New Atheists?

For our purposes, let us note the following succinct biographical information:

Richard Dawkins is the recently retired *Charles Simonyi, Professor of the Public Understanding of Science*, a chair held at Oxford University. He is a biologist and zoologist by training and has been praised for his ability to elucidate biological functions. His books include: *The Selfish Gene* (1976); *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986); *Unweaving the Rainbow* (1998); *A Devil’s Chaplain* (2003); and *The God Delusion* (2006). It is important to keep in mind that even whilst elucidating biology, Dawkins is presenting observations of the natural world mixed with his particular Atheistic world view.

He claims it is almost certain (99% to be exact) that there is no God. (Although, when Ben Stein asked him, “How do you know?” Dawkins admitted he had no reason for the quantification.²) Having been raised an Anglican, he experienced doubts upon learning of the various religions at the age of nine. At 16, he was taught Darwinism and believed it could do the job of explaining life, and thus, warding off God into the realm of delusion.

Daniel Dennett is the University Professor, Austin B. Fletcher, Professor of Philosophy and Co-Director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University. His books include: *Consciousness Explained* (1991); *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (1995); *Freedom Evolves* (2003); and *Breaking the Spell: Re-*

ligion as a Natural Phenomenon (2006). As with Dawkins, Dennett’s craft/philosophy is biased towards Atheism.

Sam Harris is a graduate in philosophy from Stanford University and is studying towards a doctorate in neuroscience. His books are: *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2004); and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006). Harris spent many years traveling the globe in search of spiritual experiences which included the consumption of various hallucinogenic drugs. He does not like the term *Atheist*, because we do not have terms such as *non-astrologer*.³ He has stated that he had a “**very secular upbringing**.”⁴

Christopher Hitchens is an author, journalist, literary critic and political observer. He received his education at The Leys School, Cambridge and Balliol College, Oxford receiving a third-class degree. He is praised for his literary output and style. His books include: *Karl Marx and the Paris Commune* (1971); *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (1995); *No One Left to Lie To: The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton* (1999); *Letters to a Young Contrarian* (2001); and *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007).

Hitchens wrote:

My parents did not try to impose religion: I was probably fortunate in having a father who had not especially loved his strict Baptist/Calvinist up-bringing, and a mother who preferred assimilation—partly for my sake—to the Judaism of her forebears.⁵

He refers to himself as an “anti-theist.” This is God in the hands of an angry sinner.

What Are Their Claims?

With regard to their claims, we must note that while they are individuals, they do have much in common.

We must begin by considering what Atheism is and to what beliefs an Atheist holds. *Atheism* is a word derived from two Greek terms *a* and *theos*. A word derives its meaning from its roots, its contemporary usage and the context in which it is found. Thus, *Atheism* is defined as *lack of God belief, negation of God, no God*, etc. The New Atheists prefer the “*lack of God belief*” interpretation. Note that “*lack of God belief*” or even “I don’t believe in God” are not statements about God’s existence; one can have a “lack of belief”—or not believe—in something that actually does exist.

According to their preferred definition, Atheism is not a belief, philosophy, world view or anything, but rather, it is a *lack of belief in God* or, as they term it, a “lack of belief in god(s).” Moreover, *Atheism* is a broad term that can range from whether the individual Atheist actually believes God does not exist (which is generally known as *strong, positive, explicit* or *critical Atheism*) to merely claiming to lack belief in God (which is generally known as *weak, negative* or *implicit Atheism*).

Furthermore, Atheists refer to themselves by various terms such as *anti-theist, non-theist*, and they have other terms which denote their particular emphasis or social-like, activist group such as *naturalist, materialist, rationalist, skeptic, Bright, Free-thinker, Humanist*, etc.

The New Atheists adhere to a sect of Atheism that does not positively assert God’s non-existence—that is to say, they would not claim to know that God does not exist. They are, in reality, Agnostics: this is another Greek-based “a” word, one followed by “*gnosis*” meaning *lack of knowledge* or *no knowledge*, from which we get the term, as it came to us from Latin, “*ignorant*.”

Their book titles reveal quite a bit: God is not great since God is a delusory, naturally occurring phenomenon whose adherents poison everything by engaging in malevolence. God is viewed as a psychological reaction to ignorance and superstition spiked with fear of the unknown.

They also assert that people invent the idea of God as a protective father figure. In light of this, it is interesting to note that Professor Emeritus of Psychology Paul Vitz (New York University) has studied the life of various prominent Atheists and turns the table by pointing out that their rebellion against God stemmed from their rebellion against their abusive, absentee, or aloof fathers.⁶

They claim that scientific advancements and reason have done away with the need to believe in the supernatural; and that religion is growing ever-more dangerous as fanatics can obtain powerful weapons.

What Is Their Appeal?

Their appeal is at least two-pronged: One is their self-professed appeal, and the other is the facts of the matter (from a Christian perspective).

Their self-professed appeal is stated by Dawkins as “**intellectually fulfilled Atheist**.”⁷ Atheism promises enlightenment—in the forms of scientific literacy, rationality, happiness, morality—and freedom from guilt, superstition and adherence to dogma.

Another aspect not generally identified as an appeal, but one that is milked for all it is worth, is the image of the Atheist as the “underdog.” Even in a time such as this—when being an Atheist is about the hippest thing to do, and there are quite a few shekels to be made from books, lectures, and even movies about Atheism—this New Atheist still will claim to be a second class citizen—he is the underdog who is not under God. (This pun makes sense if you are dyslexic as I am.)

Having mused and researched on this subject, I have found that being “**an intellectually fulfilled Atheist**” means that fulfillment is found in materialistic stories about how things may have or could have (or *should have*?) occurred: For example, how the universe came about and functions on purely materialistic grounds.

The New Atheist movement is particularly popular among the youth. Popular are Atheist activists such as *The Golden Compass* author Philip Pullman who stated that his children’s books

are about “**killing God**,” and he is “**trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief**.” He has also produced a pro-Atheism DVD for “**children that are 11 years old and above**.”⁸ Dawkins has launched the “**Out Campaign**” aimed at the college crowd. The youth are naturally rebellious and the New Atheists come along, wealthy, happy, vociferous, erudite, iconoclastic and urge them to commit the ultimate rebellion: Rebellion against God. The youth are being told they basically can do as they please within certain vague notions of “right” and “wrong.” The youth confuse rebellion against religious authority with rebellion against God.

Atheism is an appealing, consoling delusion which includes the delusion of absolute autonomy, the delusion of lack of ultimate accountability, the consoling delusion of subjective meaning in an objectively meaningless existence, and the delusion of being more erudite than thou. (Atheists are the smartest, they are “right” and everyone else is “wrong.”)

What Is The New Atheist Movement?

My title referred to the “New (Emergent) Atheist” movement (hereinafter NEAM) in order to draw a correlation between the “Emergent Church” movement and the NEAM. The Emergent Church movement is about popularization, broad appeal, and watering down orthodox doctrines until they are malleable enough to become harmless and friendly.

Likewise, the NEAM is about broad appeal, but it is of a baser sort. It is pushing a septic skeptic outlook. This movement is very good at media campaigns, that is certain; they have erected a façade of scientific and intellectual respectability around poor arguments, faulty logic, bad philosophy and have also turned science into a play thing to be bent in the direction the Atheist wants it to go.⁹

For example, while Harris will soon be a scientist, he will by no means represent the integrity of an unbiased researcher. When asked, “**What do you believe is true even though you cannot prove it?**” he stated:

Once the neurology of belief becomes clear ... religious faith will be exposed for what it is: a humble species of terrestrial credulity.¹⁰

In other words, he already believes something and is becoming a scientist in order to build a façade of “science” around his Atheistic beliefs.

In reality, the movement is about being vociferous, emotive, and disrespectful.

At first consideration, I thought that these various scientists and professors were vociferous, emotive and disrespectful, because theists were beneath their contempt, and they could not bother with those foolish mental children. Yet, I have come to find that they are vociferous, emotive, and disrespectful because they do not have much more with which to work.

Being vociferous draws attention to you, makes you look heroic, authoritative, and self-assured. Being emotive (making emotionally charged statements) is a great tool, since you can cut right through any thought process and touch people’s feelings which builds a connection to the speaker. Emotiveness is a way to skirt around arguments. Also, who can argue against adrenaline-spiked feelings: feelings are tangible while ideas, thoughts, arguments are ethereal. Being disrespectful is a very attractive quality, particularly for someone with a rebellious bent or some-

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“New Atheist” Continued from page 7

one who has a dislike for, and a feeling of impotence against, religious authority and the demands of dogma.

The Atheist Michael Shermer, while certainly not being diplomatic himself, has written an open letter to the top four celebrity Atheists asking that they curb their intolerant rants. However, he has gone unheeded.¹¹

Certainly, the NEAM has its moments of clarity in that adherents do make attempts at argumentation or rightly criticize fallacious theology as well as religious oppression. Yet, they do tend to replace rational discourse—whereby we treat our opponent’s positions fairly—with taking jabs at straw-men (misrepresenting a position in order to make it look foolish and easy-to-tear-down). Why focus your attention on serious, dry, scholarly debates and lectures when you can elbow your buddy in the ribs and say, “Those religious people are so silly!”

The NEAM is also peppered with immaturity. This is caused by at least three factors:

- 1) As alluded to previously, it is easier and more amusing (another “a” word) to poke fun than it is to exercise the intellect.
- 2) Many Atheists rejected God (in particular, rejected whatever “Christianity” means to them) at a very early age.
- 3) The result of 2) is that they allowed their knowledge of the Bible, theology, Christianity, etc. to remain stagnant at a child’s level. This child-level understanding undergirds their claim to knowledge, thus we hear familiar rebuttals: Since ... “I was raised Christian,” “I went to Sunday School,” “I was an altar boy,” etc.

Thus, I have found it all too common that Atheists argue not against the actual contents of the Bible—again, the actual character of God, the actual doctrines of Christianity—but they argue against watered-down, straw-men which are childish versions of the genuine things. Thus, in the end, they actually succeed in arguing against their very own caricatures.

It is also common to find the NEAM correlating belief in the God of the Bible to belief in “a sky daddy,” “an imaginary friend,” “fairies,” “super friends,” “magic powers” and even “Invisible Pink Unicorns,” “Flying Spaghetti Monsters.” As Harris puts it:

... beliefs about God ... are the same as beliefs about numbers, penguins, tofu, or anything else.¹²

Yet, these are perfectly legitimate correlations in their minds not only because they are generally functioning on a child’s Sunday school level, but also because they disregard natural theology.¹³

They also attempt to rewrite history as a tale of Atheistic benevolence and religious malevolence. This is expressed by perpetuating the myths of warfare between “science and religion,” declaring that America’s founders were Deists (at best), and claiming there is no relation between Atheism and Communism, etc.¹⁴

Let us note two further aspects of the NEAM:

- 1) Their desire to establish an Atheist religion.¹⁵
- 2) Their condemnation of “child abuse” (as they have redefined it, which subsequently will be discussed.)¹⁶

They desire to establish an Atheist religion and promote Atheism as being more holy and more moral than Christianity.

Following on the steps of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778, who conceived of a civil religion) and Auguste Comte (1798-1857, who conceived of a religion of humanity), the

NEAM tear down Christianity and seek to build their church in the rubble.

Dennett stated:

... there could be a rational religion.¹⁷

Harris elucidates:

There would be a religion of reason ... We would be able to invoke the power of poetry and ritual and silent contemplation and all the variables of happiness so that we could exploit them. Call it prayer, but we would have prayer without bull** ... At some point, there is going to be enough pressure that it is just going to be too embarrassing to believe in God.¹⁸ [expletive removed]**

Dan Barker (of the *Freedom From Religion Foundation*) declared:

Darwin has bequeathed what is good ... abortion is a blessing.¹⁹

He also stated:

Atheism and Freethought and true humanistic morality are, are so much more clear, so much more useful, so much more reasonable...Atheists and agnostics are more accountable they are more moral ... true humanistic morality which is much superior to Christian morality.²⁰

Michael Martin (atheist philosopher and professor emeritus at Boston University) stated:

I’m nicer than God ... Atheism is so special. So life affirming. So, so superior morally to the Christian system. So more respectful of human dignity and, and human intelligence.²¹

Michael Shermer, stated that his study of evolution was:

... far more enlightening and transcendent, spiritual, than anything I had experienced in seven years of being a born-again Christian.²²

He also made reference to, “the spiritual side of science” which he referred to “sciensuality.”²³

Dawkins stated:

... you and I probably do have ... feelings that may very well be akin to a kind of mystical wonder when we contemplate the stars, when we contemplate the galaxies, when we contemplate life, the sheer expanse of geological time. I experience, and I expect you experience, internal feelings which sound pretty much like um, what mystics feel, and they call it God....contemplating mitochondria is actually much grander than anything that you will get by contemplating the traditional objects of religious mysticism.²⁴

He also stated:

... science does have some of religion’s virtues ... almost worship ... beyond the wildest dreams of saints and mystics ... far outclasses any of the ... world’s religions ... The universe at large couldn’t possibly be anything other than indifferent to Christ, his birth, his passion, and his death.²⁵

These are fulfillments of Romans 1:18-23, 25:

... men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Profess-

ing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man...who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (NKJV)

By the term *child abuse*, the NEAM mean *teaching your children your faith*. They consider this worse than physical abuse. They not only condemn this but seek to dictate childrearing.

Dennett wrote:

... many declare, there is the sacred and inviolable right of life ... On the other hand, many of the same people declare that, once born, the child loses its right not to be indoctrinated or brainwashed or otherwise psychologically abused by those parents.²⁶

Dawkins stated:

It's one thing to say people should be free to believe whatever they like, but should they be free to impose their beliefs on their children? Is there something to be said for society stepping in?²⁷

Also:

A phrase like "Catholic child" or "Muslim child" should clang furious bells of protest in the mind ... Catholic child? Flinch. Protestant child? Squirm. Muslim child? Shudder.

The ultimate goal (besides "**society stepping in**" *shudder*) is that this, "**might lead children to choose no religion at all.**"²⁸

They seem to overlook the fact that children sometimes are referred to in such a way due to *cultural* and/or *social* considerations and not theological. For instance, Judaism has a Bar/Bat Mitzvah when a child becomes a willing/thinking adult and decides to make a commitment to the faith. Likewise, various forms of Christianity have confirmation.

Is The New Atheist Movement Dead?

The NEAM have expressed that the proverbial straw-that-broke-the-Atheist-camel's-back was the group of attacks on the United States of America on September 11, 2001. That is not to say that some of them were not Atheist activists before then, but 9/11 fanned the flames of their activism.

The attacks on 9/11 were primarily caused by Islamic extremism (with a long list of other causes such as maintenance or gaining of power, territory, etc.). The question is: What have the NEAM done in response to this particular event, this particular threat? Surely, they would focus their efforts primarily, if not exclusively, upon confronting this threat, this cause, head on.

Yet, what have they done? What they have done makes one wonder if their appeal to 9/11 is a *reason* or an *excuse*. After all, why 9/11? Are they not aware of similar atrocities throughout history? Are they not aware of the recent chronicles of the most *secular* century in human history also being the bloodiest—with millions upon millions being murdered not only during war, but also by their own rulers?

Have any of the NEAM toured Islamic countries giving lectures in which they condemn Allah, Muhammad, Islam, or Muslims? Have any of them debated Muslims in Islamic countries? Have any of them been interviewed on Al Jazeera (Arabic news network)? Have any of them written entire books in which they condemn Allah, Muhammad, Islam, or Muslims? Have they done anything of the sort at all?

The answers to all of the above are: "No." Rather, what they have done is sit within the comfort and safety of countries based on Christian principles and conveniently launched condemnations which are roughly quantifiable as being 90% anti-Christian and 10% anti-other religions.

Dawkins wrote:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.²⁹

However, has Dawkins dared to make this declaration replacing his statement: "**The God of the Old Testament**" with "The God of the Qur'an"? Has he toured Islamic countries proudly promulgating such sentiments? No.³⁰

There are at least two aspects to answer the question as to "Why?"

- First, in their eyes, 9/11 was caused by "religion" in general—Islamic extremism being a mere side effect of the main problem.
- Second, and more importantly, Sam Harris had a stroke of genius in laying the blame for religious extremism on religious moderates. He reasoned it was the tolerance of the moderates that eventually led to unrestrained extremism. This was brilliant because it allowed the NEAM to excuse themselves from taking on the *real* danger which they should be tackling; and instead, they could focus on what they could not declare to be the true evil of our world: Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, the Bishop of Canterbury, the Pope, et al. They could take aim at easy or otherwise mostly—if not altogether—harmless targets, while hiding from the *real* dangers of the world and at the same time paint themselves as courageous crusaders!

Dawkins also wrote:

In illustration of the dark side of absolutism, I mentioned the Christians in America who blow up abortion clinics, and the Taliban of Afghanistan, whose list of cruelties, especially to women, I find too painful to recount.³¹

Conveniently, Dawkin's pain allows him to completely fail to recount the atrocities of Islamic extremists and allows him to focus on the *most preposterous examples* of actions carried out by so-called "Christians."

Thus, we ask: Is the New Atheist Movement dead?

Atheists generally claim that "atheism" cannot be blamed for any malevolence, since it is merely a "*lack of God belief.*" And so similarly, we may argue that "theism" cannot be blamed for any malevolence, since it is merely an "*existence of God belief.*" Moreover, "religion" cannot be blamed for any malevolence, since it is merely a "*systematization of worship of God.*"

The point: Atheists claim that since Atheism does not imply anything in particular beyond "*lack of God belief,*" it cannot motivate anyone toward anything. It is individual Atheists who go from "*lack of God belief*" to building their particular world views who may act malevolently.

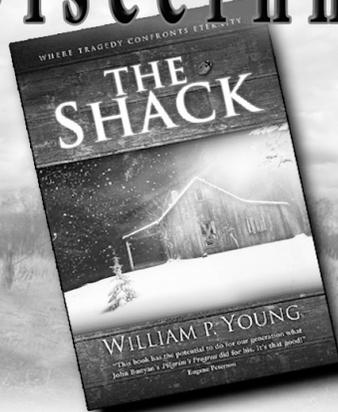
And so correspondingly, since theism does not imply anything in particular beyond an "*existence of God belief,*" it cannot motivate anyone toward anything. Furthermore, since religion does not imply anything in particular beyond a "*systematization*"

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Book Review:

Discernment and *THE SHACK*

By Gino Geraci



The Shack has generated countless comments, endless reviews, and more criticism than a presidential candidate.

Long ago in his book *A Call to Discernment*, Dr. Jay Adams noted Christian apologist and pioneer biblical counselor, used a brilliant illustration from conservative political philosopher William F. Buckley's book *The Jeweler's Eye*:

The title is, of course, a calculated effrontery, the relic of an impromptu answer I gave once to a tenacious young interviewer who, toward the end of a very long session, asked me what opinion did I have of myself. I replied that I thought of myself as a perfectly average middle-aged American, with however, a jeweler's eye for political truths ... The jeweler knows value; that is his trade.¹

Dr. Adams rightly pointed out that Buckley was speaking of discernment. The jeweler rightly distinguishes a common stone from a precious gem, the right mineral from the matrix and mineral, the flawed from the truly valuable. The jeweler looks at the stone and asks the questions: "What is this?" "Is it valuable?" "How can it be cut in such a way to enhance beauty and create value?" Individuals in discernment ministry—people with a jeweler's eye for historical biblical Christianity and theological truth—have stared long and hard into the rough crystal people call *The Shack*, by William P. Young. It looks like a diamond, but it is not; it is common quartz crystal filled with inclusions and cracks that mar whatever value it may even have had as costume jewelry.

I am an average Christian with a jeweler's eye for biblical truth. An interesting crystal may fool a child, but it will not fool a person who handles precious stones for a living. There is a large dark spot in Young's work of fiction; a crack runs through it; a flaw so profound that it renders the stone useless rather than priceless.

The Shack contains subtle and not-so-subtle heresies. *The Shack* also contains what many Bible scholars would call "aberrant" teaching. Former Professor of Theology at Denver Seminary Dr. Gordon Lewis wrote to me in a private e-mail that:

Heresy is a conscious and deliberate rejection of orthodox teaching and the acceptance of contradictory views on the biblically revealed essentials of the Christian faith.²

In the category of aberration, Dr. Lewis writes:

Unorthodox doctrine leads to aberrant behavior that wanders from the path of right action (ortho-practice) on biblically revealed moral and spiritual essentials of Christian living. Beliefs have consequence(s). [sic]³

I am hard-pressed to judge Young's motives. I cannot determine his reasons for misrepresenting the God of the Bible. In *The Shack*, Young's Papa character (God the Father) appears as a large, black woman.

However, I am more than happy to reveal my own motives. If someone reading this review asks: "What is motivating you to write this monograph?" My answer is: I am an ordinary, middle-aged, Christian man who is a pastor, who loves the Lord Jesus, who embraces historical biblical Christianity, who is asked by scores of people: "What do you think of this book?" "What is wrong with this book?" I have no axe to grind or score to settle. If a child finds a piece of glass washed smooth by the ocean's tide and believes she has found a precious stone—a valuable gem—who am I to rain on her fantasy? But if the child tries to sell me that polished glass as a precious gem or attempts to swallow the glass for reasons that only a child would know; then do I have some kind of responsibility to tell the child her precious treasure is not really valuable or safe to eat?

I am not envious of Young. I must admit a deep sense of concern, because several of my Calvary Chapel pastor friends have read this book and mistaken it for a jewel. Some things are easy to write about. Some themes are timeless and valuable to Christians in every generation. Who doesn't love devotional literature or priceless fiction saturated with Bible promises with eternal themes? We love the stories of hope; we love the stories filled with the love of God and the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

The biblical writer Jude certainly desired to write about the theme of "*our common salvation*" and then stopped and wrote:

... I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3)

Jude uses the definite article *the* with the word *faith* for good reason. The term "*the faith*" embodies the essentials of Christianity. In their wonderful book *Conviction Without Compromise*, Dr. Norm Geisler (Dean of Southern Evangelical Seminary) and Dr. Ron Rhodes (Director of Reasoning From

The Scriptures) outline some of the essentials of Christianity and preface their book with the fourth-century church father Augustine's oft-repeated dictum:

In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; and in all things charity.⁴

At the top of the list under the "essentials" category, we find: God's unity; the historic, biblical revelation of the Trinity; Christ's deity; and Christ's humanity. *Conviction Without Compromise* also includes notes about essentials: *salvation* essentials, a *revelation* essential (the inspiration of the Bible), an *interpretation* essential—which means, to the authors, the historical-grammatical method of interpreting Scripture.⁵

In Essentials Unity

People who love and/or hate *The Shack* usually agree with the saying, "in essentials unity," but they are hard-pressed to ask and answer the questions: "Does *The Shack* compromise the essentials of historic biblical Christianity?" "Is this something we should even care about or fight about?" The Apostle Jude's admonition "*to contend earnestly for the faith*" must mean a vigorous defense of the truth and a willingness to divide over the truth rather than unite under the false flag of tolerance or bad theology.

Charles Spurgeon, nineteenth-century pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle Church in London, wrote:

Discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather, it is telling the difference between right and almost right.⁶

What is it about this book that causes otherwise discerning Christians to suspend belief, enter the story, feel spiritually uplifted and encouraged, and speak of God's love and forgiveness with fresh perspective? The fundamental problem lies in the reader's inability to tell the difference between what is biblically right and biblically wrong; between what is right and almost right.

Does God love us? The answer is, "Yes." Does God forgive us in Christ? The answer is, "Yes." Does the Bible paint a picture of the Godhead where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit carry on like some rowdy cousins, eating like gluttons, making a mess, and playing practical jokes on each other? We believe Jesus is a real human being. But we do not believe Jesus is some cartoon character. I am all about fun. But guess what? God's ways are not our ways. Is it any wonder that thoughtful people who have read this book and its characterizations of God have come up with terms like "blasphemous," "sacrilegious," "loathsome," and "irreverent?"

Does *The Shack* misrepresent the God of the Bible and distort, pervert, or mislead the sinner who doesn't know God or the saint who does know God? Young presents a god who loves and forgives, but he ignores the God Who also judges, Who condemns both sin and sinners on the basis of His perfect Holiness. In my reading of *The Shack*, the author seems committed to a low, perhaps even disparaging, view of the Scriptures. The author seems quite content to mock the Bible.

In seminary [Mack] 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. God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered

by the proper authorities and intellects. It seemed that direct communication with God was something exclusively for the ancients and uncivilized, while educated Westerners' access to God was mediated and controlled by the intelligentsia. Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was that gilt edges.⁷

There is a theme in *The Shack*: When asked questions about the Bible, characters in the Bible, or events in the Bible, Young's Papa character is almost glib and condescending; and the character goes on to explain how things really are.

At GotQuestions.org under, "What is GotQuestions.org's review of *The Shack* by William P. Young," the author wisely notes:

If one is to teach error, it is important to do away with Scripture, either by adding to it (Mormonism), mis-translating it (Jehovah's Witnesses) or simply mocking it (*The Shack* and some others in the "emergent church").⁸

If hard-pressed, both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses would tell you that they love and honor the Bible—for the Mormons: "**as far as it is correctly translated,**" (LDS Eighth Article of Faith) and for the Jehovah's Witnesses: "**As every-one knows, there are mistakes in the Bible ...**" (*WATCHTOWER*, 04/15/28, p.126) and "**... the Bible cannot be properly understood without Jehovah's visible organization [the WTBTs] in mind.**" (*WATCHTOWER*, 10/01/67, p.587).

What is Young's view of the Bible? He seems to distance himself from the Biblical themes, images, and concepts found in the Bible.

Does *The Shack* claim to teach about the God of the Bible? Musician/songwriter Michael W. Smith seems to think so when he writes: "**My wife and I laughed, cried, and repented of our own lack of faith along the way. THE SHACK will leave you craving for the presence of God.**"⁹

The Shack is not really a parable—an earthly story that represents a heavenly truth. *The Shack* is more of an allegory—an attempt to use literary devices to represent and communicate generalizations and/or truths—in this case alleged truths about God, truths about forgiveness, truths about the nature of pain and suffering.

A Brief Summation of *The Shack*

The Shack seems to be a book people either love or hate. I have not met too many people who have read the book with detached ambivalence. Christian author and blogger Tim Challies rightly points out:

The book is all about the content and about the teaching it contains. The book's reviews focus not on the quality of the story but on its spiritual and emotional impact.¹⁰

The Shack has been called a modern parable. Eugene Peterson, author of the very controversial Bible paraphrase *The Message*, went so far as to write:

This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!¹¹

Is the book "that good?" Not really. It fails the elementary literature tests (great story, memorable characters, and timeless truths). *Pilgrim's Progress* is a book soaked and saturated in the

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Scriptures and contains timeless biblical themes and truths. Does it not seem that, to the “jeweler’s eye,” comparing *The Shack* with *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a bit like comparing worthless colored glass beads with precious, costly diamonds?

The Shack’s story revolves around the main character Mack (Mackenzie) Phillips. Mack’s daughter Missy is abducted and killed by a serial killer while on a family vacation. The story painfully unfolds, and we are taken to a shack where evidence of foul play exists. Mack receives a mysterious note from Papa. “Papa” is the affectionate term Mack’s wife uses for God the Father. The pain and tragic loss of their daughter is simply called Mack’s “**Great Sadness.**”

Through a series of events, Mack finds himself back at the shack—the scene of the crime—and has a supernatural encounter with three figures: Papa, Jesus, and a character called Sarayu. The author has the main character Mack embark on an emotional, psychological, and theological journey.

The problem critics have with the book is not simply the journey, but the misrepresentations of God, the Godhead, the Trinity, revelation, and forgiveness.

The people who have expressed gratitude and joy over the book seem unaffected by its blatant misrepresentations of God; but rather, they sympathize and identify with the character’s fictional journey of pain, understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

One would have to be pretty hard-hearted not to feel some sympathy for a man whose daughter is kidnapped and brutally murdered. Like Job in the Old Testament, Mack goes through a series of questions and answers designed to answer the problems of the presence of evil, the relationship of God to man; and the issues of forgiveness and hope. But unlike Job, Mack does not have an encounter with the God of the Bible.

Young, in a sermon he delivered at Crossroads Church in Denver, suggested he would like his book made into a movie.

I have some ideas and suggestions for the main cast of characters which I have drawn from media and popular culture:

- Mackenzie Allen Phillips: David Duchavney (Fox “Spooky” Mulder from the X-Files)
- Papa: Oprah Winfrey (still struggling with her weight) or Della Reese
- Jesus: Dr. Phil (with an appropriate hair piece and a nose prosthesis)
- Sarayu: Lucy Lui (dressed in gossamer, looking kind of like an Asian fairy). *Sarayu* is Sanscrit for *wind*, but its root means *to flow*, and it is the name of a river in India.

Years ago, A.W. Tozer (The Christian Missionary and Alliance pastor of the last century) warned of what he called:

... **a new decalogue adopted by the neo-Christians of our day, the first word of which reads “Thou shalt not disagree,” and a new set of Beatitudes too, which begins “Blessed are they that tolerate everything, for they shall not be made accountable for anything.”**¹²

Tozer pointed out:

It is now the accepted thing to talk over religious differences in public with the understanding that no one will try to convert another or point out errors in his belief. Imagine Moses agreeing to take part in a panel discussion with Israel over the golden calf; or Elijah engaging in a gentlemanly dialogue with the prophets of Baal.¹³

The author of *The Shack* doesn’t seem to be too interested in addressing the criticisms brought by defenders of historic, biblical Christianity.

What you are about to read is something that Mack and I have struggled with for many months to put into words. It’s a little, well ... no, it is a lot on the fantastic side. Whether some parts of it are actually true or not, I won’t be the judge. Suffice it to say that while some things may not be scientifically provable, they can be still true nonetheless.¹⁴

The author then offers a couple of disclaimers:

... **if you happen upon this story and hate it, ... Sorry ... but it wasn’t primarily written for you. Then again, maybe it was.**¹⁵

What are we to believe or not believe? Was the story written for you or not? If you hate the story, the story is for you; if you love the story, the story is for you. (-S=Y and +S=Y?)

And they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:4)

Cathy Lynn Grossman, of *USA Today*, writes: “**As for critics, he [Young] shakes his head.**” Grossman quotes the author of *The Shack*:

- **I don’t want to enter the Ultimate Fighting ring and duke it out in a cage-match with dogmatists. I have no need to knock churches down or pull people out.**
- **I have a lot of freedom by knowing that you really experience God in relationships, wherever you are. It’s fluid and dynamic, not cemented into an institution with a concrete foundation.**
- **But it’s not about me. I have everything that matters, a free and open life full of love and empty of all secrets.**¹⁶

Young claims he has “**a free and open life full of love and empty of all secrets.**” He leaves me with the impression that he elevates his own personal experience over the revelation of God in the Bible. Is that a problem? I believe the Bible teaches we can experience God in life-giving and life-sustaining relationships. I don’t believe our experience informs our theology, but rather, our theology informs our experience.

Young also makes the claim he doesn’t want “**to enter the Ultimate Fighting ring,**” but yet, he has challenged historic, biblical Christianity. Musician/songwriter Jim Croce warned in his hit tune from the 70’s: “**You don’t tug on Superman’s cape; you don’t spit into the wind; you don’t pull the mask of the Lone Ranger.**” If those constitute risky behaviors, how much more is it to misrepresent the Bible’s revelation of God? And there’s the rub. The author doesn’t seem to either know or care that he is misrepresenting the Bible’s truth about God. Young has made repeated public comments on radio, television, newspaper, and internet about the critics who he deems are heavily invested in a God Who also encompasses wrath or judgment. Somehow the god of *The Shack* is mistaken as more kind and more understanding than the God of the Bible. However, justice is not antithetical to kindness.

I have had the privilege of working with law-enforcement officials and their families. In the F.B.I. if you pull a gun on a federal agent, you are pulling a gun on every federal agent. And it follows that when you threaten a marine, you threaten every marine. If you threaten an American citizen, you threaten every American citizen.

When you dismiss the historic, biblical view of God, Jesus,

and the Trinity; when you reject the Bible's clear revelation; when you downplay the Scripture's teachings at the expense of personal experience;¹⁷ when you redefine the central message of salvation as being something other than the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary (salvation is not psycho-babble, no matter how "good" it sounds); when you redefine redemption; when you portray God in a way inconsistent with the Revelation of God in the Bible; when you redefine the roles and hierarchy within the Godhead; when you leave the reader with the impression that you believe in Universalism* but privately or from pulpits affirm the exclusivity of Jesus; you are going to create misunderstandings. And for the person who cares about truth, for the person who sees himself or herself not as some sort of dogmatist, but rather, as a person in love with the revelation of God: the revelation God has provided about Himself given in the Bible, ***The Shack* constitutes a threat.**

Misrepresentations In *The Shack*

Young doesn't seem interested in defending his warped and weird views of God including the nature of the Trinity or his heretical views of patripassianism and subordinationism. These may seem scary terms to some, but a couple of definitions may help.

Patripassianism is a form of *modalism*—the teaching that there is only one God yet appears in three different modes or manifestations (as opposed to the orthodox teaching that there is only one God Who eternally and equally co-exists in three persons). *Patripassianism* comes from the Latin, and means *the father suffers*. The term refers to the teaching that *God the Father* suffers on the cross as Son—since according to this false view, the two are different modes or manifestations of the same person.

At one point, Mack notices:

... scars in [Papa's] wrists, like those he now assumed Jesus also had on his,"¹⁸

and later Papa says:

When we three spoke ourself [sic] into human existence as the Son of God, we became fully human. We also choose to embrace all the limitations that this entailed. Even though we have always been present in this created universe, we now became flesh and blood.¹⁹

No, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit did not speak themselves into human existence; but rather, only the Son became fully human (John 1:14). The Bible reveals that Jesus is one person with two natures: fully God and fully human. The Father is not the Son and does not have a human nature; the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son and does not have and never will have a human nature.

Norm Geisler rightly and soundly points out *The Shack* contains a heretical view of the Father suffering. Geisler points out that patripassianism was condemned by the Nicene Council (A.D. 325) and the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451). At issue or at stake is the notion that *God changes*. Dr. Geisler notes:

Suffering is a form of change, and the Bible makes it very clear that God cannot change. "I the LORD change not" (Mal. 3:6). "There is no shadow of change with Him" (James 1:17). When all else changes, God "remains the same" (Heb. 1:10-12).²⁰

Do *The Shack* and its author paint a picture of a God who

changes? In what way does God change? The floodgates of heresy open (i.e. open view or neo-theism—the idea that God does not fully know or determine the future). *If God can change, then the revelation of the Bible is false.* If God can change in *any* way, can God change in *every* way?

Young's character has God the Father as well as God the Son "suffering" thus confusing the nature of God:

"Haven't you seen the wounds on Papa [God the Father] too?" I didn't understand them. "How could he ...?" "For love. He choose the way of the cross ... because of love."²¹

According to Young's characterization, the way God changes is God changes out of love; God is willing to change, able to change, **"to get inside your stuff"** (Crossroads Church audio file). If God is willing to change, motivated by love, to get inside your stuff, then according to Young, the change God proposes must be good (an improvement in His flawed original plan?), right? Wrong. In reality, the nature of God and the plan of God are perfect. If the nature of God changes and/or if the plan of God changes, that is an indictment against the nature and plan of God. My friends, to suggest the fundamental nature and/or character of God changes is heresy.

For some reason, perhaps for several reasons, those who love *The Shack* embrace the notion that God, indeed, does change! *The Shack* offers a shiny, glass pebble of psychological relief for the human heart and invites the reader to embrace a god who changes—*so you don't have to*. For those who "love" *The Shack*, they are invited to embrace a god who allegedly changes—who changes because of (Young's redefinition of) love in order **"to get inside your stuff."**

God doesn't change! The cross of Jesus does reveal the love of God—the love of an already perfect, unchanging God. Jesus came to die to absorb the wrath of God, to please His heavenly Father, to learn obedience and fulfill God's perfect plan: to achieve His own Resurrection from the dead. If you think the Bible doesn't contain enough reasons to declare God's love, perhaps reading well known Christian author and pastor, John Piper's book *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came To Die* would be helpful.²²

Young defends his position by appealing to 2 Corinthians 5:19: **"That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself;"** with the net result that the reader is left with the impression that Young's view is some kind of modified form of Universalism. In Young's faulty analysis and interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:19, God the Father is literally present (in some unknown way) in Christ—suffering, even experiencing the Roman nails, and taking on permanent wounds—visible, tangible, real. But for purposes of discussion, let's suppose that Young does not mean real, physical, and tangible, but rather, he means in some sense metaphorical or allegorical. Is the net result a God who changes?

The Apostle Paul is convinced that God the Father was *by means* of Jesus' death on the cross reconciling the world to Himself, and He was *not coexisting* or taking on an additional nature or experiencing ontological change with Jesus. Tozer writes:

For a moral being to change it would be necessary that the change be in one of three directions. He must go from better to worse or from worse to better; or, granted that the moral quality remain stable, he must change within himself, as from immature to mature or

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“The Shack” Continued from page 13

from one order of being to another. It should be clear that God can move in none of these directions. His perfections forever rule out any such possibility.²³

He then continues:

God cannot change for the better. Since He is perfectly holy, He has never been less holy than He is now and can never be holier than He is and has always been. Neither can God change for the worse. Any deterioration within the unspeakably holy nature of God is impossible. Indeed I believe it impossible even to think of such a thing, for the moment we attempt to do so, the object about which we are thinking is no longer God but something else and someone less than He. The one of whom we are thinking may be a great and awesome creature, but because he is a creature he cannot be the self-existent Creator.²⁴

Subordinationism is a heretical teaching proposing that any One of the Trinity is lesser in rank or dignity than others. In contrast, although there is no autonomous Person of the Trinity—none who is God apart from any other Person—yet each Person is autotheos (“αυτοθεος,” God in and of Himself).

Gender Bender God

Tim Challies cites from *Old Testament Theology* by Bruce Waltke (one of the leading Old Testament scholars in the world) where Waltke argues that both representation and misrepresentation matter:

God, who is over all, represents himself by masculine names and titles, not feminine ones. He identifies himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, not Parent, Child, and Spirit, not Mother, Daughter, and Spirit. Jesus taught his church to address God as “Father” (Luke 11:2) and to baptize disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). God’s titles are King, not Queen; Lord, not Lady. God, not mortals, has the right to name himself. It is inexcusable hubris and idolatry on the part of mortals to change the images by which the eternal God chooses to represent himself. We cannot change God’s names, titles, or metaphors without committing idolatry, for we will have re-imagined him in a way other than the metaphors and the incarnation by which he revealed himself. His representations and incarnations are inseparable from his being.²⁵

Young has “re-imagined” God in *The Shack*. What Waltke rightly calls “inexcusable hubris and idolatry” becomes excusable and laughable to Young who presents a god who gives the book’s main character greens that may give him the runs. The inexcusable becomes excusable as Young has the character Papa explain the mystery:

Mackenzie, I am neither male nor female, even though both genders are derived from my nature. If I choose to appear [emphasis in the original] to you as a man or woman, it’s because I love you. For me to appear to you as a woman and suggest you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors, to help you keep from falling so easily back into your religious conditioning.²⁶

Theologians concede that God is neither male nor female; but they would be hard-pressed to accept that God communicates his nature by mixing metaphors “to help” people “from ... falling back” into “religious conditioning.” Is the Bible’s rev-

elation of God “religious conditioning,” or does Young’s god need to “mix metaphors” to promote this product of Young’s own imagination?

Is Young sympathetic to the person who imagines his own failed father as the Heavenly Father; and rather than give God a bum rap, he abandons the biblical revelation of God for a psychological accommodation to help re-imagine a loving God?

Young leaves the reader (at least this reader) with the impression that his father failed him on many levels. Was Young’s father emotionally unavailable, cold, and distant?

Does it really help to re-imagine God as a non-threatening black woman to compensate for his own view of God?

Non-Essentials In *The Shack*

Dr. Albert Mohler (President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) says: “**This book includes undiluted heresy.**”²⁷ Although I agree with my friend Dr. Mohler, I would also point out the book contains some fairly diluted heresy as well.

The *diluted* heresies in *The Shack* remind me of how heroin and cocaine dealers would “stomp” on their products—dilute and divide them—so they could get the most bang for their buck. Heresy in large doses can kill the host; but heresy divided and diluted attempts to get the user high without killing the host. *The Shack* does an excellent job of masking the heresies and all the while giving the reader a psychological buzz by presenting a “God” filled with unconditional love and short on judgment.

The popularity of *The Shack* lies in its ability to share some facets of the good news without pointing out the bad news. The cross of Jesus is barely mentioned. A fairly large amount of time is devoted to God’s love and God’s affection, but God’s holiness and righteousness is largely ignored.

The Shack certainly presents Jesus as God and Man. Yet, the Jesus of *The Shack* embraces the false teaching made popular by John Wimber, and others, that Jesus performed miracles only as a man filled with the Holy Spirit in submission to the Father, thus denying the Bible’s teaching of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

He [Jesus] has never drawn upon his nature as God to do anything. He has only lived out of his relationship with me [Papa], living in the very same manner that I desire to be in relationship with every human being. He is just to do it to the uttermost—the first to absolutely trust my life within him, the first to believe in my love and my appearance without regard for appearance and consequence.²⁸

The author has his (god) character say some things completely inconsistent with the revelation of Scripture. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was before all things, all things were created by Jesus, and by Jesus all things consist (see Col.1:16-17). *Subordinationism* reduces the Second Person of the Trinity in rank by implying that His human nature places Him with less glory, dignity, or honor. The Scriptures teach, and orthodox Christianity has always affirmed, that the persons in the Godhead are equal in essence.

Young makes additional statements that suggest that hierarchy and authority within the Godhead simply don’t exist, and that hierarchy and authority are the result of sin. Once again, Young has his (god) character Papa say:

Mackenzie, we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a circle of relationship, not a chain of command or “great chain of being” as your ancestors termed it. What you’re seeing here

is relationship without any overlay of power. We don't need power over the other because we are always looking out for the best. Hierarchy would make no sense among us.²⁹

What makes no sense to Young's character makes perfect sense to the God of the Bible. The Scriptures reveal both authority and hierarchy within the Godhead. Jesus is sent by the Father; Jesus obeys the Father; the Holy Spirit obeys both Father and Son (John 14:26; John 15:26). The obedience and submission within the Godhead are not the result of sin, but rather, the revelation of the Scriptures concerning perfect love demonstrated in the way the Father relates to the Son and the way both the Father and the Son relate to the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul writes:

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor. 11:3)

Paul also warned Timothy:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience 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 chapter goes on as Paul reminds Timothy:

But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. (1 Timothy 4:7)

Young's Jesus character informs Mack that Papa and Sarayu are:

... indeed submitted to one another and have always been so and always will be ... In fact, we [read Trinity] are submitted to you [Mack] in the same way.³⁰

What? In what way? In a conditional or unconditional way? Why then did Jesus submit Himself to the Father? Why did Jesus say, ***"Not My will, but Thy will be done?"*** (Luke 22:42) Does the Bible teach submission to authority in spiritual and family and government matters? What do you think Young means? I believe Young is projecting his own anti-authority sentiments, and that includes Young's unwillingness to accept the authority of the Bible. According to Young, God is an extreme egalitarian.

Papa asks Mack to forgive the murderer of his daughter. Papa says:

Mack, for you to forgive this man is for you to release him to me and allow me to redeem him.³¹

What in the world does *that* mean? Is God only free to redeem people who have been forgiven by their human victims? Does this mean we can have no expectation of repentance, even though the Bible says, ***"If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him"*** (Luke 17:3-5)?

What about the Jesus character saying:

I am the best way any human can relate to Papa or Sarayu.³²

However, the true Jesus of the Bible says:

I am the way, the truth, the life. (John 14:6, emphasis mine)

Are there other "ways"—less ways, less than best ways, average ways, next-to-best ways—still possible? Why does the Jesus character hold out the false hope that there might be another way for the reader?

In All Things Charity

Challies has an excellent review posted on his web site (www.challies.com). He writes:

Despite the great amount of poor theology, my greatest concern is probably this one: the book has a quietly subversive quality to it. Young seems set on undermining orthodox Christianity. For example, at one point Mack states that, despite years of seminary and years of being a Christian, most of the things taught to him at the shack have never occurred to him before. Later he says, "I understand what you're saying. I did that for years after seminary. I had the right answers, sometimes, but I didn't know you. This weekend, sharing life with you has been far more illuminating than any of those answers.

An Idiot's Guide To Basic Bible Discernment

Robert M. Bowman, Jr. (Christian author and apologist) wrote an excellent book titled *Orthodoxy and Heresy*. There is a chapter in the book titled, **"Judging Others—Is It Always Wrong?"** The chapter begins with a discussion of *when judging is wrong*. Bowman explains we are to avoid hypocritical judgments. Hypocritical judgments are not bad because they are false—the judgment itself may be true. They are bad because they are given in a spirit of self-righteousness, absent is self-scrutiny. Hypocritical judgments result in judgment for the hypocrite. We are to avoid presumptuous judgments. Bowman rightly points out, **"There are some matters on which human beings simply are not competent to judge."**³³ I believe we are not competent to judge if Young is saved or not saved.

Bowman also points out that another sort of presumptuous judgment is taking a non-essential matter and making it the litmus test regarding Christian fellowship. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul warns about this by citing the misapplication of dietary restrictions and feast days as matters for Christian fellowship. Does embracing or rejecting the content of Young's book constitute an essential of the faith?

Bowman then points out in chapter 3, **"When Judging Is Right:"**

- **Judging truth from error and good from evil.**
- **Judging unrepentant sinners in the church.**
- **Judging teachers of false versions of Christianity.**³⁴

Bowman also points out in chapter 6, **"It's Not Always Black or White:"**

It is helpful to speak of religious doctrines which undermine or are in tension with a group's orthodox beliefs as aberrational or aberrant. Holding such aberrational views is a serious problem, and those who do so must be considered as being in serious sin and should be treated accordingly. Specifically, those advocating such errors should not be allowed to teach or minister in the church, and those refusing to keep such aberrant views to themselves should be excommunicated.³⁵

He continues and says:

The charge that a person's or group's beliefs are aberrational is a serious one that cannot be made easily. It is arguable that at one level any incorrect belief is at tension with or undermines orthodox beliefs. By aberrational, however I am referring only to false beliefs which do serious damage to the integrity of an orthodox confession of faith.³⁶

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Conclusion

One person named Michael Burton posted this in the review section of Amazon.com:

Upon sober reflection, perhaps you will discern that this IS an amazing book and THE book for you if, and only if ...

- You want to recreate God in your own image;
- You find Isaiah's portrayal of a holy God seated upon His throne to be a disturbing image;
- You would prefer to metaphorically cast God the Father as a loving and large black woman named "Papa," Jesus as a laid back and friendly Middle Eastern man, and the Holy Spirit as a calm and cool Asian woman;
- You want a God so small that you and she/he/she can just hang out as best buddies;
- You regard the Bible as an extremely biased, narrow-minded and insufficient revelation of God in leather binding with "guilt edges" (p.65);
- You therefore believe that God talks to people today, and that whatever she or he says to people trumps biblical truth (p.66);
- You believe that God is never to be feared (p.90);
- You believe that Jesus' miracles do not affirm Him as God, but prove only "that Jesus is truly human" (p.99);
- You want a God who does not hold people accountable for, nor punishes sin (p.119);
- You want a God who does not demand that you submit to him or her, but one who submits to YOU (p.145);
- You want a God who accepts everyone—"Buddhists ... Muslims, bankers and bookies"—as his or her children no matter what their beliefs or behavior, and that Jesus has "no desire to make them Christian" (p.223);
- You believe that Jesus lied when He warned, "Broad is the road that leads to destruction" (Matt. 7:13), because in *The Shack* Jesus says, "Most roads don't lead anywhere" (p.182).³⁷

Young has said he never meant for those quotes in his book to mean he believes in Universalism. He has said his critics are too deeply invested in a God of judgment to read his book in the spirit in which it was written.

The confusion and misunderstanding might go away if Young would affirm historic, biblical belief. Creedal theology does serve a purpose in that we don't "play telephone" with doctrine. Statements of faith have real value.

One of the great challenges any writer faces is to write in such a way that his core message is understood. What is the core message of *The Shack*? I have read the book twice—once quickly and once carefully.

The core message of *The Shack* seems to be: Nearly 2,000 years of historic, biblical Christianity has had it all wrong—well, maybe not *all* wrong. Yes, there is a God; and that God is a God of unconditional love. Nevertheless, Young contends that God may not be as angry with sin as He has described in His Word—the Bible; and there probably is some sort of universal forgiveness that results in the ultimate redemption of all mankind. Does Young assume the Bible has a lot of great stories, characters, beliefs, concepts, and doctrines; but hey, human experience is at least as important? Yes, the God of the Bible reveals Himself in Trinity, but Young's book presents his Trinity as just a modified form of modalism very similar to that of Oneness Pentecostals. So, if you want genuine and profound healing from trauma and/

or abuse, and you desire true and lasting answers to life's deepest questions, *The Shack* offers more psycho-babble than hope.

Young has fashioned a fictional vehicle to re-create and experience a god (because this god is not the God of revelation, but rather Young's imagination) who:

"... is the ground of all being, dwells in, around and through all things."³⁸

Young confuses a transcendent God—Who is greater than and exists above and independent of creation—with a pantheistic god—a god who is a part of, but not all of, this world.

What does the author really believe about God? What does the author really believe about Universalism? Over and over again we are presented with Young's characters saying the most outrageous things. For example, Papa says to Mack:

We [the Trinity] have limited ourselves out of respect for you."³⁹

Really? The Creator—God, limits Himself out of respect for created beings?—limits Himself in order to entertain and engage them? But, the God of the Bible refuses to limit Himself, choosing rather to enlighten us by saying:

"For My thoughts [are] not your thoughts, Nor [are] your ways My ways," says the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8)

Sarayu (Young's Holy Spirit character) says to Mack:

Both evil and darkness can only be understood in relation to Light and Good; they do not have actual existence ..."⁴⁰

Is *that* what the Bible teaches? How did the Jesus of the Bible get it so utterly wrong attributing His temptations in the desert to the evil Devil and speaking to him as well? (See Luke 4:1-13.)

Young's character Papa bloviates:

I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It is not my purpose to punish it; but to cure it.⁴¹

We know there are consequences of sin, both temporal and eternal. How does the God of the Bible cure sin? Jesus dies on the cross. How does the god of *The Shack* cure sin? Papa's statement is that the punishment for sin is the punishment we receive in this life. The punishment in the Bible for the unredeemed is a Christ-less eternity in Hell.

The Shack neither visits, nor explains, nor expands the Biblical view of the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The God of *The Shack* doesn't seem to hate sin (only in as much as it hurts someone in the here and the now); doesn't require sinners to repent; and fails to explain the nature of conversion or what constitutes Biblical conversion or salvation.

The Shack is not a precious gem, but a broken piece of glass that should be labeled:

"HARMFUL IF SWALLOWED" ☠

*Universalism is the false belief that all will be saved.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.



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Miguel, Anthony, and Jonathan.

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of worship of God," it cannot motivate anyone toward anything. It is individual theists and religionists who go from "existence of God belief" to building their particular world views or theologies who may act malevolently.

Therefore, since the NEAM generically condemn "religion" and have failed to focus their attention upon that which set the movement into motion in the first place, they—as a movement—are dead.

Granted, this is not to say they are done, or they will go away. They will surely remain vociferous and popular. My reference to their movement's death is to their credibility in general and to the direct consequence of being deficient in that which they had originally set out to accomplish.

Let Us Heed Their Words

Nick Spencer, a Christian and writer for the UK *Telegraph* blog, wrote:

Christians, whether or not they acknowledge it, have sometimes needed Atheists to remind them how to live like Christians.³²

There is very much about which Theists (and Christians, in particular) can agree with even the most militant Atheist activists. We could "Amen!" many of their criticisms of "religion." Many of their objections are the same ones we voiced and are the reasons why we denounced *religion* and developed a personal *relationship* with the Messiah Jesus. Likewise, we could agree with their criticisms about superstition, religious fanaticism, religious abuse of power, money-hungry televangelists, hypocrisy, etc.

In fact, the only favorable mention of "religion" in the New Testament is:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27, NKJV)

Thus, while overall the NEAM is very faulty for various reasons and ought to be refuted at every opportunity, they do play an important role in the dialogue, in sharpening our apologetics, and in waking up the slumbering church. ☞



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ENDNOTES

1 My review is found at: <http://lifeanddoctrineAtheism.blogspot.com/2008/02/quadrupartite-equine-riders-were-just.html> 2 Read a transcript of their exchange in the essay found at: http://Atheistricharddawkins.blogspot.com/2008/09/is-richard-dawkins-fundamentalist-part_12.html 3 He is actually a Buddhist, mystic Atheist who does not like the terms "Buddhist," "mystic" or "Atheist." 4 Swarm, "Sam Harris: Secular Buddhist," <http://zenbuddhism.tribe.net/thread/b1a397c5-2a9a-4f18-a7c0-c04102413059> 5 Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Grand Central Publishing, 2007), p.11. 6 His book on this topic is "Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism." An article is found at: <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/1truth12.html>. An audio lecture on the topic is found at: <http://www.veritas.org/media/talks/196> 7 Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (New York: Norton, WW & Co., Inc., 1986), p.6. 8 New York Magazine, "Philip Pullman Realizes 'Killing God' Not the Ideal Sales Pitch": http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2007/11/philip_pullman_realizes_underm.html —I wrote about this at: <http://Atheismisdead.blogspot.com/2008/10/Atheisms-sales-pitch-to-children.html> 9 Read Prof. Richard Lewontin's fascinating comments about materialism and science, "Billions and Billions of Demons" at: <http://lifeanddoctrine.blogspot.com/2007/01/how-billions-of-demons-haunted-baloney.html> 10 Edge The World Question Center: http://www.edge.org/q2005/q05_easyprint.html#harriss 11 Michael Shermer, "Rational Atheism - An open letter to Messrs. Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens": <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=rational-Atheism> - I wrote about this at: <http://Atheismisdead.blogspot.com/2008/11/michael-shermer-neglected-new-Atheist.html> 12 Sam Harris in Edge The World Question Center: http://www.edge.org/q2005/q05_easyprint.html#harriss 13 Inferring a creator and even some of the creator's characteristics from observation of nature/the universe through reasoning. 14 For information on Galileo see: <http://Atheismisdead.blogspot.com/2008/10/galileo-story-of-hero-of-science.html> On Copernicus see: <http://lifeanddoctrineAtheism.blogspot.com/2008/09/copernican-myths.html> On the myth of a flat earth see: <http://Atheismisdead.blogspot.com/2008/06/positive-Atheisms-cliff-walkers-flat.html> On Communism see the relevant portion of the essay found at: <http://lifeanddoctrineAtheism.blogspot.com/2007/02/american-Atheists-webmasters-astounding.html> 15 I have a large list of quotes to this effect at: <http://lifeanddoctrineAtheism.blogspot.com/2007/08/Atheism-is-holier-than-theism-it-is.html> 16 I have written on this in the following essays: <http://Atheistricharddawkins.blogspot.com/2007/12/hell-of-non-theism-and-gentle-pedophile.html> and <http://lifeanddoctrineAtheism.blogspot.com/2007/10/teach-your-children-well-well-just.html> and <http://lifeanddoctrineAtheism.blogspot.com/2007/10/daniel-dennetts-one-way-street-of.html> 17 During his interview with Gary Wolf, "The Church of the Non-Believers": <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/Atheism.html> 18 Ibid. 19 During his debate with John Rankin entitled "Evolution and Intelligent Design": What are the issues?: http://ffrf.org/about/bybarker/ID_Debate.mp3 20 During an audio clip that was played in

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Israel has had one friend—the United States—even though this “friend” has not always been reliable or fair. The U.S. sometimes offers to hold Israel’s coat while she fights her battles, and the U.S. ends up holding Israel’s arms behind her back instead. We demand from Israel a forbearance after being attacked that we certainly have not demonstrated, nor should we have, it seems to us, when we were attacked on 9/11. But still in all, the American people—especially born-again Christians and the majority of the representatives of congress—have pretty much taken Israel’s side as her neighbors have continually assailed her in war and in terror attacks. But this friendship may not long continue. Our new president, Barack Obama, seems intent on appeasing Muslim/Arab nations, and it appears he may be moving toward aligning with Muslim nations against Israel. He is sending:

... a delegation to Geneva to participate in planning the UN’s so-called Durban II conference, scheduled to take place in late April.¹¹

Not many are aware of the Durban Conference or what it entails. Caroline Glick (senior Middle East fellow at the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., and the deputy managing editor of *The Jerusalem Post*) fills in some blanks for us:

The Durban II conference was announced in the summer of 2007. Its stated purpose is to review the implementation of the declaration adopted at the UN’s anti-Israel hate-fest that took place in Durban, South Africa, the week before the September 11, 2001, attacks against America.¹²

The agenda for the conference is already set, and there is little reason to believe participation by Obama’s administration will change the agenda:

First, since the stated purpose of the Durban II conference is to oversee the implementation of the first Durban conference’s decisions, and since those decisions include the anti-Israel assertion that Israel is a racist state, it is clear that the Durban II conference is inherently, and necessarily, anti-Israel.

The second reason that both the State Department and the White House must realize that they are powerless to affect the conference’s agenda is because that agenda was already set in previous planning sessions chaired by the likes of Libya, Cuba, Iran and Pakistan. And that agenda includes multiple assertions of the basic illegitimacy of the Jewish people’s right to self-determination. The conference agenda also largely adopted the language of the 2001 NGO conference that called for the criminalization of critical discussion of Islam as a form of hate speech and racism. That is, the 2009 conference’s agenda is not only openly anti-Israel, it is also openly pro-tyranny, and so seemingly antithetical to US interests.¹³

It is not possible to say at this early stage how our new president will interact with Israel and her Muslim adversaries. But this seeming cuddling up to the Muslim agenda is not a good sign. It also does not seem to bode well that Obama gave his *first foreign television interview* on Al-Arabaya (an Arab television network), and that he seemed to lay the blame on his own country for the current enmity between Muslim countries and the USA. Even before President Obama was elected, it was problematical to us that his long-time and beloved pastor, Jeremiah Wright, is an admirer and fan of outspoken anti-Semite Louis Farrakhan. Now in politics, 2+ 2 *never* equals 4; but in our primitive minds, this adds up to trouble. So the situation bears watching.

Are we worried that if the US stands back or, God forbid, turns against Israel and takes the side of her enemies, that Israel may actually be destroyed—driven into the sea—as her enemies desire? Absolutely not! If you believe the Bible, and we do, Israel is under God’s protection, and she will not be destroyed even if the whole world stands against her, as sadly it will. That is the whole point of the prophecy—that the miracle of God’s rescue of His people is so great and so obvious that Israel will return to her God and accept her Messiah. The more pertinent question may be to ask if the *US will survive* if she throws Israel overboard. The US has been greatly blessed as a nation; will she continue to be?

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse... (Genesis 12:3a, NIV)

This is God talking here. Being cursed of God is *never* a good thing. We certainly hope with all our heart that our nation will never be cursed of God. For the love of our country, for our love of Israel, and for our love of innocents of any country, any ethnicity who would greatly suffer in the following scenario, we read the following with heavy hearts. But God says:

In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. (Joel 3:1-2, NIV)

These nations “divided up” the land of Israel—God’s land. Does that idea have a familiar ring to it? I don’t think people have any idea Who they are messing with, when they cavalierly plan to lop off pieces of Israel and give her land to various players over there.

A Balanced Approach

We believe there is nothing wrong with studying Bible Prophecy and trying to discern whether or not Jesus Christ may return during our lifetimes, and how Bible prophecy might be fulfilled. At the same time, we should be careful not to be dogmatic about just when or how things are going to unfold. None of us have the infallible, inerrant understanding of the infallible, inerrant Scripture. And we are not here just marking time. We have work to do while we are on earth, whether Christ returns in our lifetimes, or whether we live to die a natural death. None of us even have any guarantees about tomorrow (cf. Prov. 27:1).

So while we look forward to Christ’s Return, ***“looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”*** (Titus 2:13, NASB), we need to remain faithful to our calling—to love one another and do good to all people in our sphere, to teach and receive sound doctrine, to be ever ready to give a sound reason for the hope we have in Christ. We are not to abandon the world in the meantime. In effect, we are to anticipate His Return might be today; but at the same time, live and plan as if the day is a long way off.

The Lord’s Return is, indeed, a *blessed hope* for believers. Yes, it is true the Bible paints a bleak picture of the last days before His Return. There will be a time of Judgment on this Earth. The weeds will be plucked away from the wheat, so that justice and righteousness will finally overcome evil. But it is a time of deliverance for believers in Christ. It is comforting to know that God is aware and in control of future events, and He is specifically in control of our personal future. Rather than shrink back in fear, we are to remind each other of the Return of Christ to bring

encouragement to one another.

For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.
(1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, NIV)

Even so, come Lord Jesus. May we be found faithful. ☐

**The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS) is the government or clergy of the Jehovah's Witnesses*



Don and Joy Veinot are co-founders of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc., which is a national apologetics ministry and mission to new religious movements based in Wonder Lake, IL. He and Joy, his wife of 37 years, have been involved in discernment ministry as missionaries to New Religious Movements since 1987. Don is on the Board of Directors for Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), a consortium of discernment ministries. In addition to being staff researchers and writers for the *Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal* and co-authors of *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, they have been published in the *CRI Journal*, *PFO Quarterly Journal*, *Campus Life Magazine* and other periodicals. Don was ordained to the ministry by West Suburban Community Church of Lombard, IL at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, Israel in March of 1997. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.



ENDNOTES:

- 1) WATCHTOWER, "Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?"; August 15, 1968; 494
- 2) Most of us are aware there are differing, even competing, views within Evangelical circles about eschatological (last days) questions. Briefly, some within the Reformed tradition hold that the world will get better and better and eventually Christ will return. To these believers, the Book of Revelation is largely symbolic. For others, known as Preterists or semi-Preterists, the events of Revelation are literal events that were fulfilled in 70 A.D. For many who hold this view, it is up to the church to legislate God's kingdom into existence by taking over the government and implementing a theocracy. Once that is accomplished, Christ can return.
- 3) <http://www.watchman.org/relop/rapt.htm> Rick Branch
- 4) <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/laplaza/2009/01/the-countdown-t.html>, Countdown to 2012: End of the Maya calendar?; Deborah Bonello
- 5) Ibid. 6) Ibid.
- 7) <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/22902/maya-calendar-2012>; Many gather to ponder end of Maya days, Louis Sahagun
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) <http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/science/01/27/2012.maya.calendar.theories/index.html>; Apocalypse in 2012? Date spawns theories, film
- 10) "Leftist Jews who worship at altar of anti-Semitism," *WorldNetDaily*, Jamie Glazov; <http://wnd.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=90617>
- 11) http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/02/obamas_durban_gambit.html; "Obama's Durban Gambit," By Caroline Glick
- 12) Ibid. 13) Ibid.



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an interview with William Lane Craig: http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/PageServer?pagename=audio_visuals 21 During his debate with Phil Fernandes entitled "Does God Exist?" 22 From a video that was entitled "Kent Hovind Schools Dr. Mike Shermer": <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1410330225420430733&q=kent+hovind&hl=en> 23 During his debate with Jonathan Wells entitled "Why Darwin Matters" - video: <http://www.cato.org/realaudio/cbf-10-12-06.ram> or audio - <http://www.catomedia.org/archive-2006/cbf-10-12-06.mp3> 24 During his interview with Jonathan Miller: <http://tapes.atbhost.com/part4.php> 25 Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?": <http://www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html> 26 Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell - Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), p.326 27 During his interview with Gary Wolf, "The Church of the Non-Believers": http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/Atheism_pr.html or http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/Atheism.html?pg=1&topic=Atheism&topic_set 28 Richard Dawkins, "Now Here's a Bright Idea": <http://richarddawkins.net/print.php?id=121> 29 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006), pp. 31 30 The most they have done is that Sam Harris had one debate with Muslim Reza Aslan on US soil and Dawkins interviewed a Muslim in Israel for his program *The Root of All Evil*. Dawkins played nice by stating he was "a gentle atheist." In the same series, while interviewing American Pastor Ted Haggard, Dawkins likened Haggard's church service to a Nazi rally. 31 Ibid., pp.301-302 32 Nick Spencer, "Atheism on a bus": http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/nick_spencer/blog/2008/10/21/Atheism_on_a_bus

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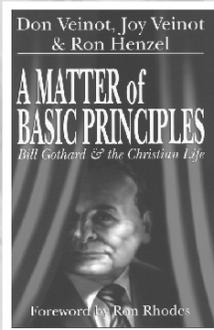
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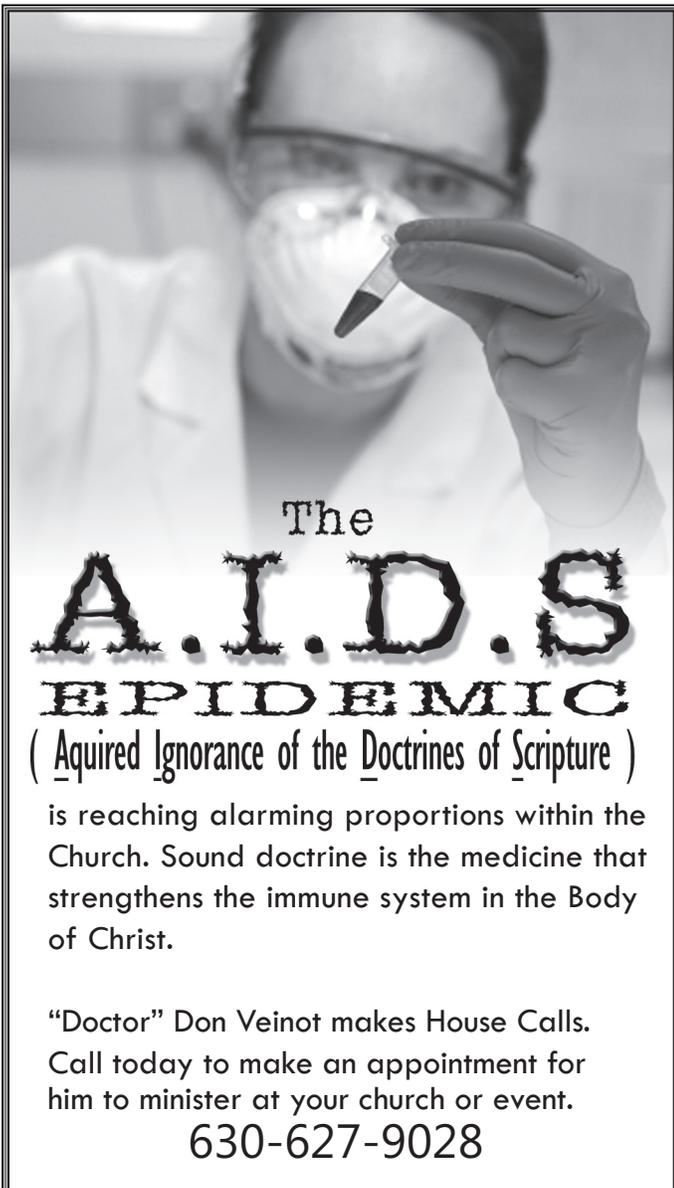
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