

8 Questions for the Fiction of Universalism

The Shack by William P. Young
The Last Word and the Word After That by Brian McLaren
Love Wins by Rob Bell

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1. What's all the fuss about? This literature is just fiction isn't it?

Yet this fiction is decidedly theological fiction. These writers explicitly affirm the theology of it. It seeks to advocate a particular, newer view of God, the Trinity, the meaning of sin, reconciliation, the judgment, hell and punishment, the church and other institutions (government, marriage, etc.).

2. Do we have to expect Christian fiction to be solidly Christian or can it be untrue at places?

Christian fiction must be true to the Bible to prevent leading impressionable readers astray. Remember the authors believe the doctrines they affirm in their fiction.

3. Do not the pluses, the advantages, outweigh the minuses, the negatives?

In writing a novel can an author deviate from the truth revealed in Christ? "A little leaven permeate the whole lump" and taints the whole fiction with corruption. One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel—a proverb we all know by personal experience.

4. If people are being brought closer to God, to discover for the first time that God is a God of love, isn't this the most important thing?

It is important to learn that God is a God of love and to develop a closer relationship to him. But what kind of a God is one brought closer to if a whole side of his being, his justice and holiness, is ignored, subverted, and even rejected? Is one truly brought closer to God if God has been redefined? A.W. Tozer once said: To believe in a lesser God is to commit idolatry.

5. Do not institutions often hinder relationship with God?

Yes, they may hinder rather than help. But God created the institutions of marriage, the state, and the church. The proper response to their failures is to correct the weaknesses or faults, not destroy the institution. UR sees the evangelical church as an obstacle to universalism. But social institutions have been designed by God. They actually have great advantages. To deconstruct any one of them leads to the end of Christian faith, the end of marriage, the end of government (=anarchy). See Blankenhorn on marriage and other social institutions.?

6. Isn't it significant that these authors have gone through significant spiritual experiences that have led them to write this way?

Yes they have, but if their experiences are not based in evangelical truth as revealed in the Bible then their experiences have become authoritative for them instead of Scripture and faith. Their closer relationship with God is based on and reinforced by a great error. They have become more loving persons, they claim; but they've done this while (or, by) embracing false teaching! If people are impressed by reading this fiction they are in danger of imbibing the theology that lies behind it. There is the Bible and much good fiction that can aid intimacy with God.

Most readers of this universalist fiction are Christians. They need to ask the question: "Should (perhaps "Will") I discover from this fiction a greater love for God and people when it is based in the universalism that has transformed the authors?" I suggest that *if the doctrine is distorted, so is the relationship*. Can bad theology produce good living? Could a person become a properly informed Christian by reading this fiction? I believe that "no" is the correct answer to both questions.

7. Are you not being a bit overly critical? In the novel Young nowhere confesses to believe in universalism; he even publicly denies it.

Yet in his past Young has acknowledged it personally, and his editors have publicly admitted that they spent over a year seeking to remove his universalism from the novel. Also, what Young has confessed in the past is belief in universal reconciliation, or Christian universalism, not universalism *per se*. It is certainly possible that Young who once confessed that he has been transformed by what he terms universal reconciliation is unaware of just how pervasively universalism continues to influence his thinking and writing. And all three writers-- Paul Young, Brian McLaren and Rob Bell—explicitly seek to deconstruct the evangelical view of hell for something that they think is better.

It is a common claim of universalist authors that they do not want to be pinned down. One of the tenets of its creed is that there is no creed that is binding. In the 1920's a universalist was asked, "Where do universalists stand?" He replied: "The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move" (from Cassara, *History of Universalism*). Young has used almost the exact same words when challenged about his embrace of Christian universalism.

8. What do you believe will be the total impact of this resurgence of universalist fiction?

Universalism first came to America through the preaching of John Murray in the 1760's. Employing fiction and other preaching it swept through the Colonies for the next 50 or more years until it was adequately refuted by evangelicals such as Isaac Backus. With the attack on the authority of the Bible in the last 50 years and the growing ignorance of the teaching of the Bible there is once again a fertile soil for Universalism. *The Shack* and the other books by universalists cited above have the potential to deceive millions of Christians. This challenge to the Bible's teaching is the greatest in the last 200 years.