

Christians duped by manipulation trick No. 703

By Jim Fletcher, 02/27/2014

I titled this installment of *Writer's Bloc* as I did because a person could spend all his time researching and writing about the glacier of propaganda that is slowly but surely covering the evangelical world and write hundreds of columns about it. The subject of language manipulation (another label would be "controlling the narrative") is a subject that fascinates me at the same time I find it deeply disturbing.

The question is, how many care?

I've written in the past how Christian writers like Donald Miller just make stuff up but are provided secure cover by evangelical leaders at the highest levels. Specifically, Miller's Nov. 19, 2012, blog post, in which he accused the Israel Defense Forces of war crimes – without documentation, save for the word of the PLO – is still in cyberspace. No one will call him to account for the lies (he has never responded to my numerous requests to provide proof of his charges).

Further, I wonder just how many "average" Christians in the pews are aware of how they are manipulated through the language used by well-known Christian leaders. Since at least the 1990s, when movements like Promise Keepers kicked celebrity worship into high gear and sealed the networks of the so-called (aptly called, actually) Evangelical Industrial Complex, top leaders like Rick Warren have controlled the narrative to a large degree.

What I mean specifically is that they have Christian media in a death-grip so that the masses hear what the leaders want them to hear. They hear what Dear Leader tells us is truth.

For example, if author Warren Smith chillingly and accurately documents the New Age roots in Warren's teachings ... how many hear about that? And, how many care? After all, Pastor Rick is "America's Pastor," according to *TIME* magazine. And, it is becoming easier and easier for pastors to simply parrot (okay, outright lift) Warren's sermons. Or Max Lucado. Or Andy Stanley. Pick your guru.

And Smith sells his thousands of books, but Warren has his millions. A writer like Smith is held in disdain by evangelical leadership; Warren is lauded.

But the problem is much deeper, occurring 24/7.

In an August 2013 column by Margaret Feinberg in Charisma magazine, I saw just how far the New Progressives within evangelicalism will go to push their agenda through the manipulation of language.

Today, one of the most hated doctrines for New Progressives/Emergents/Seeker-Driven/Purpose-Driven/Church Growth adherents is Bible prophecy. Young-earth creationists might be knuckle-dragging anti-intellectuals, but prophecy teachers and students are downright dangerous. After all, we control U.S. foreign policy (say that with a straight face in the West Wing) and thirst for bloody Armageddon, right?

Feinberg, a 30-something writer from Colorado who has a winsome style, complete with the requisite self-effacing, humor-laced biographical sketch is, I think it's fair to say, representative of the New Progressives. She speaks at Catalyst conferences, emphasizes that she shies away from controversy to focus on issues more comfortable for evangelical millennials and is endorsed by the usual suspects: Ann Voskamp, Bob Goff, Gabe Lyons and Mark Galli, etc.

Back to the Charisma article, entitled: "What If Jesus Doesn't Come Back This Year?"

Feinberg, as a writer, manipulates the reader (as she does the subject of her piece) right from the start: "One question that caught me a little off-guard recently – with no table or restroom in sight [so she could flee!] – was whether we are living in the end times. It's a simple question, but what surprised me most about it was not the question itself, but rather who was asking it.

"The person wasn't someone who had stayed up too late watching Jack Van Impe on TBN. Rather, he was a young, hip 20-something. I could tell from the sincerity in his eyes that he really wanted to know. And

perhaps he was tapping into a question we all quietly ask ourselves from time to time.

“Are we living in the end times?”

“I recognized something about the question. After you interview enough people you discover a simple but profound journalistic truth: If you ask the wrong question, then you’ll get the wrong answer. So I gently prompted the 20-something to reword the question.

“I think you mean, ‘What if we are living in the end times?’”

Notice, dear reader, that’s not what the young man asked. Here we slide like a greased pig right down the slippery slope of leftist propaganda. Feinberg did not want to deal with the real question. She also could not abide that the young man might turn into one of those goons who watch Jack Van Impe. She couldn’t go down the path illuminated by his question. That might involved discussing modern Israel, ancient prophecies, etc.

To further ensnare the unsuspecting young man (and the rest of us), Feinberg added this gem: “Without an exit sign in sight, I continued, ‘And that begs the question, What if we’re not?’”

The reversal in topic is complete. Now we are not having an honest discussion about if we are living in the end times. Rather we are traveling that astral plane of explaining why we are not!

Amazing.

Do you understand what Margaret Feinberg has done? She has marginalized credible Bible prophecy by reframing the question. “Profound journalistic truth”? Where? Is she seriously positing that she is pursuing truth by pulling a bait-and-switch with a question she doesn’t want to answer?

This kind of thing is done all the time in evangelical circles, by leaders and emerging leaders.

Do you seriously trust your youth leader or even senior pastor with what I call the “Catalyst Method”? The Catalyst Method employs dozens of bright Millennials who pose as evangelicals. They blog, podcast, and otherwise work behind the scenes to push a leftist agenda. It might revolve around a total emphasis on social justice issues (sans teaching the actual Gospel). It might subtly but effectively lampoon a traditional belief or biblical doctrine. It might involve – hey, Don Miller, bro! – lying about Israel.

But in keeping up with the Progressive/Emergent style, it’s a full-time job trying to get at the truth.

When I tried to inquire of Feinberg about why she manipulated not only the question of the article, but the poor 20-something fellow as well, her assistant said she was too busy. Then when I inquired recently, again, the assistant invoked Feinberg’s unfortunate battle with breast cancer. I was told that a better time to ask might be January 2015.

Happily, on Feinberg’s website she mentioned in January 2014 that she had had a good report from her doctor and was gearing up for a full speaking and writing schedule. So I sincerely wonder why she couldn’t find time to answer my couple of questions.

I think the answer is similar to why Catalyst’s Brad Lomenick refuses to say why he invited the radical Cornel West and other leftists to speak at a Catalyst conference.

They don’t want to answer. They don’t want people asking questions as to why a progressive, leftist worldview is being foisted upon the American evangelical community.

An added disturbing chapter in my Margaret Feinberg tale is my inquiry of Ed Stetzer, who has endorsed Feinberg’s books (titles like “The Organic God,” “The Sacred Echo,” “Scouting the Divine”). Stetzer is a key leader in the Southern Baptist Convention and president of LifeWay Research. I had asked him why he endorses Feinberg’s books, but more importantly, why she seems to be mainstreamed within the SBC (I don’t believe Feinberg is Southern Baptist). Her books bulge from LifeWay shelves.

Twice in our exchanges, Stetzer mentioned Feinberg's battle with cancer. Except that I hadn't mentioned cancer. I had asked specific questions about other things. I will tell you quite honestly that I think leaders do this all the time in order to deflect questions. If you ask me why I am a Christian Zionist, but I tell you I am battling a deadly disease, I am attempting to distract you.

That isn't honest.

A hallmark of the New Evangelical leadership is a rigid refusal to answer clear, simple questions.

When I asked Feinberg's assistant three questions – what is her denominational background (if any?); what is her eschatological view; what is her affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention – I received the following answer, the statement of faith on Feinberg's website: “As far as the story of my faith journey, it is accessible through books like ‘The Organic God’ and ‘The Sacred Echo.’ I feel like through those books and others I clearly and vulnerably express my faith in ways that a few sentences or check-this-box approach could never really cover. That said, I fully embrace the statement of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals as well the The Lausanne Covenant.”

That's fascinating and all, but it didn't answer any of my questions.

As to Stetzer and his endorsements of Feinberg, he answered, “I endorse her because I think she is a gifted writer and makes people think.”

Feinberg might be a gifted writer, and she might make people think, but those are poor reasons for endorsing a writer who has real influence, especially with young people.

In one of Stetzer's Amazon endorsements for Feinberg, we see other things: “Margaret Feinberg is a wonderful storyteller, helping us delve more deeply into the narrative of the Scriptures and discover truths we often overlook.”

I strongly disagree, and I invite you to read Feinberg's books for yourself, those of you who still care if a biblical worldview is important.

You see, I can't trust a leader who twists words and maligns traditional biblical views.

No matter how winsome said leader might be.