

## ***THE USE OF "STORY" TO DISPLACE TRUTH***

Stories can be used to illustrate truth, but stories can also be used to displace truth, as illustrated in two cases below.

The first example concerns educator Harold Rugg's use of "story" to displace biblical truths inconvenient to Rugg's revisionist educational goals. The second case considers the use of "story" in postmodern biblical scholarship. In both of these cases, one from the educational establishment and one from the community of theological scholarship, the use of "story" was a move to displace biblical history, especially the history of creation.

Evangelical scholars have sometimes fallen prey to this undesirable use of "story." An example of evangelical ambivalence on this point is discussed at the end of the paper.

### **Case #1: The Use of "Story" by Harold Rugg and the Educational Establishment**

As the twentieth century dawned, a program to secularize the public schools was underway. Harold Rugg (1886-1960) defined the beliefs that would be conditioned into the minds of school children. John Dewey (1859-1952) had provided the general goals; Rugg provided the specifics. Rugg was one of Dewey's "disciples."<sup>1</sup> Rugg also owed an ideological debt to Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949), for like Thorndike, **Rugg's goal was to replace traditional, biblically-oriented curricula with secularized versions.**

Thorndike had led the way in aggressively discrediting the vestiges of classical education in the public schools, leaving an open field for Rugg's new curricula to occupy. Indeed, under Thorndike, "[f]or the first time in the history of American education, psychological sanction was given for including in the curriculum such courses as the newer social studies and various technical subjects. ..." **Thus began vocational education and the slow demise of the liberal arts.** "Those who adhered to the traditional theory of a classical schooling faced unrelenting, and increasingly hostile, attacks from Thorndike's followers."<sup>2</sup>

Rugg answered two questions which Dewey had posed but not fully answered: (1) which beliefs would be employed in conditioning school children; and (2) who would decide the direction which the conditioning should take. Rugg responded (1) that conditioning would be employed to force a belief in collective, socialist government, and (2) that a plan would be managed by overseers to guarantee this outcome.

Rugg did not reveal the identity of the overseers, but from the fact that he was working within the framework of the National Education Association (NEA) with hundreds of specialists, researchers, writers, and editors leaves little doubt that the "overseers" were the movers and shakers of the educational and psychological establishment.<sup>3</sup> In Rugg's prime years, therefore, the overseers would have included Dewey and Thorndike, both of whom were active then.

Rugg's vision of the future was that "through the schools of the world we shall disseminate a new conception of government - one that will embrace all of the collective activities of men; one that will postulate the need for scientific control and operation

of economic activities in the interests of all people."<sup>4</sup> "Scientific control" was actually a euphemism for central planning.

Rugg advocated "*First and foremost*, the development of a new philosophy of life and education which will be fully appropriate to the new social order; *Second*, the building of an adequate plan for the production of a new race of educational workers [a master race concept]; *Third*, the making of new activities and materials for the curriculum."<sup>5</sup> In other words, **Rugg's goal was to devise new curricula for the purpose of building a centrally planned new world order manned by suitably conditioned laborers**, thus echoing Thorndike's vision of the vocationally-trained and compliant factory worker.<sup>6</sup>

Though the NEA was engaged in revising all curricula, Rugg's specialty was the gathering of civics, history, and geography into a new discipline called "social studies." Most people have had social studies in school, so it might seem strange that questions could be raised about such an apparently harmless subject. As the old saying goes, however, the devil is in the details.

Rugg himself asked, "Why one general course rather than the separate subjects of history, geography, and civics?" One could respond that there is in fact nothing inherently evil about grouping these three traditional subjects under one heading. But Rugg's answer hinted at an agenda which he did not forthrightly disclose: "Because the chief aim is to understand modern life and how it came to be."<sup>7</sup> Rather than accepting this answer at face value, one should be aware that **traditional civics, history, and geography had already been explaining to generations of students how things "came to be."** Rugg's dilemma was that he did not care for the old explanations.

**Before Rugg's curriculum revisions, for example, history books typically began with the biblical story of creation.** An old United States history text began: "All our readers know that the history of mankind begins with Adam and Eve, about 6,000 years ago ..." <sup>8</sup> Indeed, **advocates of the new social studies had a special dislike for biblical creation, because it threatened the entire ideological edifice for which Wundt (1832-1920) had laid the (evolutionary) foundations.**

Biblical creation threatened the attempt to shape a revisionist (non-biblical) morality. For instance, in the context of condemning capital punishment, one activist railed against biblical creation, lumping it together with other concepts he disliked, some biblical (e.g., biblical authority, biblical inspiration) and some not (e.g., astrology, witchcraft): "... capital punishment is scientifically and historically on a par with astrological medicine, the belief in witchcraft, the Fundamentalist view of Biblical authorship, and the rejection of biological evolution. ... [Advocacy of] the death penalty [is] no more valid in a scientific sense than astrology, witchcraft, the thesis of the literal and direct inspiration of the Bible, or the doctrine of a special creation of the world and its inhabitants in ... 4004 B.C."<sup>9</sup> **Thus the new social studies was an umbrella to cover revisions that might otherwise have been more obviously objectionable.**

Rugg further explained that in using his social studies texts, "The readers ... will encounter a second novel characteristic: *the frequent use of dramatic episodes*."<sup>10</sup> In other words, in the new social studies, stories, not facts, were to be the vehicle for guiding the student into the desired conclusions. Why was this device necessary? Because the facts of science and history show that evolution is false and that socialistic collectivism is unworkable. **Thus "dramatic episodes" – stories – were required to give the new social studies an appearance of plausibility.**

The opening pages of a Rugg social studies text were radically different from those of older texts. **In true evolutionary fashion, Rugg began with stories of change, not creation.**<sup>11</sup> Next, Rugg raised the question - thereby implicitly suggesting - whether people are "wealth," i.e., resources like cattle or minerals: "Mr. Hilbert has a wife and three children. Are they wealth?" Rugg cleverly did not answer this question, but a previously unthinkable concept was now up for discussion: "Evidently we must decide what we mean by wealth ..."<sup>12</sup> **Biblically, people are not resources but are stewards of the earth's resources.** However, a collectivist centrally-planned state requires that men and women be viewed as resources to be exploited for the good of the state.

**Rugg's push toward collectivism was not lost on the parents of school children:** "By the end of the [1930s] several social-science textbooks were being condemned by the American Legion, the Advertising Federation of America, and the New York State Economic Council. In particular, the books written by Harold Rugg, at Teachers College, Columbia University, were most frequently denounced. ...

"One of the first attacks occurred in August 1936 when a criticism of Rugg's textbooks appeared in the *National Republic*. Entitled 'Sovietizing Our Children,' the article attempted to show that Rugg's books tended toward 'collectivism'."<sup>13</sup>

Further displacing the Bible, Rugg also ignored biblical reasons for America's wealth. The influence of America's godly heritage was replaced with a racist explanation: "Americans are known over the world as energetic people. Why is this? Our pep, our energy, is one of the greatest causes of our wealth."<sup>14</sup> **This specious reasoning led to the conclusion that other peoples are inferior, and was a way of conditioning students to accept racist, eugenic views.**

A Rugg text had a photograph of "energetic" (white) Canadian factory workers *walking* home that it contrasted with a picture of (black) "workers in a hot tropical country like the Bahamas" who happened to be working *sitting down*. The text editorialized, "Note the contrast between the energetic look of the [Canadians] and the [supposedly inferior] look of people in the tropics ..."<sup>15</sup> In World War II, the crushing defeat of Hitler's Germany blasted Rugg's concept of racial superiority.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, Rugg's displacement of biblical truth is entrenched in the educational system and has been implemented with increasing aggressiveness since his death. **The illegitimate use of "story" continues as a way of conditioning students to think unbiblically.** The infamous

stories in values clarification curricula are a well known example.

## **Case #2: The Use of "Story" by the Postmodern Community of Biblical Scholarship**

Until the rise of modernism, the Bible was taken as a record of actual events occurring in real history. Modernism denied any significant historicity to much of the Bible, especially Genesis 1-11, but archeological discoveries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries made the case for wholesale rejection of Scriptural historicity increasingly difficult. Rather than forthrightly acknowledging the historicity of Scripture, however, postmodernism has drawn on a modified concept of the Bible as "story." Eugene Merrill explained the situation as follows:

"[There is] another approach to Old Testament study [besides the view that regards the Old Testament as occurring in actual history], an approach which sees in the Old Testament not so much a chronological history based upon historical data [but] a 'sacred history,' or, to use the popular German term, *Heilsgeschichte* ('history of salvation').

"This 'salvation history' is not a history in terms in which we are accustomed to regard this discipline. It is an interpretative history which expresses Israel's faith in Yahweh and His mighty acts on their behalf. That is, the Old Testament is a witness to Israel's faith, and though it has an historical background, its special and individual events may not be history in the commonly conceived sense. For example, the Exodus is a Biblical event which fits in nicely with the historical milieu of Egypt and Canaan during this period, but because of its supernatural character obviously cannot be considered factual history. ...

"The reason for such an interpretation of the Old Testament should be obvious. When the critics realized that they could no longer scout the essential historical reliability of the Scriptures [because archeological discoveries had confirmed the historicity of the Bible], they were faced with the difficult task of explaining the miracles and other supernatural content. The only feasible thing to do was to admit that the historical framework of Old Testament history was valid, but that the miraculous events were merely prophetic interpretations of what God did in history. Even prophets who recorded the events did not believe that they happened exactly as they recorded them, but they 'read into' the events their own theological judgments as to the meaning of the events. This, in effect, strips the Old Testament of its miraculous content without denying it the essential historicity which it has been proven to possess."<sup>17</sup>

**In other words, the postmodernist use of "story" parallels the use of "story" in the educational establishment.** In both arenas, "story" has been used to obscure an inconvenient biblical historicity.

However, the postmodernist claim that the Bible is "story" in the sense just discussed is logically impossible: "The conservative response is that one cannot reasonably postulate a dichotomy between types of histories without robbing the term

'history' of its accepted definitions. How can it be said, indeed, that there is more than one kind of history, that which describes the sum total of the past? Anything less than this is less than history and must be relegated to the realm of pure myth."<sup>18</sup>

### A Case of Evangelical Ambivalence on the Use of "Story"

Evangelicals rightly decry the postmodern use of "story." However, postmodern modes of thought have thoroughly infected even conservative theological circles. The result is that evangelicals sometimes find it all too easy to slip into the postmodernist use of "story" to avoid confronting biblical truths too much at variance with modern thinking.

**Evangelicals may find themselves formally denouncing the postmodern use of story, yet simultaneously following a postmodern mode of thought in addressing the hard questions of the Bible.** This is especially true in origins discussions in which biblical creation is in disagreement with evolution generally, and particularly with astronomical evolution.

As mentioned above, it is fashionable "to admit that the historical framework of Old Testament history was valid, but that the miraculous events were merely prophetic interpretations of what God did in history."<sup>19</sup> This language is typical of the "framework hypothesis."

The framework hypothesis originated with Arie Noordtjij in 1924.<sup>20</sup> **The framework hypothesis views Genesis 1 not as a literal historical account,** but as a "theology of the Sabbath" in which days 1, 2, and 3 parallel days 4, 5, and 6.<sup>21</sup>

**In other words, the framework hypothesis is a kind of postmodernist "story" claiming the creation did indeed occur, but that its days were not literal and its timing is not datable.** This treatment makes biblical creation appear to be compatible with conventional big bang theory. There was a "moment of creation" at the big bang, but its date can be fixed only with respect to secular chronological claims, not with reference to biblical chronology which has now been morphed into merely another pious "story."

Evangelicals Tim Morris and Don Petcher, authors of *Science and Grace: God's Reign in the Natural Sciences* (Crossway, 2006), have more or less adopted the framework hypothesis as providing some of their terminology, but without wholly approving it. On one hand, Morris and Petcher refuse to capitulate totally to the revisionist use of "story." They write:

"We believe that [the "story"] metaphor is a biblically warranted one, and yet we use 'story' here with a bit of caution given our current Postmodern cultural context. Postmodern references to 'story' or 'narrative' often carry with them a relativist sense such that 'story,' as a subjective account of the meaning of events or experiences, fully eclipses the reality or significance of the actual historical events themselves. Of course we are not using story in this relativistic sense at all."<sup>22</sup>

This sounds good, but later Morris and Petcher hedge on this position, showing that they have not carefully thought out the ramifications that should logically follow from their formal denial of the postmodern position. **In fact they really**

**buy into the postmodern position in those aspects of origins that are hardest to accommodate to naturalistic thinking.**

For instance, Morris and Petcher say "that the whole of creation in time and space [should be seen as] *divine theater*." They continue, "[A]lthough the story is played out in created time ... there is a sense in which the story is not strictly attached to time per se. In the Scriptures [there is] *supernatural 'license'* in telling the story ... *prophetic pronouncements* that find fulfillment in temporarily creative ways ... in which historical times and God's 'time' frame appear to be drastically different" [emphasis added].<sup>23</sup>

The terms *divine theater* and *prophetic pronouncements*, while not unbiblical, are characteristic language of the framework hypothesis. But the concept of *supernatural license* is an extrabiblical construct. Further, **the dichotomy between historical time and God's "time" frame appears nowhere in Scripture and is a distinctive concept of the framework hypothesis.** Morris and Petcher later echo the effect of accepting this extrabiblical dichotomy when they complain about "the twentieth-century evangelical and fundamentalist fixation on the when and how of creation," claiming that the *who*, *what*, and *why* of creation are "more settled Christian teachings."<sup>24</sup> **But before the advent of modern evolution with Lyell and Darwin in the 1800s, the when and how of creation had also been settled teachings throughout the church for the better part of two millennia.**

To Morris and Petcher, the *when* and *how* of creation are not to be discussed as having occurred in historical time, but are to be seen as having occurred only in "God's time frame." Thus seeking ordinary historical answers to the *when* and *how* of creation is an exercise in futility. Morris and Petcher have espoused the position of the framework hypothesis on this matter, surely unwittingly given their earlier formal denial of the postmodern position. **Thus has the illegitimate use of "story" affected the thought processes even of conservatives.**

### Notes

1 Paolo Lionni, *The Leipzig Connection: The Systematic Destruction of American Education*, Heron Books, 1993, p. 84. For further background on Rugg's, Thorndike's, and Dewey's ideological antecedents, see J. Henry, "Psychology, Education, the Church, and the Misuse of Science," <creation concepts.org>, 2005.

2 S. Alexander Ripa, *Education in a Free Society: An American History*, David McKay, 1976, pp. 240-241.

3 H. Rugg, *An Introduction to American Civilization*, Ginn, 1929, p. x. This page lists some of the prominent staff whom Rugg supervised. Given the ideological connections of the educational establishment with the world of psychology, it should be no surprise that both establishments were now unified in curriculum revision. Incidentally, Ginn Publishing Company, now Silver Burdett & Ginn, was founded by a Wundt protegee in the late 1800s with the goal of implementing the new humanist psychology in its textbooks.

Though Rugg did not identify the overseers, he explicitly stated his view that they exist. In the context of discussing who would oversee the social studies curriculum, Rugg asked, "Who knows best what these great institutions, problems, and trends are? Specialists on the frontier of thought who see society from a height [i.e., those who literally oversee]." (Rugg, p. iv).

5 Lionni, p. 85, citing Rugg, *The Great Technology*, p. 258.

6 Rugg's vision should not be regarded as strange or extreme. The Bible predicts that eventually, the "god of this world" will attempt to cobble together a one world state; those not attuned to God's purposes have tended to fall in with this goal throughout history. No "new world order" plan has succeeded, and, as the Bible makes clear, none will, excepting the final kingdom established by the Lord Himself.

7 Rugg, *An Introduction to American Civilization*, p. iv.

8 S.G. Goodrich, *A Pictorial History of the United States*, J.H. Butler, Philadelphia, 1875, pp. 11-12. This was the history book my great grandfather used in the 1870s teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. In those pre-Rugg days, this was considered a "secular" text, and the one-room schoolhouse was a *public* school.

9 Jeremiah P. Shaloo, "Harry Elmer Barnes: Criminologist and Penal Historian *Malgri Lui*," in Arthur Goddard (editor), *Harry Elmer Barnes: Learned Crusader*, Ralph Myles, 1968, p. 468, citing H.E. Barnes, *The Story of Punishment*, Stratford, 1930, pp. 248-249.

Significantly, Barnes was a protege of G. Stanley Hall (who in turn was one of Wundt's students): "[Barnes] was most fortunate in finding a friend and counsellor in Granville Stanley Hall [at Clark University]" (Richard Dewey, "Harry Elmer Barnes' Contribution to the History of Social Thought," in Goddard, p. 399). Richard Dewey was son of John Dewey.

10 Rugg, *An Introduction to American Civilization*, pp. iv, v.

11 *ibid.*, pp. 4-10. 12 *ibid.*, pp. 14-15. 13 Ripa, pp. 292-293.

14 Ripa, pp. 33.

15 Ripa, pp. 38-39.

16 Long before Rugg, the Bible had taught that "God hath of one blood made all the nations of men" (Acts 17:26), showing that racism is wrong. Of course, this biblical teaching was omitted from Rugg's curricula.

17 Eugene H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament*, Craig Press, 1972/1966, pp. 22-23

18 *ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

19 *ibid.*, p. 23.

20 Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, Baker; 1964; reprinted Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976, p. 44.

21 Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (David G. Preston, translator), IVP, 1984, p. 51.

22 Tim Morris and Don Petcher, *Science and Grace: God's Reign in the Natural Sciences*, Crossway, 2006, pp. 165-166.

23 *ibid.*, p. 166.

24 *ibid.*, pp. 176-177.