

The Shack: The New Pilgrim's Progress?

The Professor: 'This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!' - Eugene Petersen

The Pastor: 'Wrapped in creative brilliance, *The Shack* is spiritually profound, theologically enlightening and life impacting' - Steve Berger

The Pundit: 'This book was absolutely amazing... so powerful and moving.....It made me feel so peaceful and at ease... this book was fantastic' - Catie

The Presenter: 'The Shack will change the way you think about God forever.' Kathie Lee Gifford - Co-host, NBC's *Today Show*

The Pedant (or Prophet): 'Sugary sweet sentimental sap. Heresy'

The Shack is the latest multi million publishing phenomenon from the US. It tells the story of Mack, who is struggling to come to terms with the murder of his young daughter. Mack receives a note from God telling him to come to the shack where his daughter was murdered. There he meets the Trinity: Papa, an African American woman (the Father), a Middle Eastern workman (the Son), and an Asian girl (the Holy Spirit). There then follow several conversations and experiences as "the Trinity" help Mack.

The book has been warmly received and is being seen by many Christians as a great way to communicate the Gospel. I came to this book with an open mind, and yet as I read it I became increasingly depressed and alarmed. Why?

I don't mind that that *The Shack* is not particularly well-written (I found myself getting bored with what is in effect a sermon in story form). Nor is it a major concern that the book is full of the sugary sentimentalism which results in the Disneyfication of Christianity. No - where it really matters is in the New Age spirituality, the heretical doctrine and the hyped commercialism.

Firstly, there is the now familiar emergent/New Age attack upon the Bible: 'God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects.... Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt, or was that guilt edges?' Who needs the Bible when "the Holy Spirit" says, 'you will learn to hear my thoughts in yours'? Anyway, the Bible is not "me" enough. As Mack puts it, 'I guess part of me would like to believe that God would care enough about me to send me a note'. That's what we need. A note from God. Personal. Handwritten. Not a book that tells us about what God has really given.

And of course the "Church". 'Jesus' says, 'I don't create institutions, never have, never will'. There is an element of truth in that, but there is also a considerable element of destructive falsehood. It is Jesus who died for the Church, and Jesus who provided apostles, prophets, teachers, etc., for the Church. It is an organic body, but it is still a body with structure and order - a structure and order that our touchy-feely conformists can all too easily dismiss with a wave of their "it's just an institution" wand. It gets worse. "Jesus" says, 'I have no desire to make them Christians' (speaking of those who were Buddhists, Mormons, Baptists, or Muslims). Really? I thought the point of Jesus's death was that we would become Christ's Ones.

Not surprisingly, there is a completely inadequate doctrine of sin. God does not want to punish sin. He wants to cure it. So unless everyone is saved, it looks as though God's will is thwarted. Which leads us on to the implicit universalism in *The Shack*. Mack asks "Papa" if there is anyone she is not especially fond of. To which the response is 'Nope, I haven't been able to find any. Guess that's jes the way I is.' Of course, the notion that God loves everyone equally fits well with the Disney generation, but it is not biblical or logical.

The major heresy in the whole book is the way the second commandment is completely ignored. One assumes that the Lord had a good reason for telling us not to make an idol in the form of anything to represent Him. Are we now saying that we know better than God? Does God not know best how to reveal Himself without us getting in the way by creating our own images?

Finally, there is the hyped commercialism. At the end of the book we are asked to "continue our experience" of *The Shack* at the website and to participate in The Missy Project, which in effect means spreading the word, lobbying to get it made into a film, blogging, and of course selling and buying as many copies of the book as we can. We are urged not 'to make it an advertisement but just to "share"'.

This book is dangerous. Not because it challenges us, or makes us think about ourselves. But rather because it could, as Kathie Lee Gifford points out, change the way that some people think about God forever (or at least until eternity). If you want to know about God, then read the Bible. If you want to know God, then believe the Bible. If you want to see how far down the road the church in the Western World has gone from reasonable, historical, biblical, Christ-centred Christianity, then read *The Shack*.

The Editor

