

THE MOVIE, “THE SHACK”

How the Film Is Anti-Christian, Anti-Marriage, Anti-American

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The film “The Shack” will soon appear in theaters nationwide and probably beyond. If it is as popular as the novel on which it is based it will be a blockbuster.

For those who do not know, this is the movie version of the fictional novel, *The Shack*. This novel has sold upwards of 20 million copies over the last several years. It was on the *NY Times* best seller list for many months. It made the author a billionaire. This is quite amazing when we consider that this was written by a writer claiming to be a Christian and intended for Christians to give a Christian explanation for why people suffer. Obviously the story has resonated with a multitude of people, whether Christians or not, who have wondered about the love of God, eternity, and why Jesus Christ came into the world.

The story is about Mac and many Christians like him who are struggling with serious life questions and uncertainty about their faith. They have been challenged by severe suffering beyond their control. They feel that God does not care about them and perhaps has even abandoned them. Many are angry at God. Like Mac they may come to a shack where they come face to face with God. *The Shack* provides an explanation for their pain and anger, and a way of escape—back to God.

But deeper, more gnawing questions often lie behind the surface struggles. If God is a good God why do so many people suffer? If God is a good God why are so many people—those who are non-Christians—destined for eternal suffering? Why should people suffer everlastingly for sin and for sins committed during a short life time? If God is love, why does he judge people and send them to hell? At one time or another all have thought about such heavy questions.

It is really these difficult questions that *The Shack* seeks to answer. But the answer is surprising. The answer is not to explain the Bible’s teaching on these matters but to provide a new understanding of who God is—a God who is all loving and whose love limits his judgment and justice. Paul Young says that Christians have misunderstood God, indeed, the whole Trinity.

And this is where the rub comes in.

It is well known that the novel became a focus of controversy. This controversy swirls around the author, William Paul Young, and whether he has tried to sell subliminally his beliefs as a universalist in his novel. There are many who believe that the novel has betrayed Christian belief, that it is heresy. There are others who think not.

So *The Shack* is hotly debated.

I became involved in the controversy because I have known the author, Paul Young, for over a couple decades. He and I founded a Christian forum in the late 1990’s and we entertained

all sorts of questions about Christian belief. Then in 2004 Paul presented a 103-page paper in which he said that he was rejecting his “evangelical paradigm” and embracing universal reconciliation. This is the belief that God is so good and loving that he cannot judge anyone. So everyone will be saved either before or after dying. It means that unbelievers in hell and the Devil and his angels will be “corrected” or “purified” by their sufferings in hell. They will repent, believe the gospel about Jesus Christ, and enter into heaven. In the final end hell will cease to exist; there will be none left. God’s love triumphs over all.

Such universalism is not new. It was first expressed in the 3rd century by an early church leader and then was declared heretical in the 6th century. It came to America in the 1740’s and was quite successful during the next century. But evangelical Christians held the teaching up to the scrutiny of the Bible and always found it in error.

The month following Young’s presentation I presented a paper to oppose his and argued for the Christian understanding of the Bible. But Paul was not present. He stopped attending our forum and began writing his novel. After *The Shack* was first completed a couple of his pastor friends who opposed the blatant universalism in it have testified that they spent a whole year trying to remove the universalism. Then in 2007 the novel was published and became a best-seller. In 2010, I published my book, *Burning Down the Shack*, to expose its heresy in the light of the Bible.

The big question that remains is this: Were the editors able to remove all the universalist teaching in the novel and now in the film? Do the novel and the film promote universalism? The only way to prove the answer is to hold up the various statements in the novel and in the film to the scrutiny of the Bible and to compare them to the major teachings of universalism.

What do we discover? *The Shack* makes many questionable, even heretical statements. Here are a dozen or so examples from the book. Papa (depicting God the Father) says that the first aspect of his being is not that he is Almighty but that he limits himself. The Trinity of three persons became “fully human.” Jesus “has never drawn on his nature as God to do anything.” “God cannot act apart from love.” The whole Trinity was crucified. “God is not who you think I am.” God doesn’t punish sin but cures it. In a relationship with God there is no authority and no submission. God cannot send any of his children to an eternity of hell just because they sin against him. God will not “condemn most to an eternity of torment.” “Mercy triumphs over justice because of love.” God is “now fully reconciled to the world.” “In Jesus, I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me.”

Most of these statements are in the film. All of them are found in the expressed teaching of universalism (as even Wikipedia shows). And if this is so, then the implications are staggering.

Many other reviewers who know nothing of Young’s background also find this heresy in his novel and film. And through the ages Christians have provided better responses to the challenge of suffering without denying the faith.

Young is especially opposed to the institutions of marriage, the church, and the government. He has Papa call them a “diabolical scheme,” “a man-created trinity of terrors that ravages the earth and deceives those I care about. . . . It’s all false.”

In light of the preceding, Young’s novel is a subtle attempt to change the Biblical teaching about God, the Trinity, judgment, eternal destiny and hell, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the institutions which God created that give order, meaning, permanence, and pleasure to culture and nations. The movie version is a subliminal selling of universalism.

It is not going too far to identify Young and other universalists as terrorists against the evangelical church, as anarchists against this country and every country and our culture with its affirmation of marriage, and as deceivers inspired by the Devil himself to undermine the truth of the Bible about the nature of God, the Trinity, the church, and who his children are. Jesus and the Apostles made similar judgments about false teachers in their day (see Matthew 7:13-16; Galatians 1:7-9; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; and the Book of Jude). We should do no less in our day for the greater glory of God and the truth that is in our Lord Jesus Christ.