

The Shack Deception

Introduction

Jesus prophetically warned against the deceptive influence of false prophets in the last days (**Luk. 21**). During this time, He said, there would be a great falling away from Biblical truth. Most of the New Testament writers warn against the same thing. In our day books and ministries that spread things contrary to what is taught in the Bible have become very popular in Christian circles. The Biblical warning found in **1 John 4:1**: *"...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits..."*, is ignored by many Christians. This is, I believe, as result of a wrong understanding of what the Bible teaches concerning judgment. Few understand the difference between judging doctrine and judging character. Good men can spread wrong doctrine. Paul warned the Galatians:

*"A little leaven {a slight inclination to error, or a few false teachers} leavens the whole lump {perverts the whole conception of faith, or misleads the whole church} (**Gal. 5:9**, Amp. Bible).*

Against this back ground it can be understood why Scripture commands that what is taught in the church should be tested (**1 Cor. 14:29, Rev. 2:2**).

Already during the first few years of the early church Paul had to warn Christians that *"another Jesus"* and *"another gospel"* was being preached (**2 Cor. 11:4**). The same thing is happening in the church today. To illustrate that *"another Jesus"* is being presented to the world, we will make use of a few examples taken from William P. Young's very popular book, *The Shack*, which is read by many all over the world.

The Shack

Although *The Shack* is written as fiction, Eugene Peterson, author of the liberal "translation" of the Bible called *The Message*, has this to say about it in his endorsement on the front cover of the book:

"This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress did for his. It's that good."

If still in doubt why this book was written, listen to what William P. Young's Father God, a black woman, says to Mack:

*"For me to appear to you as a woman and suggest you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors, to help you keep from falling so easily back into your **religious conditioning**...To reveal myself to you as a very large, white grandfather figure...would simply reinforce your religious stereotypes, and this weekend is not about reinforcing your religious stereotypes" (p.93, My emphasis).*

This book was written to break down religious concepts in the minds of people. Religious conditioning? Is that what Young calls Biblical faith? Was Jesus wrong when He taught His disciples to pray *"Our **Father** Who is in heaven?"* (My emphasis). Was His concept of God as His Father also a

religious stereotype that had to be broken down?

The Shack's Crucifixion

How is the Biblical message of the crucifixion portrayed in this book? In answer to Mack's question about the scars on Papa's wrists, she explains that she did not leave Christ to suffer alone on the cross, "*We were there together*" (p.96). This version of what happened on the cross completely contradicts Biblical facts about the substitutionary death of Christ. According to the Bible it was the Father who punished His Son on behalf of sinners:

"...we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, ...the punishment that brought us peace was upon him..." (Is. 53:4-5).

If the Father had been with Jesus on the cross, why did He cry out: "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" (**Matt. 27:46**). In one line *The Shack* negates a foundational truth concerning the doctrine of salvation.

Is the view expressed in *The Shack* concerning the crucifixion limited to the imagination of an individual writer, or is there something more behind it? To try and answer this question, consider what Alan Jones, another postmodern writer, has to say about the suffering of Christ on the cross:

"The church's fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it."

(Alan Jones, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit without Disconnecting Your Mind*, Hoboken, N.J.:John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005, p.132).

He goes on and makes the following blasphemous statement:

"Penal substitution was the name of this vile doctrine" (p.168, My emphasis).

Alan Jones is but one of many postmodern preachers and writers whose purpose it is to "*reimagine*" Biblical Christianity. Some liberal preachers have referred to the Biblical doctrine of the substitutionary death of Christ as a "*slaughter house religion*" (Horton, *Church History and Things to Come*, (Pensacola: A Beka Books, p. 156).

(<http://www.lighthouse-trail-research.com/slaughterhouse-religion>)

It does not take much discernment to see how what is written about the crucifixion in *The Shack* corresponds with what men like Alan Jones have to say.

Christ-like Conduct ?

Another disturbing aspect of *The Shack* is its portrayal of the way in which the members of the Trinity conduct themselves. Jesus is shown as one who likes cooking, gardening and one who enjoys the

“fun” of chasing fish by running on the water. Together the Trinity laugh and giggle over funny things like old “clumsy”, “greasy fingers” Jesus dropping a bowl of batter on the floor (pp. 104,105). When Mack stands watching in open-mouthed amazement, he is crudely addressed by Papa, the female “Father”:

“Well, Mackenzie, don't just stand there gawkin' with your mouth open like your pants are full” (p.88).

Do you understand what “God” is saying here? If Jesus' own disciples, who intimately lived with Him for a few years, give no hint in the Gospels of such irreverent bantering, one wonders what prompted Young's imagination?

What William P. Young does not understand is the fact that the Jesus we worship today is no longer the One that dwelt in a fleshly body on earth for a few years, but is the ascended, glorified Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father “...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given...” (**Eph. 1:20,21**). Compare Peter's dignified description of the glorified Christ in his first sermon (**Acts 2:36**) and how Steven, the first martyr, saw Jesus at the right hand of the Father in heaven (**Acts 7:55**), with the description of Christ that we find in *The Shack*.

God submitted to man?

It is obvious that the dialogue in the book is aimed at breaking down previous concepts that Mack might have had about God. He now, for example, hears that God exerts no authority over man. No wonder that Mack is puzzled and asks:

“Why would the God of the universe want to be submitted to me?”

It is then explained to him:

“Authority, as you usually think of it, is merely the excuse the strong use to make others conform to what they want...We carefully respect your choices...” (p.123).

Is this irreverent remark aimed at the God of the Bible?

Forgiveness

Although there are sections in *The Shack* about forgiveness that are well written, it is a type of forgiveness that must lead to reconciliation and healing without the full conciliatory message of the blood of Christ being proclaimed. The message of forgiveness is very important, but one must remember that it is not limited to Christianity only; it is preached by most religions of the world.

Connections and Associations

Some try to defend the book by saying that the writer just wrote a fictitious story and that there are no ulterior motives. When one reads that Young acknowledges the assistance of someone like Wayne Jacobson for spending much time in helping with the preparation of the book for publication, it is just

logical to conclude that he must have played a significant role in endorsing its content. On Wayne Jacobson's website, www.lifestream.org, a list of books appear which he says helped to shape his spiritual development. Amongst them are several contemplative and emerging church authors who promote teachings of Eastern religions. Amongst them are Dallas Willard, Jim Palmer and Anne Lamot. Dallas Willard, for example, in an interview in which he seemed very uncertain about what the Bible teaches about salvation, made the following statement:

"It is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved" (A Conversation with Dallas Willard, Cutting Edge, 2001, Vol. 5, No.1).

Anne Lamot's endorsement of the book *Eat, Pray, Love*, which promotes Hinduism, appears on its cover. Also consider what Eugene Peterson, whose endorsement appears on the front cover of *The Shack*, had to say in an interview:

"The importance of poetry and novels is that the Christian life involves the use of the imagination, after all, we are dealing with the invisible. And, imagination is our training in dealing with the invisible, making connections...our primary allies in this business are the artists...Why do people spend so much time studying the Bible?...Christians should be studying it less, not more...I'm just not at all pleased with all the emphasis on Bible study.

(A Conversation with Eugene Peterson, Mars Hill Review, 1995, Issue no.3, pp. 73,90, my emphasis).

This indifferent, disparaging attitude towards the written Word of God is also reflected in what is written in *The Shack*. On page 65 we read the following:

"God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated... Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was that guilt edges?"

Compare this sarcastic, derisive remark with what the Bible has to say about itself:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..." (2 Tim. 3:16).

It is clear that the authority of the Bible as basis for our faith is being undermined. Its place must now be taken in by sensual experiences and mystical revelations given by artists, poets and story tellers. We are experiencing the fulfilment of the prophetic Word which warned:

*"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead...they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to **myths**" (2 Tim. 4:4, my emphasis, See Eugene Peterson's statement concerning poets, imagination, artists and stories quoted above).*

Emotions and Perceptions

Through the tragic story of the murder of Missy, Young succeeds in deeply touching the emotions of his readers. Hereby perceptions are influenced, which in turn cause new concepts to be formed. By their own declarations, this is exactly what the Emerging church leaders want to do. Instead of emphasizing principles given to us in the Word of God, more and more mystical teachings and practices (“spiritual disciplines”) of medieval Roman Catholic saints and priests are being incorporated into evangelical churches. As an example, read how often Richard Foster quotes Thomas Merton (a Catholic priest with Eastern religious connections) in his popular book, *Celebration of Discipline*. The theology of the Jesus of *The Shack*, in contrast to what the Bible teaches, agrees with the philosophies of Eastern pantheism. He teaches Mack that “*God as the ground of all being...dwells in, around, and through all things*” (p. 112, My emphasis). The Bible does not teach that God is **in** everything; it teaches that God is present **everywhere** in His creation (**Ps. 139:7,8**). This concept that God is in everything explains why the Jesus of the book explains to Mack that when the external fades, the real being emerges (p. 112). The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that Christ stands outside and knocks on the door of the sinner’s heart. If he opens the door and invites Christ in, He will enter and have fellowship with him (**Rev. 3:20**).

One World Religion

The reason why the gospel of the Bible must be “reinvented” is best expressed through the words of Brian McLaren:

“I think our future will also require us to join humbly and charitably with people of other faiths – Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, secularist, and others – in pursuit of peace, environmental stewardship, and justice for all people...” (Christianity Today Online, July 26, 2008).

Just a Story?

In answer to those who say that the book is just a story and must be read as such, I want to give a few quotes from commentaries that appear as endorsements on the front inner pages of the book.

Patric M. Roddy, Emmy Award winning producer for ABC News: “...I understood *Father, Son, and Spirit* for the first time in my life.”

Mike Morell: “When I read it I felt like I was fellowshiping with God.”

Gayle E. Erwin, author of the book *The Jesus Style* : “*Riveting...teaching powerful theological lessons...I was crying by page 100*” (My emphasis).

Greg Albrecht, Editor, *The Plain Truth Magazine* : “...you’ll be experiencing God as never before. William Young’s insights are...**Biblical faithful**...” (My emphasis).

Dr. Isak Burger, President van die A.G.S.: “Op Teologiese gebied dink ek is die boek handig...Die verhoudingsmatige in die verstaan van die Drie-Eenheid word ook...treffend en eenvoudig uiteengesit...Neem lees!”

Do these comments give the impression that the book was read just as a story? Do those who have made these statements realize that they knowingly or unknowingly endorse the aims of those who want to “reinvent” Christianity?

Conclusion

William P. Young puts words from his own imagination into the mouth of his fictitious god and gullible people from around the world perceive them as “Thus says the Lord.”

What has happened in the mind-set of so many Christians that a book like *The Shack* could become a world-wide best seller? It can be found lying around in many Christian homes. What will a naïve person, or a child, believe about God when he or she reads this book?

The Shack is just another example of the sinner-friendly gospel that is being preached in so many churches these days. This perverted gospel is busy conditioning Christians so that, together with the masses of the universal inter-faith movement, they will one day accept the Anti-Christ as the universal messiah.

Re-invented Christianity can try and make our world a better place by preaching peace and unity, but will this bloodless gospel save a soul from hell?

As believers we should

“...contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men...have secretly slipped in among you...” (Jude 1:3).

In the time of the apostles men spreading false doctrine had to do it secretly, these days their books become best sellers in Christian bookshops!

Nick Maartens

Jeffreys Bay

0827826074

E-mail: nickmaartens@hotmail.com

Website: www.nickmaartens.co.za