**The Shack – Deception or Inspiration:**

**Can Your Youth Discern the Difference?**

*Every frame in a movie carries with it a taste of a worldview….*

Dick Pence – Big Sky Worldview Forum.

Much has been written on both sides of the issue of the book and movie, *The Shack*. It will not be my goal to examine this idea in detail, but I would like to make a few key observations and LINK you to more. **Be sure you read my two doctrinal concerns at the end**. I am painfully aware that this book was wildly popular in many of our churches. The responses I received talking to many proponents a decade ago were passionately emotional. However, l believe that it is critically important that we not have thin skins when it comes to examining such issues.

It is worth going back to an excellent piece that you should read written by respected Apologists Dr. Norman L Geisler and Dr. William C. Roach entitled [*The Shack, Helpful or Heretical*](http://defendinginerrancy.com/the-shack-helpful-or-heretical/)  where they list fourteen concerns. In their summation they say this:

*“The book may be psychologically helpful to many who read it, but it is* ***doctrinally harmful to all who are exposed to it.*** *It has a false understanding of God, the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, the nature of man, the institution of the family and marriage, and the nature of the Gospel. For those not trained in orthodox Christian doctrine, this book is* ***very dangerous****. It promises good news for the suffering, but undermines the only Good News (the Gospel) about Christ suffering for us.  In the final analysis it is only truth that is truly liberating.”*

In March of this year at Summit Ministries Stand Conference, one of the sessions was a discussion with the Leader of Barna Research. David Kinnaman stated the well-known fact that only about 17% of Christians hold to a Biblical world view. But the discussion took a different direction this time, this was my take on it. The question was asked, **“For the vast majority of Christians who are looking to other world views for their truth - *what are the* sources they are looking to? Which of the other five major world views are they looking to?”** In a day when theology and truth are held in low regard by many Christians, that is a key question. Deception really can lead people off the safe trail. I will illustrate in a moment.

Big Sky Worldview Forum is committed to apologetics – the defense of the orthodox Christian faith, emphasis on orthodox – as best we can. As we look at sources mentioned above that are capturing people’s attention, is it Islam, Marxism, Postmodernism, or Secularism? Certainly there are issues with several of these in terms of our theology and philosophy. But my observation is that the **bigger attraction is The New Spirituality** – a mixture of New Age, Mysticism, Emergent theology, and whatever hits our fancy. Clearly, *The Shack* fits into this category.

You won’t follow this rabbit trail very far before you run into Dr. James De Young’s book *Burning Down the Shack.* He is a reformation type thinker, a professor at a seminary. At this point, I have not read his book. But I just happen to have in my computer, the forerunner of the book from a decade ago when *The Shack* was so controversial. I want you to hear something De Young says in his introduction as he quotes two men I think very highly of – Dr. David Noebel and Geoff (pronounced Jeff) Botkin.

*“In one of the best documents I have ever examined –* ***Hollywood’s Most Despised Villain****, Geoff Botkin argues that every movie is a teaching media. His case is brilliantly documented by Dr. David Noebel in his book* ***Understanding the Times*** *(p. 74-5) where he quotes George Lucas on why he brought Star Wars to the screen. Lucas makes it clear that his goal was to introduce an old myth in a new way. The old myth was the weaving of the pantheism of New Age and Eastern mysticism into the plot of the movie. He says “I’ve always tried to be aware of what I was saying in my films because all of us who make motion pictures are teachers, teachers with very loud voices.”*

I would ask you to think long and hard about the idea that **every frame in a movie carries with it a taste of a worldview**. Movies are our prime teachers today – we believe their theology more than we believe our Pastors.

There are a lot of things in *The Shack* that I think are **careless**, even offensive - how he treats Jesus, the Holy Spirit, gender issues etc. But there are two underlying themes that are **dangerous.**

*First,* it is obvious to the discerning that William Young, author of *The Shack* has a sympathy for Universalism or **Universal Reconciliation**. There are various forms of this, but essentially this is the belief that in the end, **all will be saved**. Big deal you say – nobody believes that. Wrong, this belief is held by a large percentage of older Christians and is the predominant belief among Millennials. In Barna’s data, we are seeing this belief becoming more prominent in the Evangelical church. Yes, fewer believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father. Allow me to quote just a bit of the muddy theology you see in The Shack.

“*Those who love me come from every stream that exists. They are Buddhists, or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats or Republicans and many who don’t vote or are not lowers who were murderers and many who were self-righteous. Some are bankers and bookies, Americans and Iraqis, Jews, and Palestinians****. I have no desire to make them Christian****,* [a popular theology with the Emergent crowd] *but I do want to join them in their transformation into sons and daughters of Papa, into brothers and sisters of my beloved.”* The discussion continues with the question *“does that mean all roads lead to you.”* Then there comes the denial with the murky answer from Jesus *“I will travel any road to find you.”* (p. 182)

Dr. James De Young was an associate of the author and documents that Young was a Universalist. Again, this type of thinking is celebrated in Emergent circles – they love the *Love Wins* thinking of Rob Bell. And speaking of dangerous – Rob is a guy that apparently moved from somewhat orthodox to hard core Universalist. Here is a good issue for your cell group to ponder, if you believe that there are many roads to salvation – which Jesus do you believe in?

*Second*, Young flatly denies (in interviews and his book) the doctrine of **Penal Substitution** which J.I. Packer considers to be the heart of the gospel. It is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement that demands justice. The justice was served by Jesus being punished for YOUR sins. Those who deny the doctrine argue that a loving Father would not punish His Son for our sins. Geisler and Roach make the point that *The Shack* denies that sin must be punished. This is a fundamental doctrine of the reformation. For sure, Young is correct when he says this doctrine is being debated. The question is by who? This is sound orthodoxy, the debate is mostly amongst the Neo Orthodox liberal churches.

Much more could be and has been said about this book and movie. I would recommend that you listen to Jan Markel, Eric Barger, and Dr. James De Young’s discussion of this deceptive literature at [Olive Tree Ministries](http://olivetreeviews.org/radio/complete-archives) from March 11, 2017