

# THE SHACK

a comment by Chuck Colson

When the prophet Isaiah and the apostle John caught glimpses of God, they were overcome with despair at their own unworthiness in the light of his glory. The same could be said of Daniel or Paul, or any number of figures from Scripture.

But when the protagonist of a new book called *The Shack* is introduced to the Father of heaven, he is greeted by a “large, beaming, African-American woman” who goes by the name of Papa.

If you have not heard about *The Shack*, there is a good chance you will soon. A novel self-published about a year ago by William P. Young, the book has gained quite a following in Christian circles. It is still among the top ten sellers at Amazon.com. And when it receives a glowing endorsement from a scholar whom I respect, like Eugene Peterson, it is not a phenomenon that discerning Christians can ignore.

The story is about a man named Mack, who is struggling in the aftermath of the brutal murder of his young daughter. One day he finds a note in his mailbox – apparently from God. God wants Mack to meet him at “the shack,” the place where his daughter was killed.

When he arrives, the shack and the winter scene around it transform, Narnia-like, into a mystical mountain paradise, perhaps meant to be heaven itself. Now dwelling in the shack are three mysterious figures – the African-American woman, a Middle Eastern workman, and an Asian girl – who reveal themselves as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the book is basically a discussion between Mack and the three persons of the Trinity. While the discussion is mostly on the deep topics of creation, the fall, freedom, and forgiveness, too often the author slips in silly lines that, frankly, seem ridiculous in the mouth of the godhead. Jesus, looking at Papa, says, “Isn’t she great?” At one point, Papa warns Mack that eating too many of the greens in front of him will “give him the trots.” And when Jesus spills batter on the floor and on Papa, Jesus then washes her – or is it his? – feet. Papa coos, “Oh, that feels sooooo good.” Ugh.

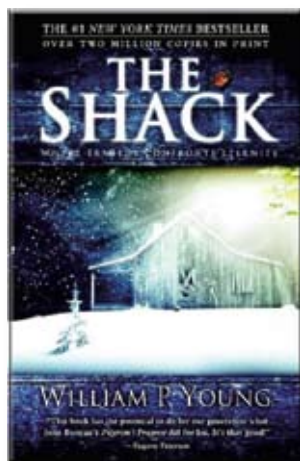
Okay, it’s only an allegory. But like *Pilgrim’s Progress*, allegories contain deep truths. That is my problem. It is the author’s low view of Scripture. For example, Mack is tied to a tree by his drunken, abusive father, who “beats Mack with a belt and Bible verses.” The author reflects derisively in another spot that “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.”

That is not to say *The Shack* is without merit. The centrality of Christ and God’s breathtaking, costly love come through loud and clear. But these truths are available everywhere in Scripture, everywhere in Christian literature. You do not have to visit *The Shack* to find them.

As Papa warns Mack, God is not who Mack expects he is. But he is also not what our creative imaginations make him to be, either.

He is, after all, who he is. ❖

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## The Shack by William P. Young

Newbury Park, Ca: Windblown Media, 2007 248pp RRP \$25  
 NZ sales: contact Rev Doug Vause <douglas.vause@xtra.co.nz>

We have two copies of this book to give away. To enter the draw, write your name and address on the back of an envelope and post to Shack Book, c/o DayStar, PO Box 180168, Luckens Point, Waitakere 0663 by September 30. One entry per person, please.

## Are Dads Ever Good Enough?

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a special role in affirming their sons' identities.

**While women can affirm boys as people, only fathers can affirm them as males”**

Warwick Pudney

“While women can affirm boys as people, only fathers can affirm them as males.”

Men play a vital role in the lives of both sons and daughters, affirming their identity and their purpose in life. Promise Keepers has observed that up to 50 percent of Christian men lacked a positive role model as a father, but through the power of forgiving their father’s shortcomings, it’s possible to break the destructive cycle. We have the example of God as our loving Father as the model.

Fatherhood is one of the most rewarding challenges a man will ever undertake because its legacy can last for generations. It’s not about being perfect. It’s about providing a positive masculine role model for our children. ❖

<sup>1</sup> Dobson, James. “Like Father, Like Son.” *Focus on the Family*, November 2001, p4 <sup>2</sup> As above, p5

<sup>3</sup> Newman, Muriel. “Restoring Fatherhood.” *NZCPR Weekly*, 6 July 2008, <http://www.nzcpr.com/Weekly137.pdf>, p1

<sup>4</sup> Pudney, Warwick. “Men are Parents Too?” *Auckland University of Technology Research Report 2002*

## SOLZHENITSYN REMEMBERED

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collectivisation, famine, and Stalin’s deportations and mass executions, the figures are much greater. *The Black Book of Communism* estimates that 20 million perished through internal repression in the USSR between 1917 and 1959.

Exiled to the West, Solzhenitsyn lived for eighteen years in the woods of Vermont. There he researched the *Red Wheel*, describing the demise of Orthodox Russia. He emerged to give an occasional speech, as at Harvard University in 1978 when he lambasted the West for abandoning its Christian heritage. The consumer culture of the United States, and of post-Communist Russia after his return in 1994, appalled him.

Compared with his novels, Solzhenitsyn’s essays are flat and colourless, marred by a distaste for the West, an uncritical Russian nationalism, and a moralising tone. Not for them will Solzhenitsyn be remembered, but for his courage in exposing the moral bankruptcy of Soviet Communism. ❖

Rev Rob Yule, Senior Minister of Greyfriars Presbyterian Church, Auckland, was secretary of the NZ Society for the Study of Religion and Communism in the 1970s.