

The shack releases in cinemas in UK 9 June. It's a 12A.

The Shack follows Mack Phillips who has spiralled into a deep depression after the abduction and assumed murder of his daughter, causing him to question his innermost beliefs. Facing a crisis of faith, he receives a mysterious letter urging him to an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness where his daughter may have been murdered. Despite his doubts, Mack journeys to the shack and encounters an enigmatic trio of strangers (the Trinity). Through this meeting, Mack finds important truths that will transform his understanding of his tragedy and change his life forever.

The film won't be as good as the book – they never are. This director's last offering "life of Pi" proves the point. But we live in a world of controversy. Much controversy about The Shack.

1. *"Is one of the most successful 'Christian' books in history actually promoting anti-Christian beliefs? Don't be fooled. Find out the terrible true story behind 'The Shack' and uncover heretical doctrines being promoted. Your soul could be at stake."*

2. *"There is nothing so profound as the concept of God, and few things as shocking as the notion that the creator of all things would stoop to our level and reveal himself to us in a most personal and intimate way. ... The Shack will not answer all our questions, nor does it aspire to. But we can be thankful that it has started a great conversation."*

C.S. Lewis often complained that the biggest problem with theologians was that they lacked imagination in their theological explications. If Lewis were still alive he would know that little has changed.

There are times when I have wondered if Jesus was accused of "heresy" when he compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. Consider the possibility that Jesus was less than orthodox when he, in story form, compared God to the father who gladly threw aside his dignity and self-respect to welcome home a wayward son.

My conclusion is this: Christian viewers will see what they want to see in the film. If you think the film promotes idolatry because the Persons of the Trinity are depicted as visible people and thus violates the second commandment, you'll see that. You may freak out that the Spirit's name in the film is a Hindu word for "wind" and conclude the film is promoting all religions as ways to

God. When “Papa” shows the nail print in her wrist and says, “Love always leaves a mark,” you’ll shout about God depicted as a woman and the heresy of modalism. The Godhead presented as three different ethnic groups will stick in the throats of some because we all know the Father and Spirit are invisible and Jesus was a blue-eyed, blond guy who spoke British English. I think the book and the film artistry points us to the Source of all the beautiful ethnicities in this world.

First, the book and the film are art. Say it out loud, “Art form.” Neither the book nor the film is a theology textbook about God and the Trinity. I liked the scene of the Father, Son, and Spirit sitting at the meal table. The marvel of redemption is that we get to sit at the table, too. Avoid racist comments like “God is presented as Aunt Jemima” or “a New Age Oprah Winfrey.” Let the film push your stereotypical thoughts about God.

Second, I did not pick up in the book movie a clear sense of universalism. There was no “all religions lead to God” teaching though it is not unknown that Young himself tips in the universalism direction. I did not see sin and evil taken lightly with no judgment to fear.

Third, I did not see nor hear the Bible being belittled or set aside. Though there is a little poke at those who think the living God is trapped within the pages of a Book.

Fourth, I was impressed by the depiction of devastating human pain and the Jesus’ command to love and, yes, forgive. How can a good, loving God plan or allow evil? That question is raised and dealt with satisfactorily (yet, perhaps, not to the satisfaction of all). The movie does away with Christian versions of flippant, superficial forgiveness. Seeing that the resolution to human pain is found in the deeply loving Trinitarian God who suffered with and bore our pain.

Use it as a tool. Take your friends. If you find the film isn’t true to your reading of Scripture, explain that to them.