



William P. Young – *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity*. (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007.)

Reviewed by David P. Lamb

This novel reads like a true story that could be recounted by an intimate friend. Mac's life is shattered by a tragic event which occurs in a woodland shack. He falls into a deep depression and begins to question his limited and estranged relationship with God. After several years of suffering Mac receives a cryptic note: "Mackenzie, It's been a while. I've missed you. I'll be at the shack next weekend if you want to get together. Papa" (Papa is the affec-

tionate name Mac's wife uses to address God). He travels to the woodland cabin and there, experiences an other-worldly phenomenon.

Mac, and by extension the reader, encounters representations of God (the Father?) as a large, beaming black woman named Papa, the Holy Spirit as a somewhat ethereal, small Asian woman named Sarayu, and Jesus as a Middle Eastern man dressed like a laborer with tool belt and gloves. The explanation for these characterizations comes from Papa: "For me to appear to you as a woman and suggest that you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors to help you keep from falling back into your religious conditioning."

This is blasphemy. Our image of God is not "conditioned" by some religious system, but founded on the Bible where, by His choice, God revealed Himself to mankind as The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, all in masculine terms. It is a characteristic of New Age philosophy to represent God as a female. And this book abounds in New Age philosophy.

It is troubling for a true believer in Jesus to read the aberrant theology coming from this made-up god.

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO GOD?

The Shack's "Jesus" states, "Those who love me come from every system that exists. They were Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans and many who don't

vote or are not part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions...I have no desire to make them Christian."

This is followed by "Jesus" denial that this necessarily means "all roads lead to him." Instead he states, "I will travel any road to find you." The path is reversed so that rather than man having to find the true way to God, Jesus is already in all religious systems and won't draw anyone out of them to be Christians. Ultimately this effectively means there is more than one way to God. It's just a more subtle way to say it, and implies that Jesus is in any religion one chooses.

PANTHEISM

In *The Shack*, "Jesus" also says, "God, who is the ground of all being, dwells in, around, and through all things." The Bible teaches that God, through Jesus, created all things, not that He indwells all things. This is Pantheism; it is not biblical truth.

UNIVERSALISM

Mac is asked by a female character representing God's Wisdom to be the judge and choose which two of Mac's five children will spend eternity with God and which three will spend eternity in hell. Of course, as a loving father Mac can't make such a decision and instead offers himself as a substitute. "Now you sound like Jesus. You have judged well...you have judged them worthy of love, even if it costs you everything."

This makes Mac's offer the same as Christ's sacrifice. While both actions would be done in love, Mac's solution does not include judgment of his children, but only a means for ALL of them to be with God for eternity (universalism). In truth, Christ's sacrifice is in connection with judgment, and many will be found without faith, unworthy of Heaven, and destined to spend eternity in the lake of fire.

HINDU INFLUENCES

The name of Young's "Holy Spirit," Sarayu, is found in Hindu mythology. According to the Hindu epic, the *Ramayama*, the banks of the Sarayu

River in India is where Rama, the seventh Avatar of Vishnu was born. He is said to have immersed himself in the Sarayu in order to return to his real, eternal Mahavishnu (an aspect of the Hindu god Vishnu) form when he retired from the throne of the Kosala kingdom.

“Sarayu” means “wind” or “breath.” Hence the reason Sarayu in *The Shack* represents the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for spirit in the New Testament is *pneuma*, which can also be translated “wind” or “breath.”

Young obviously has some familiarity with Hinduism to use this name in this manner.

ANOTHER GOSPEL

Just as great an error found in this scenario is the implication that mankind is worthy for Jesus to have come and died for our sins. To say that man is worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus demeans that sacrifice. By definition a sacrifice for sin is something made for that which is unworthy. Scripture tells us that without Christ man is an enemy of

God. This means that man is not worthy of Christ’s sacrifice.

And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight if you continue grounded and settled in the faith, and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you have heard, and which was proclaimed to every creature that is under Heaven, of which I, Paul, am made a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23)

The Gospel that Paul proclaimed is the only Gospel from God:

I marvel that you are so quickly removed to another gospel (which is not another) away from Him who called you into the grace of Christ. But there are some who trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ.

But though we, or an angel from Heaven, proclaim any other gospel to you than that which we have proclaimed to you, let him be accursed.

As we said before, so I now again say, if any man proclaims any other gospel to you than that you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

The Shack is another gospel. One would expect to find it in secular bookstores, or even Mormon bookstores. Sadly, it is a bestseller in Christian bookstores. Christians enamored by its message justify it as “just fiction.” “Why get upset?”

Granted, *The Shack* is a well-crafted work, beautifully written with stirring word pictures that draw the reader into a world of revelations and vicarious experiences pleasing to the emotions. I can understand why this beguiling story would be appealing even to true believers. But it still compromises God’s Word.

Since reading it, I have been led by the Holy Spirit to pray for the protection of the undiscerning who might give the author a pass because the book is fiction.

A well-worn family saying comes to mind: “Just because you can do something well doesn’t mean it should be done.” ❖