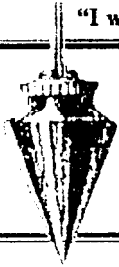


"I will set a Plumbline among my people..." Amos 7:8



The Plumbline

Assessing Current Teachings, Issues and Events with Scripture

The Shack

Evangelicals "Shacking Up" with New Age Concepts

My first encounter with the best-selling book, "The Shack" came earlier than most. I have two sons that teach at a school for missionary children in Asia. Last Christmas my wife and I traveled there for their Christmas break. Even before arriving my sons had inquired about this book called, "The Shack." I hadn't heard of it at all. After our arrival on the campus we soon learned that this book was creating a stir among the Christian faculty. Many of the teachers were engrossed in the book, while some were disturbed by it. Some teachers were even using the book for classroom devotions with the students. My sons asked me to read the book and I was jolted at the content. I had no idea that this book would become a best-seller. I never dreamed it could become the book study for the ladies in my home church. I learned that the author, had in his youth attended a sister missionary school in New Guinea while his parents were missionaries there. When his parents returned to North America he grew up and in his adult life has been in ministry, and business. What might not be known to readers is that during his childhood in New Guinea, he was sexually molested by the stone-age Dani Tribesmen.

A friend of mine recently stopped in at a local Christian bookstore and found they had more than twenty copies available. Perhaps one reason this book has escaped serious criticism is that Eugene Peterson endorses the book on the front cover and suggests it may become the "Pilgrims Progress" for our generation. Peterson, however, promotes contemplative spirituality which publicly welcomes eastern mysticism into Christian experience. We need to assess this novel/allegory and its teaching.

"The Shack" is being described as a 'Christian' novel and is currently ranked number one on the New York Times bestseller list for paperback fiction. Many believers are buying multiple copies and giving them to friends and family." (Warren Smith). It is theological fiction in which the author has cleverly embedded concepts that actually resemble eastern mysticism. When New Ager Oprah Winfrey loves and promotes the book it ought to signal a caution to Christians. Nevertheless, this book is rather becoming some sort of spiritual grid for hundreds of believers. In my home church the pastors wife has chosen the book for a ladies discussion group. The book presents a grab bag of ideas that appear to have allusions to biblical ideas. But into this mix are seeded ideas that are totally anti-biblical and can easily be demonstrated to have their antecedent in a wide range of imaginations which eventually can be traced to eastern and even pagan ideas. This blend of apparent biblical ideas with mystical and popular imaginations is apparently hard to detect by those who are already conversant with the mystical ideas now gaining a hearing in the wider evangelical community. This book is an attempt to produce an apparent biblical husk with New Age and inter-spiritual kernels. Having said this, why would self confessed evangelicals ever fall for this? First, biblical understanding is fast

eroding. Emergent Postmodern Christian writers and speakers are gaining nearly full acceptance by the larger evangelical community. This being true how can we expect “soccer mom” Christianity to draw the necessary distinctions? Secondly, the book is skillfully written to draw the reader emotionally into the book. This tends to disguise non-biblical truths embedded in the narrative.

“William Paul Young is the official author of the “The Shack.” Young used an 80 minute commute to fill yellow legal pads with imagined conversations with God. But it was Wayne Jacobsen who molded this material in the final draft. According to a New York Times article, Jacobsen spent 16 months helping to rewrite the first draft. This could leave the logical conclusion that Jacobsen had some significant influence on the final outcome of the book. And with this in mind, readers need to be aware that Jacobsen is a proponent of emerging and contemplative books and authors. On Jacobsen's website, LifeStream, he carries a list of books he calls “Favorite Reading,” which he says have most shaped his spiritual journey. Of the twenty some books listed, there is a hodgepodge of both contemplative authors and emerging church authors. These include Brennan Manning, Larry Crabb, Dallas Willard, Mike Yaconelli, Don Miller, Jim Palmer and Anne Lamott. Jim Palmer on his blog links to the contemplative Richard Rohr. Rohr's spirituality is consistent with the likes of a Matthew Fox who believes in pantheism and panentheism. Anne Lamott resonates with Oprah's New Age meditation author, Elizabeth Gilbert. Lamott's endorsement of the book is on the back cover of Oprah's book. Jacobsen's favorite authors may well have influenced the final draft. In the “Shack” Young refers to God as “the ground of all being, that dwells in, around and through all things - ultimately emerging as the real.” (p.112)...This description of God does not mean that God upholds everything; rather it means that God is the essence of all that exists.” (Lighthouse trails). This pure panentheism.

The Plot

“The plot is developed around the abduction and murder of 6 year old Missy, beloved daughter of nominal Christian Mackenzie Philips (Mack)... Mack's life is described as living under 'The Great Sadness.' Then one day four years later God drops Mack a note in his mailbox and invites him to the isolated shack where Missy was murdered. Obviously, skeptical, Mack takes a chance that God might show up and heads alone to the shack... [Young's] Trinity takes human form in the novel: The Father (called Papa) appears as a large African-American woman who loves to cook; The Holy Spirit is called Sarayu (Sanskrit for air or wind) is a small Asian woman, who is translucent; and Jesus is a middle-age man, presumably of Jewish descent, a carpenter. Much interesting dialog takes place as members of this Trinity take turns explaining to Mack what they want him to know.” (Gary Gilley).

Problem Areas

Panentheism:

Young's description of God seems to be borrowed from the writing of Paul Tillich (1886-1965) in that Young uses a famous saying of Tillich that “God is the “ground of all being.” to explain his view of God.

“Young presents a Tillich like view of God where Elousia/Papa presents herself as “the ground of all being that dwells in, around and through all things.” (p. 112). Tillich's view has always been viewed as

pantheism/panentheism. For the sake of explanation, *pantheism* states that God is all things, while *panentheism* teaches that God inhabits all living things. (Larry DeBruyn). Young creates a new name for God, which appears to be from the Hebrew “El” and “Ousia” which is Platonic Greek for “being.” Tillich taught that God was not a personal being but being itself. Millard Erickson gives a helpful analogy that in pantheism a tree is God, but that in panentheism it is the sap in the tree that is the being of God. Panentheism is a core belief in all contemplative experience and teaching. As the sap in a tree is suggested to be God, so God is buried in the depths of every human being. The goal of contemplative technique is to find the internal divine in all people. This teaching leads directly to inter-spirituality. Other faiths are also striving to contact this internal God, especially eastern religions.

God Identified as the Great Spirit.

In the first chapter (ps. 28-31), Young recounts a camping trip he had with his two girls, Missy who was later murdered in the shack and another daughter Kate. Mack relents to Missy's request to tell the Indian legend of the beautiful Indian daughter of the chief. As the legend goes there was a terrible disease killing many in the tribe. The old medicine man determines that the chief's daughter must be sacrificed and had to jump to her death to placate the Great Spirit. Finally Missy asks “is the Great Spirit another name for God, you know, Jesus' papa?” Mack smiled in the dark, ... “I would suppose so, Its a good name for God because he is a Spirit and he is great.” (notice the he is not capitalized)

The Feminization of God the Father.

The feminist movement denies that God should be depicted as masculine. In fact, the feminists assert that depicting God as male (and not female) is the reason for so much male chauvinism. The fact, however, is that in both the Old and New Testaments God is **always** depicted as male. It is not therefore permissible for us to change this and imagine God as female as does Young in *Elousia*. Others retort that God actually is not a sexual male so what's the big deal? Beyond the fact that God chose to reveal himself in masculine terms, and sent His eternal Son, it was necessary to counter centuries of pagan worship that declared that creation was accomplished by male and female deities that created life by virtue of celestial sexual procreation. When Israel encountered these Canaanite religions they encountered the fertility gods of Baal masculine and his female consort Astheroth. Supposedly, male/female sexual union in heaven produced all of life upon the earth, both plant, animal and human. In the Old Testament, the debauchery of the “high places” for Israel was that by indulging in sex on these high places, they believed their sexual activity would induce Baal and his female consort to follow suit and thus produce good crops, large herds and many children. Israel began to equate Baal and Jehovah as the same deity. Saul even named his son “Ishbaal” meaning “man of Baal.” (The later writers of the Chronicles renamed this “Ishbosheth.” meaning a “Man of Shame.”) Israel succumbed to this practice and was judged by God for it. To depict God as female lends credence to idea that God is female and gives life to all things. God thus chose to be known as a singular male who created by the power of his will apart from any female consort.

Sarayu

“Sarayu, is the character meant to represent the Holy Spirit. Just after introducing her, Mack asks the Shack's Jesus, speaking of Sarayu, “is she the Holy Spirit?” Jesus answers, “Yes, She is my Spirit.” “Yes she is Creativity, she is Action; she is the Breathing of life; she is much more. She is my Spirit.” But by naming the Holy Spirit *Sarayu*, there appears to be an allusion to the *Rig Veda*, the Hindu scriptures, for *Sarayu* bears semantic and phonetic resemblance to *Vayu* as found in the *Rig Veda*. Is the author making an overture to eastern religion?” (Larry LeBruyn). “Thus we are not surprised when Mack asks *Sarayu* if he will see her again and he is told “Of course, you might see me in a piece of art or music, or silence or through people, or in creation, or in your joy or sorrow” (p. 198). This is not biblical teaching. This idea seems repeated in a line from a song Missy creates, “Come kiss me wind,

and take my breath till you and I are one” (p. 233). This is purely eastern thought and not biblical.” (Gary Gilley).

Universal Reconciliation

Young has Jesus reply to Mack's question, “Is that what it means to be a Christian?” when Jesus says, “who said anything about being a Christian? I'm not a Christian... Those who love me come from every system that exists...Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans,...etc.... I have no desire to make them Christians.... Does that mean asks Mack, “that all roads lead to you?” Jesus denies this but then says, “What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you” (p.182). This apparently means Jesus will travel any road to join them in their self-transformation. Dr. James B. DeYounge, ThD., Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Western Seminary, states: “I have known the author and Young and I and our families have interacted... Paul (Young) and I belonged to a Christian “think tank” of sorts and we conversed about many theological issues. About 4 years ago Paul embraced Christian universalism and has defended this on several occasions... The Shack was rejected by many publishers and was finally self published. Wayne Jacobsen and Brad Cummings went through it and tried to eliminate universal salvation. But *Universal Reconciliation* still remains.” (Dr. James DeLonge) Young also rejects the biblical teaching of sin. Young states: “Papa: I don't need to judge peoples sin. Sin is it's own punishment.” (p. 120). BUT, without sin there is no need for the cross and for the Father to punish Jesus for our sins on the cross would be the epitome of injustice. Surely, this explains why the cross has no meaningful mention in the book.

Jesus is not the only way to salvation

In the Shack, Christ states: “I am the **best** way any human can relate to Papa/elousia and Sarayu.” But is Jesus only the best way? John Lanagan uses the word “best way” in some sentences: “The best way to eat pancakes is with maple syrup” Yet that is not the only way to eat them. “The best way to Oregon from California is the I-5 highway.” Yet its not the only way to Oregon.” This “best way” teaching is consistent with other inter-spirituality concepts in the book.

Conclusion

A.W Tozer said: “wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true.” (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*).

We concur with many others, that Christians should “**Stay out of the Shack.**”

In this holiday season Georgiann and I would love to extent to you and your household the wish of a blessed celebration of Jesus' birth and also a happy and blessed new year.

We also want to express to you our thanks for enabling “Plumblin” to continue and thank you for you support.