

THE SHACK – COMMENTARY BY LUCILLE MAY

We all hear of books that are best sellers from time to time. Occasionally it happens to a Christian author that his/her book takes the world by storm, even beyond the Christian community. *The Shack* is one of those. It's not a best seller, it's more than that. It's a phenomenon!

I bought the book because a friend recommended it to me. I heard from others that it really deals with false religious spirits which still plague many Christians in their concept of and relationship with God. As this issue is something we are currently discussing and are concerned about, I was very excited to get stuck into the book. My expectation was that it would be insightful to see how someone else tackles this issue. Since the book is also being compared to the classic *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a beautiful and profound allegory, I really looked forward to what I was about to find. I googled an interview with the author and he seemed a very nice and sincere family man. I did not read a single negative review, I was not interested. I WANTED to read the book and I WANTED to enjoy it. I haven't had a chance to read good Christian fiction for such a long time...

Initially I quite enjoyed it, the writing style, the story-line, etc. I fully agreed with the fact that Mack had to return to the place of his pain to find healing there. I liked the fact that the author endeavours to make God accessible in a relaxed and caring relationship, a God who is involved in our lives and wants to heal our pain. Throughout the book there were several concepts I found very intriguing.

At the same time, however, I had this very unwelcome nagging check in my spirit. The first time it really jolted me was on p66, where Mack is considering God and the way He reveals Himself.

“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?”

I flinched for a moment. Why does he talk of the Bible like that, was there a hint of sarcasm? But then I thought, the letter of course kills, but the spirit gives life. That's obviously what the writer is alluding to. I was sure he would qualify this statement later...

On p84 'God' introduces Himself in the form of a big momma calling herself Papa, explaining that God is both male and female, and Mack now needs the female side of God to minister to him in his emotionally scarred state. Fair enough, I thought. This is an allegory, right? Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*...

But then it gets tricky, and he almost got me on this: On p94 "God" explains to Mack why The Bible refers to God as Father –

“We knew that once the Creation was broken, true fathering would be much more lacking than mothering...**an emphasis on fathering is necessary because of the enormity of its absence.**”

This is where thousands of people in our society today will agree – the often heard of 'Father-wound', of course!!! 'Why didn't I think of that!' I thought. At this point I still didn't want to believe that there was anything wrong with the book. I **wanted** to agree with the author, wanted him to give me new insight...(I later realised that Mack was here almost making excuses for God for the oversight of not bringing out the "Mother"-side of God more, trying to explain **from the perspective of his own understanding** why God would do such a thing. But then putting it in the mouth of "God" himself, as if He Himself is stating it as a **fact.**)

But then, when I got to p96, I knew something was horribly wrong! Here "God" explains to Mack that Jesus was not forsaken by the Father on the cross, it only **felt** like that to Him. He explains:

“You misunderstand the mystery there. Regardless of what he **felt** at the moment, I never left him”.

Jesus was fully human, but also fully God, would He be deceived by His feelings?! Certainly not. He is, and was, sinless perfection! Many humans have suffered

much worse fates than Jesus, but if His suffering were merely physical and emotional, what punishment DID Jesus then receive in our place, if He was not to be forsaken by the Father in our place? (Isaiah 59:2 - *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*) This assumption devalues and throws out the entire meaning of the gospel!!! Also now I'm starting to notice that there's no use of capital letters on pronouns relating to God. I thought, maybe Papa figures that's also 'religious'. But I'm getting queasy, because I battle to accept the **casual** familiarity of the conversation with God Almighty. Mack seems to think he's relating to a peer. Relaxed and informal is one thing, but being casual with a Holy God is profane.

By this time I realised that I was not dealing with an allegory, but rather with an author wanting to lead us (or his children, whom he said he wrote this book to) into **his** view of God, which, unfortunately, is not quite Scripture's view of God, and, in many other places in the book, certainly not MY experience of Him.

The God I know and serve would NEVER say of Himself (p98):

““Mackenzie, as you might imagine, **there are some advantages to being God**....I live in a state of perpetual satisfaction as my normal state of existence,” she said, quite pleased. **“Just one of the perks of Me being Me”**”

I was at that point expected to accept another god, not the One true God I have come to know and love; the God whom I fear, in a “He-is-awesome-who-can-ever-comprehend-Him” kind of way. I'm reminded of the prophet who encounters God in Isaiah 6:1-5 and becomes aware of his own human state of defilement in the light of His presence...(*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the*

house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.")

He continues on p99 by saying:

“When we three (the Trinity) spoke **ourselves** into human existence as the Son of God, **we** became fully human. **We** also chose to **embrace all the limitations that this entailed**. Even though we have always been present in this created universe, **we now became flesh and blood.**”

This left me disagreeing! According to Scripture, only the Son was incarnated, not the Father or the Spirit. But then the author seems to correct the deviation on the next page when Mack asks Papa:

“...did you limit yourself only to Jesus?” “Not at all!!” (comes the reply)
“Although I have only been limited in Jesus, **I have never been limited in myself.**”

Now I was absolutely confused! *Why does the author endeavour to explain the Trinity, even giving Him 3 different earthly faces, as if He can be fully grasped in human terms when God explicitly forbids us in His Word to compare Him with anything that has been created, including humans? Why does he violate the second of the Ten Commandments?*

Then he does it again: From p122 there's a long discourse on authority and submission, (*and here he really puts his foot into it*) ending on p124 with:

“You humans are so lost and damaged that to you it is almost incomprehensible that relationship could exist apart from hierarchy. So you think that God must relate inside a hierarchy like you do. **But we do not.**”

But how then does one explain away 1 Corinthians 11:3 (But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God), and John 6:38 (For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me)?

On the same topic, on p145: “God” says of the Trinity:

“We are indeed submitted to one another and have always been so and always will be....Submission is **not about authority and it is not obedience** (*“If you love Me, obey My commandments”???*); it is all about relationships of love and respect. In fact, **we are submitted to you in the same way”**.

(God Almighty submitting to us, His creation? Where in the world does the author get this heresy from other than his own imagination? Or maybe from some other source... I bet the devil himself will enjoy this one!)

About evil, “God” says it does not exist. P136:

“Both evil and darkness can only be understood in relation to Light and Good; **they do not have any actual existence.”**

Which means there is no devil or demons? This doctrine is starting to sound familiar. It is a very popular ‘gospel’ emerging lately. Would the author go so far as to also exclude judgment from his gospel? *Later I found my assumption to be correct. Refer to some paragraphs lower down.*

On p203: “God”, in an attempt to expose the religious spirit and to explain the difference between Law and Grace, says the following:

“**Enforcing rules**, especially in its more subtle expressions like **responsibility and expectation**, is a vain attempt to create certainty out of uncertainty. And contrary to what you might think, **I have a great fondness for uncertainty.”**

How does one explain the parable of the talents?

God’s Word leaves us with no uncertainty about Himself or us, on the contrary, He makes it abundantly clear that He and His Word is the One Certainty we can fully rely on as absolute Truth.

Further along we come to the part where Mack has to forgive the man who killed his Missy. And again, although much of his explanation of the process of forgiveness is so true, the following paragraph appears on p225:

“When Jesus forgave those who nailed him to the cross **they were no longer in his debt, nor mine**. In my relationship with those men, **I will never bring up**

what they did, or shame them, or embarrass them.” He goes on: “Mackenzie, I already told you that forgiveness does not create a relationship. Unless people speak the truth about what they have done and change their mind and behaviour, a relationship of trust is not possible. When you forgive someone you certainly **release them from judgment**, but without true change, no real relationship can be established”.

In other words, God absolves all of mankind of judgment, but only those who truly repent may have relationship with Him. Now the question arises as to who then The Great White Throne Judgement of Revelation 20:11-15 is reserved for? (¹¹ *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.* ¹² *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.* ¹³ *The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.* ¹⁴ *Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.* ¹⁵ *And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*) In other words, there is no more judgement of sinners, and no eternal punishment! The author’s assumption here is a humanistic, unbiblical one. God’s judgment at the end of time is one of justice, precisely because it is based on the fact that forgiveness carries a debt or a moral obligation. In Romans 6:4, 16-18 Scripture makes it clear that man’s lot is ‘slavery’! (⁴ *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* ¹⁶ *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*) The only choice we may exercise is to who our master is. This is where Christ’s forgiveness

demands our submission to His mastery/Lordship of our lives. It is at this point that the author denies the Cross by preaching another gospel and invites God's judgment upon himself in the process (Galatians 1:8: *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed*).

When I read p177-182 I understood why the author is so mixed up in his understanding of God and the gospel. From his interpretation of 'church' it is clear that he does not believe in the Scriptural explanation of the term, and how we should conduct and organise ourselves as a body of believers. His understanding clearly rejects receiving ministry from those appointed by God in the ministry giftings. Small wonder that he is an open target for deception. In his view 'church' should not be organised, but rather consists of people who haphazardly "simply share life.....and being open and available to others around us." That's it. Church-meetings are sarcastically written off as "the sitting in endless meetings staring at the backs of people's heads."

Furthermore, writing off all organised church as described in Ephesians 4:11-16 as 'religion' and associating it with politics and economics, which he angrily calls a

"man-created trinity of terrors that ravages the earth and deceives those I care about",

or

"tools that many use to prop up their **illusions of security** and control";

and

"a vain effort to **create some sense of certainty** and security **where there isn't any. It's all false!**"

The author's personal pain and confusion and uncertainty come through very strongly. My heart bleeds for him. It's very clear that he's not healed of his negative experiences of the past. Here it is him speaking, not "God"...

But, for the sake of the millions who are influenced by his book I wish to say to the author: Hey, please don't write off all people who gather together to worship and have the Word of God served by Jesus' ministers. We know there are many religious institutions that fit that negative description of dead religion, but there are also a great many life-giving churches who take the Great Commission of Jesus Christ very seriously. It would be impossible to bring the gospel to the whole world AND to disciple them if the church were not **organised**. We all have witnessed the chaos which comes from trying to organise anything if no-one takes responsibility to lead and no-one follows instruction? (Hebrews 13:17 - *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you;* 1 Timothy 2:2 - *for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*)

There are several other doctrinal errors and wrong nuances in the book, of which I mentioned but a few. The error present here, however, has the potential to lead believers horribly astray. In the hands of an unbeliever the book will present them with a false, compromised gospel designed to deny them true salvation, while molly-coddling them into thinking of God as **"God, my servant"**, as Mack finally grasps the 'true' message the author clearly wants us all to embrace on p237. God loves us so much that He submits to and serves us. All human beings are children of God and there is no judgment (John 1:12 - *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name*). So guess what: the fear of God is not the beginning of wisdom anymore (Psalm 111:10 - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever*), we are only to behold the goodness of God, there is no severity (Romans 11:22 - *Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell,*

severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off).

I will not recommend this book to anyone, not even to those who have suffered like Mack did. I'd rather let the God of Scripture heal them than the God created here by the author, William P. Young. The Scripture he must deal with is that found in Matthew 4:10 (*Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve'.*).