

After two good Presbyterians asked me what I thought of *The Shack*, and after Debby read the novel herself and thrust it at me, "Read this," I plowed through the paperback that advertises "over two million sold." Despite myself, I enjoyed the story about Mack, a middle-aged grieving father who has a strange and fanciful encounter with God. The plot is not great literature, but it contains enough twists to satisfy most fans of the murder mystery genre, if they can wade through the theological sections.

Ah, those theological sections. Like an ancient philosophical dialogue, Mack's story is the vehicle for a number of extended conversations with God. These exchanges are lightened somewhat by purple passages describing heaven as a riot of pumped up natural scenes. One keeps reading in the hope of a) solving the puzzle of the murder, and b) resolving Mack's grief and anger. But, it's clear that the reason for writing this book is to explicate some of the problems that keep theologians gainfully employed and trouble anyone willing to entertain the question of evil in God's world.

The author, William Paul Young, tackles free will, the trinity, gender differences, the wrath of God, justice and church among other issues. He doesn't much like church. Some Christians have quarreled with his imaginative treatment of the persons of the trinity who are woven skillfully into the plot. Read as either biblical or systematic theology, shortcomings abound. However, it's a novel. My sister-in-law thinks this book is not appropriate for immature Christians, presumably because it might confuse them. On the contrary, it offers some hope that the most confusing aspects of Christianity can be entertaining even while they remain mysterious. *The Shack* is a mystery hidden in a novel wrapped in pop psychology. I've heard worse sermons.