



## God in the Movie “The Shack”

You’ll notice to the left an artist’s way of expressing the inexpressible. The artist of this image was attempting to capture something of the nature of the Holy Trinity, that is, the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this image or icon of 15th century Christian

origin, the artist has used the story of the visitation of the three travelers to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. In the story of Genesis 18 “the Lord appeared to” Abraham. How? Abraham looked up and “three men stood in front of him.” As Abraham provided them with a meal, he came to realize it was an appearance or theophany of the Lord. The artist, using this story from Genesis, painted three angelic beings seated at a table in order to present his understanding of the Trinity. Look carefully at the faces. Notice that they are the same. Only the hand positions and robes are different. It portrays a fundamental unity even in the diversity.

Christian artists have used more than human figures to portray the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit. For example, look at the picture of God, the Holy Spirit, below. God is represented in the form of an animal. This image comes from John the Baptist’s description of what he saw at Jesus’ baptism. Of course,



we don't think that a dove is God. But, the image of the dove points to the Holy Spirit as the bringer of peace and inspiration and reminds us of Genesis 1 where in the beginning the creative Spirit moved over the waters.

God the Son, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, is sometimes represented as a lamb holding a royal staff (cf. John 1:29, Revelation 5:6). At other times the Son of God is represented as a lion (cf. Revelation 5:5).

For example, the Son of God is represented by the lion named Aslan in C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Christian artists use these images to teach about God in a way that is non-verbal and appropriate to our human limits while holding the basic truth that "God is spirit" (John 4:24).

In the movie *The Shack*, the author of the story fictionally portrays God in different ways as he seeks to teach about God and God's connection with humans. For example, in the story, like the 15th century image above, God is portrayed as three different persons, yet having an essential unity. God, the Father, is portrayed at one point as an African-American woman living in the house that the character, Mack, grew up in. Examples of thinking of God as feminine in some sense are present in the Bible (cf. Isaiah 66:13, Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34, Luke 15:8-9). Later at a different point in *The Shack*, God, the Father, is portrayed as a Native American grandfather. As one person wrote, "In much

deeper ways than gender [or race], God is not at all who or what Mack expected.”

God, the Son, is portrayed in the movie by a young Israeli man as a guy who likes carpentry and fishing. The humanity that God, the Son, took to himself makes him easier to approach. That’s one reason why God became human, that is, to help us more easily know and draw closer to him.

God, the Holy Spirit, is portrayed in the movie by a young Asian-American woman. In the original Greek of the New Testament, the words for Holy Spirit have a feminine gender. In the movie the Holy Spirit’s name is Sarayu which means wind or breeze. In the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek, the words for spirit can also mean wind or breath. I enjoyed the movie’s visual image where the woman portraying the Holy Spirit always seems to be clothed in a shimmer or light. That shimmer leads to the truth that in the Holy Spirit’s presence there is always something more, deeper, more beautiful, more profound yet to be revealed.

The Christian art of *The Shack* speaks on the levels of emotion and thought about who God is and who we are. The belief about God, the Trinity, according to the United Methodist Church is: “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” We are called to move as Christians from belief to understanding (cf. Ps. 53:2, Ps. 119:130, John 16:13, I Cor. 2:12). One venue in which to help deepen our understanding of what we believe is Christian art.

Christian art points past itself to the God that it, in its limited way, witnesses to. That’s true of any movie, painting, book, play, story, etc. that seeks

to tell something of the Christian story. Look around your home or the church to see how many different images of God and the Christian message you can find.

I hope you enjoy our small group studies and sermons during July on the movie *The Shack*. I want to encourage you to sign up for a small group study this July. The story of *The Shack* is emotionally-challenging and thought-provoking. See you in worship this Sunday.

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