

EVANGELIZATION THROUGH THE MEDIA. THE HOLY TRINITY IN THE SHACK 2017

*Florin URSA, Lucian DÎNCĂ**

Abstract: In the new, modern post-secular society, the Catholic Church wants its evangelization mission to be extended by the media. The most recommended form of evangelization is the direct one, face to face, but nowadays so that the biblical message of the Christ to be also reach by the young people, who spend most of their time on social media, Internet, TV, films, etc. One of the most popular media is the internet, where all the information is just a click away. The Catholic Church through the Vatican II Council wishes to become involved and encourages the involvement of clergy and believers in supporting Christian film actors and producers, Christian TV and radio stations. One of the messages that the church wants to send to the world is the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This mystery is one of faith in the living God, unique in being and intermingled in persons: God the Father (the Creator), God the Son (the Redeemer) and God the Holy Spirit. The use of cinema in the transmission of Church messages must be done with caution and well documented. Through the analysis of the movie *The Shack 2017*, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed to the cinefiles a part as a Christian teaching in accordance with the Catholic Church's teaching and another apart as Christian teaching intertwined with new teachings (New Age).

Keywords: Evangelization, Media, Cinema, Holy Trinity, movie, Christ, Magister, Holy Parents, Apostolate, Church.

Let all of the sons of the Church strive in unity of thought and intention so that the means of social communication may be used without delay and with the greatest efficiency in the many works of the apostolate, as circumstances require, preventing harmful initiatives and this especially in countries where moral and religious progress calls for more urgent and active intervention [...] In cinematography the production and the distribution of films are useful for honest leisure and to promote the real cultural and artistic value, ensured by all appropriate means. In the first place, these movies are intended for young people [...], priests, monks and laity and the people must be trained without delay to acquire the necessary skill to use these means for apostolic purposes¹.

* Drd., University of Bucharest, Romania, Școala Doctorală Teologie și Studii Religioase. E-mail: ursa_florin40@yahoo.com; Conf. univ. dr., University of Bucharest, Romania, Școala Doctorală Teologie și Studii Religioase E-mail: lucian.dinca@unibuc.ro.

¹ CONCILIUL ECUMENIC VATICAN II, *Decret privind mijloacele de comunicare socială (Inter Mirifica)*, București, 1999, 51-52.

We want to expose in this work, *Evangelization through Media the Presentation of the Holy Trinity in the movie: The Shack 2017*, general concepts about the new tools of the media, led by the Internet, then the dogmatic approach of the Holy Trinity and its interpretation in the cinematic vision of the movie director *The Shack 2017*, with minimal references to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Religious movies want to reveal the teachings of Jesus Christ to people, but there are often found human errors in interpreting the teaching in the movies. These errors can be such as: the personal attitude of the movie director (feelings, own vision, influences etc.), lack of thoroughly documentation and opinions of the own faith etc. All the movies presents and it has its own ideas, and in this study we will analyse and compare the transmission of the message of the mystery of the Holy Trinity with the teaching of the Catholic Church, thus avoiding any slipping towards non-Christian paths in the movie *The Shack 2017*.

I. Evangelization through Media

In response to scientific and technological developments, the Catholic Church wants to continue its mission of evangelization in the postmodern secularized society through media tools (TV, internet, movies, music etc.). The new evangelization consists in the freedom of each person to discover how the Holy Spirit is present in their life and not alone but together with the each other in their own way, but all united in the spirit of Christ².

Correlation between the media and the behaviour of humans

Research in the field of communication has established that the classic means of mass communication: television, film, radio, papers, books, all has had a historical evolution with a certain peak, are surpassed by the Internet. Classical media tools have not disappeared but they coexist intertwined and it builds the information environment that influences public opinion and produces changes in people's behaviour. The rise of public opinion as a „little dictator” in the life of modern society makes the contemporary world to be governed with its legitimate consent.

Media messages to the public have a real echo in the people's turmoil. The new science of communication can no longer ignore the realization of any project of political and social governance. Located at the interference between fields (psychology, sociology and linguistics), the rules of communication

² Frank P. DESIANO, *Parish Orientation Toward Evangelization*, International Journal of Evangelization and Catechetics I (2020) 67-80.

processes are related to the context, and the fact that they can be mimicked, is an expensive illusion³.

Public opinion is the „unofficial conscience” of civil society; it always has a position on events such as: opinions, doubts, rejections and they always consider their essence. So we can say that the relationship between the media and public opinion is a real one, like a „organic binomial, acting as a judge of power, but vulnerable by the: lack of competence of the individual peoples to solve their problems, tyranny of the majority, being susceptible to persuasion, techniques which is based on emotional irrational reaction”⁴.

Political scientist Walter Lippmann with concerns in the field of communication presents the idea that „people build images with which they operate [...], the whole vision starts from the relationship between two realities: the outside world and our representation of this world”. So it appears that the interaction between the people and environment is a created fiction environment so that the human conscience is not presenting lies, but his own believes. So the humans react to a fiction environment and not to the existing reality, meanwhile his conscience has an impact on his behaviour in the real world. Lippmann in his work also presents the distortion of human perception of the world, so that human patterns influence the behaviour, respectively the stereotypes in the human mind, like: our mind perceive only what we are ready to understand from the world we come in contact with⁵.

New technologies and information means

Through the interaction between media and communication, a new dimension opens up, which includes the connection between computer, technology and communications satellites, which are forming the new „information society”. The new media and we refer to the Internet, is the first decentralized communication system and its experiencing an unprecedented evolution. Digital technology has been replaced by the analogue technology, combining sounds, images and text. The innovation has led to the emergence of the 3C: compression, conversion and convergence. These new means are a crossing between existing technologies and innovations like: transforming the TV into a computer. So that anyone connected to a computer can send the information to one or more people at any time, being able to connect to new networks based on connection protocols.

We are invited into a virtual reality, which simulates the natural prime reality where the information is transmitted instantly in real time and

³ P. DOBRESCU – A. BĂRGĂOANU, *Massmedia și societatea*, București, 11-13.

⁴ P. DOBRESCU, *Massmedia și societatea*, 15-26.

⁵ P. DOBRESCU, *Massmedia și societatea*, 41-43.

accurately. The speed with which the „new is produced”, projects the human being into the „hyper reality”, an indispensable artificial environment for everyone (interpersonal discussions, entertainment, online shopping, banking, economy, cyber-economy)⁶.

The media determine a selective definition of public issues that are different from personal ones, like a role played (intentionally or not). Harold Lasswell defines the basic functions that the media perform: monitoring the world by recounting events in it, interpreting these events in a way that people can understand and by socializing⁷.

Internet challenges

The Internet is the newest means of media through which the information is at a click of a button. The biblical message can be easily transmitted through Christian sites, platforms and social networks. The internet offers us great advantages in the field of communication. The communication has become extremely effective no matter where we are on earth, with the help of on certain platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc.). Christian communities are formed on internet and people can join through different platforms (Vatican news, doxology, word for salvation etc.), or can be formed on different sites and social media platforms.

Paradoxically with all this technological-scientific development, people become figures, statistics and objects of study. This it is observed that the internet can take out the feelings and the news presents people's as figures and statistics of the victims of the accidents, kidnappings, rapes, robberies, prostitution, manipulation, abuse, all cold and terrifying.

Many of among youngest people use the internet reckless, „the distance from virtue to sin is given at the touch of a button”, loving at one point the Internet and the sinful pleasures more than God⁸.

In the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Apostle John states,

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever (1 John 2: 15-17).

The Internet is a kaleidoscopic, bright world. Immoral advertisements sometimes shock, frighten, or disgust us, which must be blocked or avoided as much as possible, for the good of human's souls, because Christ is EVERYTHING.

⁶ P. DOBRESCU, *Massmedia și societatea*, 80-87.

⁷ P. DOBRESCU, *Massmedia și societatea*, 113-128.

⁸ C. ȘERBAN, *Internetul tinerii în fața provocării*, Galați, Apologeticum (2005), 3-5.

God request from us our whole heart not to enslave us but to fill it with the heavenly goodness, and we must believe, giving our obedience by doing His Will, without offending Him. The Holy Apostle Paul tells us: „Everything is lawful for me, but I will not let myself be dominated by anything.” (1 Cor. 6,12)⁹.

Anyone who wants to take Jesus seriously needs to be courageous and to speak openly and be prepared to become a prophet and a mystic. The great theologian Karl Rahner states: „The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic or he will not exist at all”, so that all people can experience a little intimacy with God¹⁰.

Evangelization through the media

It has often been said that the media, like other methods of communication, is a way and not a purpose in itself. What is the Christian message propagated through all media? This „deliverance from everything” that is freedom and the way: Jesus Christ. He asks us to give up our attachments, fortunes, money, functions, supplies, luxury, our own worries and ideas, our cultural, religious and spiritual practices, which are just as many chains around everyone’s neck, and guide us to feel the need to find and love our fellow man. God is love and through this love he wants us to serve Him, but not in a naive but conscious and mature way. The first requirement of service is self-denial, and this not represent to sell everything we have, but he wants to detach things, to give up our time in the favour of helping our neighbour, to give up our reputation (image), to be humble in front of everyone, to be detached from our work or profession. We are dead when we try to save our lives, when we are not willing to give up our lives for others. None of this we can do if we do not trust God, to put our life’s in His hands, abandonment coming from the true self, the „agony of the cross” being the process that will last us our whole life, based on the experience of union with God¹¹.

All Christians have the right to education. The Church through the media wants to educate the population not only for the personal grown of each one, but to reveal to them the knowledge about the mystery of salvation and to be aware of the gifts received from God¹².

⁹ L. DUMITRU, *Tinerii pe calea întrebărilor*, Galați 2004, 51-56.

¹⁰ A. NOLAN, *Isus transformă continuu omenirea. O spiritualitate a libertății radicale*, Iași 2010, 113-114

¹¹ A. NOLAN, *Isus transformă continuu omenirea*, 179-189.

¹² N. BAUER, *O That the Living Faith Becomes Manifest and Active: Catechetical Instruction According to the Code of Canon Law*, International Journal of Evangelization and Catechetics I (2020), 45-66.

II. The holy „icons”, Spiritual life and the binomial between Theology and cinematography

We notice the dynamism and effectiveness of both fundamental categories, the need to upgrade the theology-cinema relationship and the importance of the Christianity with the unique moment of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the image of the unseen God. „God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1,9).

From the beginning in the Christian tradition, holy “icons” were used in the liturgical cult, some pastors encouraged the cult towards images, others rejected it and the problem was: how a Christian can worship through icons made from the colours of the hands of some artists while the first commandment of God opposes this practice?

The iconoclastic crisis was triggered by the Byzantine emperor Leo III in 730 when he promulgated a decree against the holy images, thus ordering the removal of icons from the Church, or private homes. Empress Irina, who took over the reign of the Byzantine Empire, as regent of her son Constantine VI in 780, convened this Ecumenical Council VII which had to solve the iconoclastic problem, and give the Church an official position on the worship of holy images in the churches and in the Christian liturgy¹³.

Empress Irina is advised by Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople to implementing worship and honouring icons, although the Council of Blachernes 754 strengthened the iconoclastic decrees of previous emperors, yet the Council of Nicaea II annulled them, establishing other church based of theology of John the Damascene in the work *The Three Treatises against the Iconoclasts*. Therefore, the Saviour and the saints will be able to be represented in icons, bringing them worship of honour, but not idolatry, worship or adoration.

Implementing the decisions of the Council of Nicaea II, they met opposition from Emperor Leo V, the Armenian who ascended the throne has decreed the destruction of icons in St. Sophia Cathedral and forbade the worship of them, but the worship of the holly images will triumph with the accession of Theodora, the new Irina. This devotion of the holy icons has last only until the Protestant Reformation in 1517 when the honour of the holly icons will be condemned again and continued to this day by Protestant cults¹⁴.

The spiritual life

The essence of the spiritual life presupposes „to live in the world without being in the world”, the fears, the worries due to the dark power, of the

¹³ L. DÎNCĂ, *Conciliile Ecumenice. Constantinopol II (553) & III (680-681) și Niceea II (787)*. Monografii, Târgu-Lăpuș 2018, 199-202.

¹⁴ L. DÎNCĂ, *Conciliile Ecumenice*, 294-297.

Wise in Evil, is forcing us to move from the house of fear to the house of love so sublime expressed in the image of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rubliov, who painted in 1425 in honour of the Russian saint Sergei (1313-1392), but not so much „as the fruit of his own meditation on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but to offer fellow monks a way to keep their hearts centred on God”, in the agitation and hatred of those times in Russia, „People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man” (Lk 21;6,36), and discovering the beauty of God, by contemplating the image with the inner eyes and that becomes prayer and healing¹⁵.

Dr. Alexis Carrel, the scientist who conveys the theological knowledge to a greater extent than many other theologians that are lacking the knowledge of scientific truths, argues that: “Modern society has dealt only with material values. She neglected the fundamental human problems that are both material and spiritual”, he notes a close connection between faith, prayer and healing, declaring that the “religious sense” is a fundamental physiological activity... We must use all present forms of life. The most useful is the Christian form in the mystical sense, presupposing union with God and with others¹⁶.

We know God ordinarily through our mind and faith, but we can also know Him experimentally through love. The true spiritual life according to the teaching of Saint John of the Cross: “it is the contemplative life—the way through which we can reach the experience of an inner life in intimate union with God” (different from contemplation which is the gift of God). That is, a direct search for God’s love, but without neglecting the active form of life, which seeks to lead us to God through good deeds and in the service of our neighbour. Christian holiness or perfection consists in a perfection of the virtue of love, the object of love being double: of God and neighbour, the means are meditation and mortification, „through contemplation (intimate living with God) the soul tastes the anticipation of heavenly happiness, contemplation being a free gift, which God does not deny to any soul prepared by renunciation and prayer.

The soul passes through the night of the senses, not feeling the comforts of God’s presence. Overcoming this crisis, the soul embarks on the path of union with God through the practice of theological virtues, living faith, trust and perfect love in God, then comes the second crisis— the spiritual

¹⁵ H.J.M. NOUWEN, *Frumusețea Domnului. Rugăciunea cu icoane*, Iași 2001, 15-24.

¹⁶ A. CARREL, *Conduita vieții, reflecții. Rugăciunea*, Prahova 2013, 6-9.

night, when the soul reaches a purity that could not be acquire through your own efforts, and from here the soul lives a deified life, the final goal is to collaborate with Jesus in the redemption of the world. „I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal 2, 19-20)¹⁷.

The binomial between Theology and cinematography

The Catholic Church (magisterial documents) in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council emphasizes the importance of „applying” the rules for the right use of social media, reminding the children of the Church that

they have a duty to support and help Catholic newspapers and periodicals, film initiatives, radio stations and television programs whose main purpose is the spread and defence the truth and the endowment of human society with a Christian formation. There is a need to increase the number of schools in which Christian filmmakers receive an education in accordance with Christian doctrine to „help the actors to benefit human society through their art”¹⁸.

III. The Living God, Unique in Being and Triune in Persons.

The Holy Trinity in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is a mystery of faith in the living God, unique in being and triune in persons: the Father (Creator), the Son (Redeemer) and the Holy Spirit (the Sanctifier). The Father is unborn, the Son is born from eternity from the Father in a purely spiritual way, and in time he was born of the Virgin Mary; The Holy Spirit proceeds or is breathed from the Father and the Son. In the Holy Trinity the Father is the spring of deity, the source of life, love and light, it's the sun. The Son is the light of the Father and the Holy Spirit is the radiance of the Son. That's why the knowledge of the Father is the knowledge of the Son, and their knowledge is the work of the Spirit who leads us to all truth. If the Holy Scriptures reveal to us who the Holy Spirit is, the one who helps us understand the scriptures¹⁹.

The Christian teaching states that God is the perfect spirit, the creator of heaven and earth, and the catechism tells us,

There are three persons in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Every person is the true God. The three persons are one God. The mystery of one God

¹⁷ N. PURA, *Adevărata viață spirituală, Intimitatea cu Dumnezeu după Sfântul Ioan al Crucii*, Cluj Napoca 2006, 8-12.

¹⁸ CONCILIUL ECUMENIC VATICAN II, 52-53.

¹⁹ E. FERENȚ, *Dumnezeu cel viu, unic în ființă și întreit în persoane*, Iași 1997, 242.

in three persons is called the Holy Trinity. We call it the mystery of any truth revealed to us by God and which we cannot comprehend with our minds²⁰.

God has revealed Himself as Love in the person of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, man and God, the Saviour of the mankind. God sent him into the world so that through his suffering, death, and resurrection he will free the people from the Devil, sin and death, and be able to share his divine life with him. God is incomprehensible here on earth and in the light of beatified glory.

God cannot be attributed a gender, He is not a woman or a man. He has no gender, he is God. In the Bible we often find revealed expressions about the nature of God: God as voice „ a voice came from the heavens” (Mk 1,10-11), the fatherhood of God through „ Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form” (Jn 5,37), the motherhood of God through: „I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Lk 13,34). St. John Paul II said in explaining the parable of the prodigal son that in the paternity of God is also found His Motherhood through: „The merciful Father of the parable contains in himself, transcending, all the features of fatherhood and motherhood”²¹.

The Ecumenical Council of Constantinople I, presided over by Emperor Theodosius I, in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, promulgated the truths of faith against the Church of the first four centuries of Christianity. The Council Fathers succinctly enunciated the faith in the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, for the salvation of humans. The shortcomings of the Creed regarding the consubstantiality and divinity of the Holy Spirit, does not mean that the Council Fathers did not affirm the Holy Deity and the Son, but only used equivalent terms, they did not say that the Holy Spirit is God, nor that he is consubstantial, so as not to shock those who had „a sick hearing”²².

The relationship in the Holy Trinity is something constitutive, substantial and eternal, and by no means an Aristotelian accident. The relationship is God’s very way of being. The Holy Trinity is the alpha and omega of human life; from it we come and to it we go, in his treatise *On the Holy Trinity*, St. Augustine considers man as an image, a living icon of the Holy Trinity.

The teaching of the Holy Trinity does not come from a theological reflection but is recognition of the divinity of Jesus as the son of God, as the

²⁰ *Catehismul romano-catolic*, București 1984, 12-13.

²¹ D. KOWALCZYK, *Paternitatea și maternitatea lui Dumnezeu*, <https://www.catholica.ro/2013/02/19/pr-kowalczyk-paternitatea-si-maternitatea-lui-dumnezeu> (19.02.2013).

²² L. DÎNCĂ, *Conciliile ecumenice, Niceea I, 325 & Constantinopol I, 381*, Târgu-Lăpuș 2015, 226-228.

word and image of God the Father and the recognition of equality among all divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)²³.

St. Gregory of the Nazianzen rejects the heretical teachings of Eunomius who claim that the Son and the Holy Spirit do not come from the essence of God (that they are not fully divine). He criticizes Eunomius and challenges his point of view: divinity does not have a unique nature, but it is not composed either, but there are three alienated and dissociated natures that are proportionally superior or inferior. Eunomius taught that: the Son and the Holy Spirit do not come from the essence of God (it brings them to the rank of creatures) and the Son is distinctly inferior to the Father. St. Gregory tells Eunomius not to confuse God with creatures. God being the source of divinity and through divinity we reach creatures and that he dishonours with his statements the Divinity by lowering the Son and the Holy Spirit to the level of creatures. He explains the divinity as: independent in time, inseparable and infinite, honours both the source (due to the nature of things – God being the source) and the issues (own nature, the nature from which it comes, it cannot be contained in time, neither in nature nor in holiness). God is a being in internal agreement with itself, is always the same, always perfect, without quantity or quality, independent in time, incomprehensible, never without self, life and lives, light and brightness, glory and splendour, true and truth, Spirit of truth, holy and holiness in itself²⁴. The revelation coincides with the reality of Jesus. No other revelation is to be expected until the Parousia– the Christocentric character of the whole saving plan²⁵.

IV. The Holy Trinity in the movie *The Shack* 2017

The movie *The Shack* 2017, presents the story of a father on his spiritual journey. The main character Mackenzie Philips is married to Nannette a nurse with a deep faith „the mortar that holds together the bricks of their marriage”, the parents of five children. Mack is not a very religious person, and he has a relationship with Nannette „of love mixed with hatred”. He suspects God that he is always planning something, God being somewhere far away and foreign to what is happening on earth²⁶.

Marked by the abduction and death of his daughter who is left unattended for a few moments, Mack Phillips (an exponent of modern Christian

²³ G. EMERY, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, Washington, 2011.

²⁴ PD BRAY, *Grigory of Nazianzen's Trinitarian argument in oration 23*, *Theologica An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* (2020) 1-23

²⁵ R. LAVATORI, *Dumnezeu și omul*, Târgu-Lăpuș 2009, 55-56.

²⁶ W.P. YOUNG, *Baraca*, Oradea 2009, 12-13.

thought, with many misconceptions about God and Holy Trinity) begins to question his own beliefs and values, and when the police do not find the murderer, Mack is filled with anger and hatred. Mack receives an anonymous letter to go to the desert in Oregon (the place where his daughter was killed), to an abandoned barrack. Dark and full of doubt, however, Mack heads for the barracks, feeling that the letter is a divine sign (the letter is signed „Dad,” as his wife tells God), with an unbridled desire to find answers, and motivated by his own emptiness. The journey helps Mack to rediscover himself as a human being, to re-signify the tragedy he went through, and even more, to change his philosophy of life²⁷. Arriving at the barracks, he falls asleep and wakes up in a friendly place inhabited by three characters: a black woman named Dad, a mythical Asian woman named Sarayu and... a carpenter named Joshua, Isai or... Jesus.

In the conversations between Mack and Dad, Mack and Sarayu or Jesus, his conceptions and perceptions of God are overturned. Everything happens to radically change Mack²⁸.

We highlight the fact that by watching the movie *The Shack* 2017 and reading the book with the same title, we can have a partial knowledge of the Holy Trinity, in relation to Catholic Christian teaching, and that we are inevitably exposed to media evangelism by a movie impregnated with biblical teachings, which are part of the Eastern religions (New Age Movement).

The New Age movement is a combination of oriental religions, Gnosticism, witchcraft and Christianity, which accepted forms of occultism such as: astrology, divination, hypnosis, yoga practices, pantheism, belief in reincarnation, witchcraft. The spiritist Alice Bailey (1880-1949) receives messages from the so-called „master of wisdom”, the Tibetan Djwal Khul, leading to the formation of the essence of the Plan of Movement, which aims to form a new world order, initiation being an act of consecration, called „luciferase”, symbol used number 666, the movement offers everything for everyone: religion, philosophy, occult science, attention to environmental protection and life, inclination towards economic, social, political issues. The teachings and practices are dangerous, because they want to convince us of a spiritualist universe: supernatural forces that solve problems such as: the dead rise, people teleport, thoughts are transmitted telepathically. The ways of the new age have death at their end, so the Bible forbids all New Age practices²⁹.

²⁷ *The Shack* (2017), Stef (04.02.2017), <https://filmenoi2014.wordpress.com/2017/02/04/the-shack-2017/>

²⁸ Baraca, Wm. Paul Young (recenzie), Andrei JIȚĂREANU (22.02.2010), <https://anddij.wordpress.com/2010/02/22/baraca-wm-paul-young-recenzie/>

²⁹ A. FLORIAN, *New Age sau Era Marii Amagirii* (06.10.2021), <https://www.resursecrestine.ro/eseuri/10721/new-age-sau-era-marii-amagirii>

All religions want to provide an answer to the mysteries of the human condition, which disturbs the human heart. It is a continuous search of the man that can fill that inner void: “who does not know what he is looking for, continues to search without finding; but who knows what he is looking for, ceases to search when he finds it”³⁰ and thus the different non-Christian religions are in their own search for a certain truth different from the one revealed. Even from the ancient times humans have this religious feeling, which is why God is not far from those who seek in all sorts of shadows and faces an unknown God. He wants all to be saved, even those who do not know the teaching of Jesus Christ (with no fault of their own) but by cooperating with the grace, and those who with a sincere heart listen to the voice of conscience, can gain eternal life³¹.

The Catholic Church does not reject anything that is true in non-Christian religions and it still proclaims the unique truth that is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that is Jesus Christ. The church encourages dialogue with those of other religions (prudently and charitably) by giving living testimonies of the Christian faith and life. All people are brothers, and God is our Father par excellence, so our refusal to behave fraternally with our fellows, based on sex, colour, religion etc., are contrary to love for God: “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.”(1 John 4,8). But this love must be in the TRUTH, which is JESUS CHRIST (in His teaching)³².

*The main shortcomings of the Christian teaching in the movie:
The Shack 2017*

The drama movie, made after the novel of the same title, does not contain parts of Catholic teaching such as: God became man in order to deify man. He remained sacramental, but real, in the holy Eucharist, so that every man of every age could meet God personally in Holy Communion. This is because the author of the book and the film’s director do not consider Love equals sacrifice, and suffering, disease, and death are elements that cannot be accepted by the entire secularized postmodern American society. In fact, a liquid society, strong and advanced in terms of culture, science and technology, whose complex lifestyle reduces God to a hypothesis that does not influence personal choices, but focuses on individualism, capital accumulation, cultural diversity and moral relativism.

³⁰ S. FAUSTI, *Amintește-ți și istorisește evanghelia. Cateheză narativă a lui Marcu*, Cluj-Napoca 2017, 50.

³¹ CONCILUL VATICAN II, *LG*, București 2019, 72-73.

³² CONCILUL VATICAN II, *NA*, București 2019, 221-224.

The director of the movie, Stuart Hazeldine, considers that God is good only when he gives a more than comfortable life, and Nan's children are not a gift from Him, not even their own life. He does not regard Mackenzie as a gift from God, considering it his right, which he deserves. In the movie we see Mack's ambiguous, oscillating faith, which lasts until his family is healthy, and everything goes according to his worldly plans, but we notice that immediately after the Providential events he no longer carries his cross, nor does the film show that he is at home praying. The force of prayer being extremely strong, like the greatest army, only the devils know to what extent the mere act of praying is to be feared for them. The church, Mack just „visits” it simultaneously we clearly deduce from the film only his anger, his desire for revenge, but revenge is the reward of evil. The anger is savaging his soul and stopping him from any connection with those in his family and other peoples from around, he decides only on his own to solve his problem and being tempted, he is quickly overwhelmed by the Great Sadness.

Evangelization it is a mission of Church

For the evangelization of the population, the direct relationship with the believer is preferred, which allows the transmission of the message of the Gospel to be faithful, being received as a gift. We have as an example the Christian TV stations, which broadcast Christian films, art and music. We can also use the internet through different platforms that offer us a quality communication such as: Facebook, YouTube, Chat, Skype, Blogs, Email have various Christian articles and sites³³.

We are all exposed to the evangelization through the media. Watching the movie *The Shack* 2017, or reading the book, or press reviews is an effective and modern phenomenon of preaching the Word of God (but also a mixture of unbiblical, even pagan, teachings). The moral status of people increases or decreases depending on the words they utter and the messages they choose to hear, either: God, world or from the Devil.

Every communication has a moral dimension, says the Lord Himself: “You brood of vipers, how can you say good things when you are evil? For from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. A good person brings forth good out of a store of goodness, but an evil person brings forth evil out of a store of evil” (Mt 12,34-35).

The ethical dimension of social media involves eliminating the risks that the media poses to the well-being of the family and these powerful means of communication must remain authentic sources of inner spiritual enrichment.

³³ R. BOGESIC, *The Church and the Media-Evangelism or Manipulation*, *Evangelical Journal of Theology* (2019) 107-120

The Internet is a modern forum similar to that of ancient Rome. The virtual public space where political issues are debated, business is concluded, religious duties are fulfilled, where so much of the social life of the world's citizens takes place and where human nature is revealed in a positive or a negative perspective. The church uses the potential of the new world of cyberspace to proclaim the gospel message.

In the movie *The Shack* 2017 and in the book with the same title are found unbiblical teachings that are part of Eastern religions (New Age Movement) therefore the movie raises some sensitive questions about the truth such as: relationship with divinity, life and suffering.

Ghioancă Constantin, in his work "Western Emerging Churches" considers that William Paul Young promotes non-biblical teachings in his book *The Shack* 2017 (also taken in the film), considering the following arguments:

1. The character Mack meets the divine Trinity as follows: „Father” (an African-American woman), „Jesus” (a Jewish carpenter) and „Sarayu” (an Asian woman who appears to be the Holy Spirit). The dialogues are between Mack, Father, Jesus and Sarayu on all kinds of problems. One problem debated was the theodicy (the aspect of evil in the Universe in relation to the character of God). Jesus tells Mack that: „He is the best way a man can relate to his Father or Sarayu.” Notice the wordplay: not the only Way, but the best way. We know that there is no other way but Jesus, the Bible says: Jesus also said to him, „I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14, 6).

2. Dad says, “Mackenzie, I’m not what you think. I don’t need to punish people because they sin. Sin is in itself a punishment, devouring you from within. It is not my purpose to punish him, it is my joy to heal him. „God does not want the death of the sinner but the salvation of him. The Bible speaks of God the Judge who at the end of history will punish sin. (Rev. 20, 11-15). The idea of: „sin which is in itself a punishment” fits the Eastern concept of karma and not the Christian gospel.

3. The problem of the universalism (as if God has reconciled everyone and saves everyone). Dad tells Mack he’s now at peace with everyone. Mack continues, “With everyone? You mean those who believe in you, don’t you?” Dad replies, „Everyone!”.

Thimoty Beal mentions that in *The Shack* are „unbiblical metaphorical models of God”, „the non-hierarchical model of the Trinity,” and worst of all, the „theology of universal salvation” (all roads lead to Jesus)³⁴.

³⁴ C. GHIOANCA, *Bisericile emergente vestice. Din perspectiva baptistă românească*, Cluj-Napoca 2010, 231-233.

To prove these non-Christian teachings and contrary to the Bible, the writer Warren B. Smith also helps us with the Christian Book BARACA and its New Age Yeast³⁵.

The differences between the book and its movie adaptation: “The Shack” 2017.

Watching the movie and reading the book with the same title, we find the following:

- The appearance of God in the film at 1:38 to 2:30, when Mackenzie is just a child, is not specified in the book, but in the film it has meaning and it gives more meaning.
- In the movie Mackenzie and the children do not stop to visit the waterfall from the story that the older children have heard. In the car they ask their father to tell Missy the story of the Indian princess, he finishes to say to Missy only in the tent in camp (in fact in the book the four had stopped at Multnomah Falls to buy Missy pencils and a colouring book, to Kate and Josh two cheap cameras and then went on a route following the marking to the bridge in front of the waterfall, where Missy asked and finally persuaded her Father Mack to tell her the story there until the end. Missy didn’t say a word at the end of the legend of the young Indian princess, she returned immediately and headed for the minibus as if to say: I have nothing to do here, let’s get out of here³⁶.
- In the book, Willie offers to accompany Mack to the shack, but they don’t get along, Mack refuses and doesn’t steal his car like in the movie, but borrows from Willie a 4x4 jeep. At departure in middle of the winter he receives the car from Willie with the pistol and the cartridges. – p.65;
- Also in the book, the encounter with Dad is the first, not the one with Jesus as in the movie, when Mack wanted to punch the door, she opened it and a big African-American woman took him in her arms, spinning, like he makes a parent with his child, telling him by his name, and took his coat and he gave him the gun, not wanting anyone to be hurt.
- The circumstances in the film do not change after Mack falls asleep in the shack, as described in the book very clearly and in detail. In the book we see Mack collapsing with his back to the wall, his eyelids fall muttering: „I love you Missy, i miss you”, it doesn’t take long for him to immerse himself effortlessly in a death-like sleep p. 73;

³⁵ Cartea “creștină” BARACA și drojdia sa New Age, Warren B. SMITH (10.2016), <http://apologeticindex.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Baraca-A5.pdf>

³⁶ W.P. YOUNG, *Baraca*, 28-29.

- In the Christian film, Dad’s reaction to the weapon that Mackenzie carries on him differs from the one in the book.
- In the movie the nightmare in the boat, from minute 1:12:50 to 1:14:45 does not exist in the book and in the novel Mackenzie does not take off his shoes the first time she tries to walk on water with Jesus. Mack descends from the dock imagining that the water is a hard ground and then he fixes his gaze on the far shore of the lake, making contact with the water. His shoes watered on the spot, but the water did not even reach to his ankles. The water of the lake moves, he loses his balance, and returns to find Jesus barefoot beside him and the second time Mack takes off his already wet socks and shoes, stepping on the water next to Jesus, and they both quickly reach the opposite shore.

Conclusions

From a theological point of view, the movies *The Shack* 2017 together with the book with the same name it represents a nonconformist vision of the Holy Trinity. In the Catholic Church the image of God is already outlined, so the ideas written by the author William P. Young are a little shocking: God is not who we think He is, yet we have not even begun to know Him, therefore the author is waiting for another revelation which from a Catholic point of view will no longer be, we already have the revelation in Holy Scripture so we know without doubts about the Holy Trinity and the only way is Jesus Christ.

The Revelation is the act of the God revealing himself to introduce mankind into their own lives. More precisely, it is the act of the Father manifesting in his incarnate Son in order to bring people back to himself in the Holy Spirit (*Dei Verbum* 2). Christ is the supreme mediator and the fullness of revelation in the condition of the Incarnate Son, in His person, in His works, in particular through His redemptive death, God revealed Himself to man (*Dei Verbum* 4).

Therefore Christian moviegoers must deepen their faith (obviously Catholic believers to review the Catechism of the Catholic Church) before watching any Christian film production on the market, including the American film discussed above – *The Shack* 2017 an original Christian drama. A personal remark that Catholic moviegoers can watch without fear of heresies: Lux Video productions, films with scripts verified by priests, representatives of the Catholic Church.