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## **FILM IMAGES OF CHRIST IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMA**

A feature film that is one of the most popular and most-loved forms of entertainment constitutes also an extremely attractive media message, strongly influencing the imagination of viewers. In addition to having the entertainment function, it also plays an important role as a carrier and promoter of a specific ideology and worldview. By presenting suggestive images that strongly affect emotions, it can shape public opinion, promote or stigmatize and depreciate selected ethical systems as well as individual and social moral attitudes.

In this context, as an important task of the theology of social media, critically analyzing various media messages, and thus feature films and TV series, one can regard a reflection on the forms of presenting figure of Jesus Christ in contemporary cinema. The tension resulting from the fact that the Savior – worshiped and adored by a community of believers – has also become a hero of popular culture requires a proper theological and media analysis.

### **1. INTEGRAL RELATIONSHIPS OF CINEMA WITH LITERATURE AND RELIGION**

Since the beginning of its existence, i.e. since 1895, cinema has been abundantly inspired by beautiful literature, which has been the basis of the vast majority of cinematographic works. Film adaptations of well-known and popular stories, short stories, novels and sagas

ensured both commercial and artistic success. New technical skills, namely the use of trick photography and astonishing special effects have enabled the cinema to create dynamic images illustrating miraculous events in the early stages of its development. No wonder then that the pioneers of the cinema reached for religious topics known to the public and started to make films referring to well-known biblical events, especially evangelical ones. It is worth recalling a few characteristic examples, confirming the importance and presence of religious subjects in the early period of cinema development: in 1899, the film *Christ Walking on Water* was produced in France, while *God's Passion* was adaptation of the Passion play. Furthermore, the Italian productions were particularly popular, especially already the third at the time adaptation of the famous novel by H. Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis?* shot in 1912; the film *Christ* of 1915 was an equally impressive, monumental historical cinematographic picture, which contributed to strengthening the position of the religious Italian cinema.

In the USA, in Hollywood, films inspired by biblical events were also created; *From manger to cross*, realized in 1912, is considered the first American full-length feature film; then exalted movies entitled *The Ten Commandments* from 1922, *Ben Hur* from 1926 and the *King of Kings* from 1927 were produced; the theme of the Passion of Christ was one of the themes of the previously realized monumental film image entitled *Intolerance* from 1916<sup>1</sup>.

Along with the development of cinema art as well as individual film genres, a specific type of genre, that is religious film emerged, mainly concerning the Christian tradition as an essential and fundamental element of Western culture. Both in the silent movie era and during the so-called the golden age of Hollywood, when monumental historical movie productions were created there, film makers eagerly reached for religious themes. They made impressive and spectacular

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Zwoliński, *Obraz w relacjach społecznych*, Kraków, 2004, 185; T. Miczka, *Kino włoskie*, Gdańsk 2009, 30; J. Płazewski, *Historia filmu francuskiego*, Warsaw, 2005, 32.

films, which were remembered in the history of cinema as successful grand productions. A characteristic feature of the then created film images was a more or less faithful presentation of biblical and evangelical events and the creation of film adaptations of stories relating to the beginnings of Christianity as well as showing the heroism of the faith of the Apostles, the first Christians, especially martyrs. Religious films, or speaking more strictly, evangelical ones, made Christ one of the most recognizable heroes of popular culture.

Generally speaking, it can be said that until the late 1960s the cinematic image of Christ did not differ much from the one presented in the Gospels. The creators of the cinema presented the Savior according to the Christian tradition and created His film images and biographies, which were more or less successful. An exception to this rule is the movie *King of Kings*<sup>2</sup>. His authors allegedly wanted to avoid conflict with the followers of Judaism, because they presented Christ as a conspirator and victim of Roman persecution<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. FALSE IMAGES

The moral revolution that took place in the 1960s had a significant impact not only on the shape of the moral cinema, but also influenced the way Christ was portrayed. An important element of the transformations identified with the so-called the sexual revolution and the development of hippie ideology was the contestation of all authorities, namely parents, school, church, state. The myth of freedom considered as unrestricted freedom resulted in the development of youth subcultures, proclaiming the ideology of hedonism which was assumed as constituting the meaning of life, the eroticization of popular culture, making sexual the central issue of human existence and reducing all interpersonal relations to the sensual dimension. This way of perceiving the world has also been shown on the screen.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *King of kings*, dir. N. Ray, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Zwoliński, op. cit., 185-186.

Considered a so-called cult film *Easy rider*<sup>4</sup> presented the image of the hippie commune and its leader bearing the name of Jesus, and therefore clearly associated with Christ. The moral freedom shown there is to be considered a distorted, caricatured and grotesque version of the commandment of love. The exaggeration of the meaning of sexuality of Jesus of Nazareth was later presented in several feature films. The film *The Last Temptation of Christ*<sup>5</sup> depicted a false alternative story of Jesus' life, reduced to the erotic dimension. The film adaptation of the scandalous novel by N. Kazantzakis<sup>6</sup> was rightly perceived as profanation of the drama of the Savior's death. The image of Christ struggling with temptations, especially lust, who succumbed to despair and depression, was far from the Gospel truth, it distorted it and obscured the essence of the message and the work of salvation. Earlier in the film *Teorema*<sup>7</sup>, a provocative Christotypic symbol appeared; the protagonist, a young man resembling Jesus, became a heterosexual and homosexual lover of a rich industrialist's family. Exposing eroticism, moral ambiguity and, above all, blasphemous content, it caused scandal and indignation as well as evoked discussion about the way in which religion should be presented in the cinema<sup>8</sup>. In recent times, the alternative biography of Christ was depicted in the action film *Da Vinci Code*<sup>9</sup>. It illustrated the mythological genesis and the mendacious – from its beginning – history of Christianity through the alleged marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The basic message of the scandalous plot of the film was the message that Christ

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Easy rider*, dir. D. Hopper, 1969 [basic information about foreign films was taken from the respective pages of filmweb.pl, available from 8 to ... March 2019].

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Last Temptation of Christ*, dir. M. Scorsese, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. N. Kazantzakis, *Ostatnie kuszenie Chrystusa*, transl. J. Wolff, Poznań 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Teorema*, dir. P. P. Pasolini, 1968.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Zwoliński, op. cit., 186; T. Miczka, op. cit., 345-346.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Da Vinci Code*, dir. R. Howard, 2006.

was not God, but an ordinary man with descendants<sup>10</sup>. Such a screen image of Jesus of Nazareth was completely contrary to the evangelical truth, faith, experience and tradition of the Church. It unequivocally undermined the credibility of the Church as well as the credibility of its Founder.

Among the films bearing the characteristics of iconoclastic narrative, the film *Life of Brian* can be indicated<sup>11</sup>; Although it was supposed to be a pastiche that ridiculed Hollywood religious cinema, it turned out to be a production that glaringly lacked legendary British humor and good taste. The final scene depicting crucified singing joyful songs, although it did not, in fact, represent Christ, it indeed evoked unequivocal associations with the real tragedy described in the *New Testament*. The only sequence relating directly to the evangelical events, namely the scene showing Christ preaching the sermon on the mountain, was also mocking and ridiculing, for it distorted the meaning of blessings and exaggerated the reactions of inattentive listeners who did not understand the meaning of the Savior's words.

After the publication of the brilliant novel by Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*<sup>12</sup> filmmakers immediately recognized its amazing potential as the basis for the script of feature film and television production. The next film adaptations proved the unusual attractiveness of Bulgakov's narrative<sup>13</sup>. Reminding of the person of Christ in the atheist Soviet Union was undoubtedly of great importance, as it not only opposed the official propaganda of atheist totalitarianism, but also referred to the essential elements of the spiritual tradition of Russian Orthodoxy. Presented by Bulhakov and faithfully reproduced by the filmmakers, the image of Jesus

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. C. E. Olson, S. Miesel, *Oszustwo „Kodu Leonarda da Vinci”*, transl. M. Bortnowska, Sandomierz 2006, 81, 116.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Life of Brian*, dir. T. Jones, 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. B. Sokołow, *The Master and Margarita*, in: Idem, *Michail Bulhakow. Lexicon of life and works*, collective translation, Warsaw 2003, 213-234.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *The Master and Margarita*, dir. A. Petrović, 1972; *Pilat i inni*, dir. A. Wajda, 1972; *Mistrz i Małgorzata*, dir. M. Wojtyśzko, 1988; *The Master and Margarita*, dir. Y. Kara, 1994; *Mistrz i Małgorzata*, dir. W. Bortko, 2005.

created by him differed quite considerably from the evangelical truth. The protagonist of Bulgakov novel and of the film – Yeshua Ha-Nocri was a pitiable teacher of the new faith, who as a result of the intrigues of the Sanhedrin and the cowardice of the Roman governor, Pilate, was condemned to cruel death on the cross. The image of a naïve dreamer, an utopist, a harmless philosopher, an innocent victim of fanatical power, was far from the evangelical image of Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior. The plot of the novel and its film adaptations could even give the impression of a kind of duality, because the paradoxical picture of the omnipotent devil created by Bulhakov, Woland dominated the action and other heroes. In one of the scenes of the final sequence, however, the theme of Yeshua's reign over Satan appeared<sup>14</sup>. However, this theme was not developed, rather signaled and could be left unnoticed and unintelligible by readers and viewers. In the original adaptation of the novel by M. Bulhakov made by the Polish film director, the scene of the crucifixion of Yeshua was placed in a rubbish dump near a busy highway<sup>15</sup>. The shocking picture could suggest the failure of the sacrifice of Christ, to which the world remained indifferent<sup>16</sup>. The interpretation presented by the author of film adaptation emphasized the universality and validity of Christ's presence in the world and the confrontation of old and contemporary human attitudes, as well as reactions to the drama of the cross<sup>17</sup>.

A false image of the Savior appeared in the film adaptation of the famous rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*<sup>18</sup> by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. A biblical musical with great artistic value presented a false picture of an ancient hippie, Jesus of Nazareth as a romantic, charismatic teacher and a gentle idol of the crowds, who was regarded, however, as a threat to the religious elite frightened by

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. Bułhakow, *The Master and Margarita*, transl. I. Lewandowska, W. Dąbrowski, Warszawa 2009, 490-492.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Pilate and others*, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. B. Michalak, *Wajda. Kronika wypadków filmowych*, b.m.w., 2016, 133-135.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Wajda, *Pilat i inni*, <http://kwartalnikwyspa.pl/andrzej-wajda-pilat-i-inni/>, 9 III 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Jesus Christ Superstar*, dir. N. Jewison, 1973.

the popularity of harmless idealist. The film adaptation suggestively emphasized the theme of Maria Magdalena's sensual love for Jesus and, like some of the above-mentioned film images, reduced his Person solely to his human aspect and completely ignored the divine aspect of the nature of the Savior. The final scene and musical illustration referring to the evangelical record J 19.41 indicated the ultimate character of Jesus' death as the tragic end of his mission, which is, of course, contrary to the fundamental and constitutive truth of Christianity about the Risen Christ.

A film image of Christ's extremely depreciating work of salvation was the horrible production of the *The Brand New Testament*<sup>19</sup>. The nightmarish image of a sadistic God was accompanied by the image of his rebellious daughter who, after escaping from the heavenly hell, chose and sent out new apostles as if following the example of her older brother, known as JC... The world changed for the better only when control over it was taken by the wife of God. Such images constituted a repulsive caricature of Christianity and undermined the foundations of not only theology but also Christian anthropology. They confirmed the belief in the ineffectiveness of the saving mission of Christ and its positive effects also for the temporal history of mankind. They presented a false truth about God's, creative and saving love imposing a misinterpretation of the mystery of His suffering distorted by the perspective of incomprehensible God's whims and cruelty, deceitfully portraying man's fate as a passive puppet who had no influence on the plans of the despotic Creator, thus the obscuring the vision of salvation accomplished by the Son of God.

The abovementioned examples of fictional productions containing false images of Christ can be qualified and defined as persuasive propaganda messages of an anti-religious, and more specifically anti-Christian nature, because they more or less explicitly contradict the truth and tradition of the Gospel.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *The Brand New Testament*, dir. J. Van Dormael, 2015.

### 3. APOCRYPHAL MOVIES

The classical division of religious cinema genres distinguishing biblical, evangelical, hagiographic and existential-theological films<sup>20</sup> should be supplemented with an additional category, namely apocryphal films. One of the characteristic features of current cinematography is the reference to the most popular motifs and well-known biblical heroes. Their histories are often treated as a background for creating dynamic film images overwhelming the viewer with special effects, as well as narrative openly deviating in its meaning from *Old Testament* messages, sometimes even contradictory to the message and truth of Revelation or rich with many fanciful elements that obscure and falsify biblical stories<sup>21</sup>. Such film adaptations of biblical texts are closer to adventure movies and *fantasy* genres than to religious cinema. movies inspired by the stories and biographies of biblical heroes, but not their faithful film adaptations, should therefore be classified into a new category, i.e. a category of apocryphal movies. Apocryphal elements also prevail in many productions formerly qualified as evangelical movies, that is concerning Christ, His Mother, Mary and Saint Joseph.

The most apocryphal elements, which is a peculiar analogy to the ancient Christian legendary literature, occurs in relation to narratives depicting the childhood of Jesus and the life of the Holy Family<sup>22</sup>, and also presenting biographies of the Blessed Virgin Mary<sup>23</sup> and Saint Joseph<sup>24</sup>, as well as stories of real and fictitious characters

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. I.K. [I. Kolasińska], *Religijny film*, in: *Film Dictionary*, ed. by R. Syska, Kraków 2010, 156-157.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Noah's Ark*, dir. J. Irvin, 1999; *Noe. Chosen by God*, dir. D. Aronofsky, 2014; *Exodus. Gods and kings*, dir. R. Scott, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *The child called Jesus*, dir. F. Rossi, 1987; *Holy Family*, dir. R. Mertes, 2006; *Star of Kings*, dir. F. Jephcott, 2007; *Young Messiah*, dir. C. Nowrasteh, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Mary, mother of Jesus*, dir. G. Chiesa, 2010; *Mary of Nazareth*, dir. G. Campiotti, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Joseph of Nazareth*, dir. R. Mertes, 2000.



for whom the encounter with Christ was a breakthrough existential experience.

Among these films, one should mention apocryphal film images concerning Mary Magdalene<sup>25</sup>, the apostle-betrayer – Judas<sup>26</sup>, Barabbas released from prison instead of Jesus<sup>27</sup>, the tribune Marcellus<sup>28</sup> and Prince Ben-Hur<sup>29</sup>. In this case, the common rule of using literary prototypes as the basis of the cinema scenarios has been confirmed<sup>30</sup>.

Productions which presented the Gospel of Jesus' childhood rather accurately depict the events described by the Evangelists. However, they are supplemented mostly with apocryphal themes<sup>31</sup>, concerning, for example, the life of the Holy Family in Egypt<sup>32</sup>, and then in Nazareth – before the beginning of public activity by Christ<sup>33</sup>. However, due to the abundance of fantasy themes, fictitious scenes and invented dialogues, such productions should be classified as apocryphal, not as biblical or evangelical films.

In the feature-length drama *Jesus*<sup>34</sup>, which is a film screening of the *Gospel according to Saint Luke*, the authors tried to avoid unnecessary apocryphal elements; in this context, an interesting procedure was to present the silence of Saint Joseph responding to the evangelical truth and the scene of a return with the twelve-year-old Jesus after finding Him in the temple; the scene shows the Holy

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Mary Magdalene*, dir. G. Davies, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Judas*, dir. R. Mertes, 2001; *Judas*, dir. C. R. Carner, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Barabbas*, dir. R. Fleischer, 1961; *Barabbas*, dir. R. Young, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *The Robe*, dir. H. Koster, 1953.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Ben-Hur*, dir. F. Niblo, 1925; *Ben-Hur*, dir. W. Wyler, 1959; *Ben-Hur*, dir. T. Bekmambetov, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. P. Lagerkvist, *Barabbas*, transl. Z. Milewska, Poznań 1993; L. C. Douglas, *The Robe*, transl. M. Skibniewska, Warszawa 1994; L. Wallace, *Ben Hur*, transl. A. Appel, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *The star of kings*, op. cit.; *Holy Family*, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *The child called Jesus*, dir. F. Rossi, 1987; *Young Messiah*, dir. C. Nowrasteh, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Jesus*, dir. R. Young, 1999; *Joseph of Nazareth*, dir. R. Mertes, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Jesus*, dir. P. Sykes, J. Kirsh, 1979.

Family leading a lively and joyful dialogue on the way to Nazareth, but the words are not heard.

The apocryphal film *Young Messiah*<sup>35</sup> takes up the topic of Jesus' self-consciousness. It presents Him as a seven-year-old boy, living with Joseph and Mary in Alexandria, in Egypt.

Jesus performs miracles known from the legendary literary tradition: he revives a dead bird, resurrects the boy, but he does not understand who he is or where he has such power from. Both Joseph and Mary believe that Jesus is the Messiah; Joseph is worried, however, that he can not explain God to his Son. The image of Jesus as a small boy emphasizes mainly his human nature; as a child he is taught by Saint Joseph; their relationship is characterized by great intimacy and familiarity. In the film *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*<sup>36</sup>, which is an apocryphal film presentation of the Gospel of Jesus' childhood, one of the sequences reminds us of the stay of a twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, where He presents His extraordinary nature, which is the object of amazement of the scribes.

The apocryphal epic movie – following the examples of the great Hollywood historical productions, that is, *Holy Family*<sup>37</sup> presents the legendary narrative of the Gospel of Jesus' Childhood. St. Joseph is irritated by Mary's claims that Jesus is the Son of God. He considers it a nonsense because he regards Jesus as a normal, average boy. As Jesus grows up, their relationship clearly changes: Jesus asks Joseph to guard him and help him grow up. Joseph starts to understand that Mary and Jesus are extraordinary, sometimes he cannot cope with the difficulties of upbringing, with regard to the pranks of little Jesus, once he even hits him in the face. Yet, after this event Joseph has a guilty conscience, realizing that he slapped the Messiah but Mary calms her husband saying that everything that is made of love is good and accepted by God. Joseph, shocked by his behaviour, explores deeply the mystery of Jesus, who tells him: "You are a good

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Young Messiah*, dir. C. Nowrasteh, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Mary, mother of Jesus*, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Holy Family*, dir. R. Mertes, 2006.

man, though violent<sup>38</sup>. Joseph clearly admits that he does not understand the situation in which he found himself. Even after meeting the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, he still have doubts. The film ends with a moving sequence of Joseph's death. The dying man is accompanied by twelve-year-old Jesus. At the request of Józef, they pray Psalm 23, the *Lord is my shepherd*, together. Joseph asks Jesus for forgiveness and confesses the misunderstanding of the mystery of the conception of the Messiah. Jesus prays eagerly for dying Joseph, admitting that He appreciates being guarded and raised by him, he comforted me when he cried – He says addressing Joseph just as he expected it all his life, t.i. My father.

The image of the Holy Family presented in the analyzed film concentrates on highlighting the problem of man's struggle with God's mystery. Jesus turns out to be a mystery even for His beloved ones, that is, Saint Joseph, the earthly guardian. The excessive accentuation of his disbelief, however, does not correspond to the evangelical message.

In the apocryphal film image of the *Child called Jesus*<sup>39</sup>, the legendary story of the Holy Family, first living in the border village between Palestine and Egypt, and then in Alexandria, was presented. The film, which is an adaptation of the Gospel of Childhood, contains elements known from apocrypha, including a miracle of reviving a clay bird by little Jesus. Yet, in the face of the pranks of little Jesus, Mary demands radical educational responses from Joseph, but he shows extremely forgiving attitude towards his son. The film presents a special intimacy between adolescent Jesus and Joseph; Jesus helps Joseph at work, calls him a father, tells him that he needs him. Little Jesus is a good, grateful and loving child. The continuation of this film image raises the problem of the self-awareness of little Jesus and the perspective of His mission<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Child called Jesus*, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Z. Adamek, *Ekranostas. Przewodnik po filmach hagiograficznych*, Tarnów 2009, 259.

In the film *Mary of Nazareth*<sup>41</sup>, little Jesus also calls Joseph the father; the chronology and completion of the scenes concerning the beginnings of Jesus' public activity are different from the content of Gospel messages: after being tempted in the desert, Jesus will meet Mary and Joseph and participates with them in a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where at the request of Mary He helps the newlyweds and transforms water into wine. The next sequence, differently from the message of tradition, depicts Joseph's death: for it is not Jesus, but Mary who keeps guard by Joseph's bed. The evangelical film *Jesus*<sup>42</sup> depicting the life of the Savior begins with an apocryphal scene of seeking work by skillful carpenters, namely Joseph and adult Jesus. After returning to Nazareth, Joseph unexpectedly weakens, and his death becomes a turning point in the life of Jesus.

In the apocryphal film *Joseph and Mary*<sup>43</sup> presenting the childhood of the Savior, the final scene shows the death of Saint Joseph, who is worried that he will no longer be able to protect Jesus. The dying Joseph experiences the vision of the Crucified. Another apocryphal image, *Joseph of Nazareth*<sup>44</sup>, also combines a legendary narrative with facts known from the Gospel of Childhood. The film emphasizes the image of Jesus as a special child endowed with extraordinary wisdom and perfect knowledge of the *Bible*. Apocryphal film images created in accordance with the principles of cinematographic art contribute to the presentation of religious themes in contemporary cinema. Nevertheless without adequate education of viewers they can obscure the evangelical truth about the essence of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Mary of Nazareth*, dir. G. Campiotti, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Jesus*, dir. R. Young, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Joseph and Mary*, dir. R. Christian, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Joseph of Nazareth*, op. cit.

#### 4. FILM ICONS

In the contemporary history of world cinematography, attention is paid to these evangelical movies, which are distinguished by both a faithful representation of the truth of Revelation, an excellent artistic form as well as a moving way of presenting Christ and His teaching, miracles, and above all His passion, death and resurrection. Such images include, for example, the film adaptation of the *Gospel according to Saint John*, namely the film *The Story of the Savior*<sup>45</sup> and impressively spectacular Hollywood production *The Greatest Story*<sup>46</sup>, a feature biography of Christ. The first part of the monumental film *Jesus of Nazareth*<sup>47</sup> contains some apocryphal elements, such as the scene of Joseph, a young carpenter, who is presented as matchmaker of a widow, Anna; several successive scenes presents Joseph working in a carpentry workshop and wisely instructing little Jesus and other children. Joseph presides over family prayers and introduces Jesus to the synagogue.

In this film, however, Jesus does not accompany dying Joseph. The second part of the film presents the history of the Savior, known from the Gospel. Earlier film *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*<sup>48</sup> met with an accusation of over-emphasizing the human dimension of the nature of Christ<sup>49</sup>.

The exceptional production, which reminds us of the drama of the passion and death of the Savior was the film *Passion*<sup>50</sup>, a successful attempt to screen the tragedy of Golgotha, the uncompromising nature of Christ as well as an expression of opposition to illusionary character and the excessive sentimentality of contemporary cinema. The real

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. *The Tale of the Savior*, dir. Ph. Saville, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *The greatest story*, dir. G. Stevens et al., 1965.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Jesus of Nazareth*, dir. F. Zeffirelli, 1977.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, dir. P. P. Pasolini, 1964.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. A. Zwoliński, op. cit., 186.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Passion*, dir. M. Gibson, 2004.

advantages of this cinematographic image were realist narration and a clear outline of the attitudes and behaviors of the film's characters<sup>51</sup>.

In the context of the analysis of the screen images of Christ, one should also pay attention to the characteristic phenomenon of combining religious and action movies, both considered in the convention of historical and contemporary cinema. The police investigation, which was conducted in ancient times by the Clavius tribune, commissioned by Pilate to explain the mystery of the empty tomb of Jesus<sup>52</sup>, and the modern journalist investigation of the phenomenon of Christianity and its Founder<sup>53</sup> emphasize the uniqueness of the Person of Christ and the significance of faith in the process of interpretation of the meaning of human existence. A similar theme of Christ's presence in the life of a modern man was moved by one of the film belonging to the genre of the existential-theological cinema<sup>54</sup>.

The analysis of film images of Christ in contemporary cinema indicated that cinema can be both considered an anti-Christian propaganda instrument and an instrument thanks to which Christianity and its founder is present in popular culture. Films affirming religion, as if screen icons, remind us that faith is important not only from the historical and civilizational, but mainly from existential and moral perspective.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. M. Dopartowa, *Czy kino może nawrócić? Wokół Pasji Mela Gibsona*, Kraków 2004, 70-81.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Resurrected*, dir. K. Reynolds, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *The Case for Christ*, dir. J. Gunn, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *7 kilometers from Jerusalem*, dir. C. Malaponti, 2007.

### Summary

Presentation of film images of Christ in contemporary cinema. Showing the integral relationships of cinema with literature and religion. Postulating the distinction of a new genre of religious film, namely the apocryphal film. Analysis of selected films showing the life and mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Presenting false images of Christ.

**Key words:** Movie, Christ, cinema, truth, apocryphal film

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### Filmography

- 7 kilometrów od Jerozolimy*, reż. C. Malaponti, 2007.
- Arka Noego*, reż. J. Irvin, 1999.
- Barabasz*, reż. R. Fleischer, 1961.

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*Dzieciątko zwane Jezus*, reż. F. Rossi, 1987.  
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*Gwiazda królów*, reż. F. Jephcott, 2007.  
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