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SÁROSPATAKI FÜZETEK

THEOLOGY AND FILM

- **INGRID GLATZ-ANDEREGG**
  The Significance of Religion in Politically Unstable Times – A Religious Studies Analysis Based on the Film *A Taste of Sunshine*
- **CLAUS LÖSER**
  The "Ukrainian Cinematographic Miracle" – Incomplete Notes on the History and Presence of a European Cinematography
- **ANETT CSILLA LOVAS**
  In Search of Meaning in the Series *The Leftovers*
- **VIKTOR KÓKAI-NAGY**
  Interpretation of "The Young Pope" in the Light of the Great Commandment of Love (Matt 22:37–39)


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EDITORIAL

The present issue of *Sárospataki Füzetek* gives an insight into two conferences on the theme of theology and film. In Budapest, at the end of April 2023, Interfilm International was organising a seminar on the history of Hungarian film and the current situation in Central and Eastern Europe. In the middle of October 2023, Interfilm Hungary held its second international conference. The venue and host of the event was the Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy. The theme of the conference this time was "Screen Priests and Screen Pastors". The programme included lectures and film screenings to help deepen the understanding of the topic: how are priests and pastors portrayed in cinema and TV films?

According to biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann[1] the Psalms can be categorized into three fundamental themes: orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. These themes reflect different phases of human experience. Brueggemann describes the categories in the following way:

a) Sometimes, life blesses us with contentment and stability. During these seasons, we feel gratitude for the constancy of God's goodness. The "psalms of orientation" express joy, delight, coherence, and the reliability of God, creation, and divine law.

b) At other times, life throws us into hurt, suffering, and alienation. These moments evoke rage, resentment, and self-pity. The "psalms of disorientation" mirror this painful disarray. They allow for extravagant expression, hyperbole, and abrasiveness.

c) Human life, at times, consists of turns of surprise when unexpectedly, joy breaks through despair, illuminating our darkness. The "psalms of new orientation" boldly proclaim fresh gifts from God, reshaping our perspective. These affirm a sovereign God who continually renews and transforms our human experience.

But human life is not merely a static position where we find ourselves. It is also a dynamic journey – a continuous movement from one circumstance to another. Along this path, we encounter surprises – new situations we did not anticipate. Sometimes, we resist these changes, clinging desperately to what is familiar. Some of the films screened or discussed at the two conferences could be consideres cinematic poems of that journey.

In our current times, we might be more acquainted with transitions from settled orientations to seasons of disorientation or moves from certainty to uncertainty. These shifts are not just external changes; they are deeply personal awakenings. Whether abrupt or gradual, they dismantle our old, known world. We relinquish our safe confidence in God's good creation, and a rush of negative emotions floods in – rage, resentment, guilt, shame, isolation, despair, and even hatred.

But there is another move we hope for and pray to experience: the shift from disorientation to new orientation. Imagine moving from uncertainty to fresh

[1] Brueggemann, Walter: *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary,* Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing, 1984, 19–21.

certainty, surprised by a divine gift just when all seemed lost. It is like escaping the chaotic pit we thought we would never leave – an inexplicable departure, credited solely to God's intervention. This transformative journey toward new life brings forth positive responses: delight, amazement, wonder, awe, gratitude, and thanksgiving.

Gabriella Rácsok

Teach Me that I May Live

"How do we approach life? How do we do it right? How do we live in such a way that is in accordance with God's will?"

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, 1956, Fortepan / Gyula Nagy

Margriet Gosker

GO TO THE ANTS… – A MEDITATION ON PROVERBS 6:1-11*

'It is a matter of choosing or sharing'. This is a Dutch proverb used if a decision has to be made. Let us talk here about how we make our choices. The deliberate making of good choices requires some courage because it means that a decision is final. If you choose one option, the other options are mostly eliminated. And sometimes, there are sudden consequences that you had not foreseen. This is why most of us prefer to be cautious and protect ourselves from all kinds of risks. We often look for a safe middle ground, a compromise. It helps if we can choose between different options, and we are glad if we can be free to decide for ourselves what we can or cannot do. Now I note that an atmosphere of non-commitment has arisen nowadays in our society. Our individualism wants to be free, but all kinds of organizations suffer from a moribund existence. Volunteers are difficult to find. All kinds of initiatives do not get off the ground or have to be phased out due to a lack of cooperation and involvement. 'It is a good idea, yes, and please let someone do it, but I do not have time for it right now. And I really have to think about myself for a while'. This is what I hear too often.

When people are stuck in fixed patterns, it does not feel good. But 'non-binding' is also not the best. In both cases, no real choices are made. Breaking free from rigid patterns is fine, but we should not let everything take its course and then grumble because we do not like it. If we no longer dare to connect ourselves, things will not go well for us in the long run. Then, everything will become vague and uncertain. Then there will be more and more floating voters and seekers and fewer and fewer convinced people who really want to go for something. Therefore, I say we need convinced idealists again. No unworldly guests who know it all so well but who are going to

* I thank Rev. Harvey Richardson, Methodist minister in Britain, for his kind help in correcting my English.

make the world a better place. Not that! But we do need people with commitment, love, and real involvement.

Film is a mirror of reality. Films sometimes mercilessly show what is wrong and what fails us. I had the privilege of attending the 'Screen Priests and Screen Ministers' Conference in Sárospatak (Interfilm) in 2023.[1] I was really amazed. The images I see on TV in the West are all too often completely negative about everything that has to do with the Church, Christianity, and religion. Pastors and priests are often depicted as hypocritical and mainly associated with sexual abuse and the abuse of power. So my expectations were not very high. But during this conference, I saw positive film images of pastors who lovingly treat their fellow human beings and really show how we can radiate the love of Christ to our fellow human beings. It was almost too good to be true. I talked about it with the German journalist, Peter Paul Huth, an expert on film and cinema, who was also present at the conference, and he understood exactly what I meant. We all see with eyes influenced by our own context.

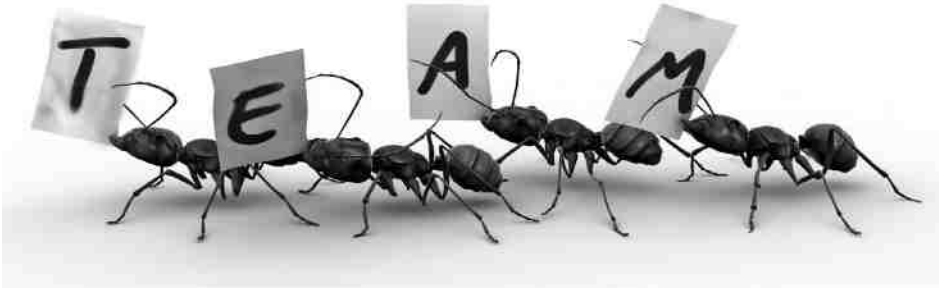
We also saw images from 'The Young Pope', directed by Paolo Sorrentino (2016). The beginning of the film is a clear example of a choice (compromise) that turns into its opposite. A new pope had to be elected, and it was clear that the 'papable' cardinals would all prefer to become popes themselves. But that was precisely what made them unable to reach an agreement, and therefore, they were unable to make a good choice. When the white smoke rises, it appears that they have decided to opt for a compromise. A 'Young Pope' (Pius XIII) was chosen, and they ended up disappointed with that choice. They had thought that the forty-seven-year-old American would be flexible and open to change, but he actually turned out to be an arch-conservative. A fatal miscalculation. The film develops in an interesting way, but that is not my point. Instead, I want to show that choosing for something (or not choosing for something) is also determined by our own context. And not every compromise always works out well, as we see in this film.

I think Jesus was not interested in compromises. Jesus was not someone who constantly asked himself how to get profitable through life in the smartest and safest way. On the contrary, he was really convinced and committed to his calling. He made good choices and stuck to them, regardless of the risks. As a son of the ancient people and as a Jewish Rabbi, he was familiar with the Proverbs of Wisdom: that old book of Proverbs, which we know as a collection of all kinds of wisdom that relate to everyday life. He knew it and personally lived from that wisdom. Israel's wisdom was a very practical wisdom, and at the same time, pious and full of human experiences, admonitions, warnings, comparisons, life lessons, and beatitudes. Does the book of Proverbs have a central message? Of course,

1 'Interfilm' (founded 1955 by Protestant Film Associations in Europe) connects Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Jewish members, institutions as well as individuals. It promotes the dialogue between cinema/film and churches/cultures/religions. It shows the relevance of theology and religion for the world of film and cinema in an ecumenical context.

it does. And I think that the central message is still relevant. I see the central message of the book of Proverbs as: 'How does a person become wise?' And do not misunderstand it as 'learned' or 'smart. Not even in the sense of some mysterious Eastern wisdom, but very practical: How do we approach life? How do we do it right? How do we live in such a way that is in accordance with God's will?' It is not about 'doing as you are told'. No, it is about our own insight, knowledge, and independence. It is about having the capacity and inner freedom to make our own decisions and make our own choices independently. And we may do that before God because that is the beginning of all wisdom. Proverbs 6 shows us this in a very beautiful and recognizable way. We are all human beings before God, and we must learn to make our own choices. And we should not let anything or anyone mislead us. Just keep doing what you are doing without being distracted or discouraged by anyone or anything.

But there is also a danger. Proverbs 6 talks about a dear son who always wants to be there for others. That seems like a good boy to me, with his heart in the right place, who wants to live according to God's promises and commandments. We know such people. They are almost too good for this world. They give away their last Forints to charities, and then they still want to help a friend out of trouble who has been a bit too generous with his money. Such a person, such an unsuspecting boy, runs the risk of losing his way in this world. He runs the risk of being used or even blackmailed. Such a boy runs the risk of falling into the grasp of others, who are selfish and mainly think about their own interests. What is the good advice of the Proverbs? My son, if you become surety for someone else and you have promised that you will help that other person out of everything, be careful who you are dealing with. Because you may be honest and sincere, but before you know it, the other person has you in his grasp. He gains power over you. You give him power over you, and after a while, he can make or break you. Do not let it happen. Don't give anyone else power over your own life. Free yourself from that tight grip. Take courage, approach him, and set yourself free, for you are the only one who can do that. If you do not, you will get into even more trouble. Then it is possible you will become despondent. And at some point, you will no longer feel like getting out of bed. You think: what am I doing all this for? And who knows, you might even lose your job. And then you wallow in self-pity, and that doesn't make things any better. Things go from bad to worse, and in the end, you cannot even take care of yourself anymore. Poverty becomes the trump card. So says the Proverbs poet. And it is so terribly true!! I have seen it many times in my life. Lovely people who completely collapse because they have been too trusting and have given up control of their own lives. Among the homeless, there are many such sweet people who can no longer manage on their own. So the message is: take it all into your own hands and take responsibility for your own life. You have to do it yourself; no one else will.



Look at the ants, you fool, says the Proverbs poet. You miss your opportunities and get discouraged far too quickly. Watch the ants, you loafer, you who are afraid to make a choice and, therefore, leave everything behind. Do not think: 'Let it go'. Do not stay in bed; come on! Stand up. Come out and tackle it. Look at the ants, see what they do, and become wise. Go and look at an anthill for a while. What do you see? At first glance, you see a lot of wriggling of all those hymenopterans. But if you take a closer look, you see how all those creatures work together with a tireless commitment to the entire ant society. What a perfect collaboration. Every animal knows exactly what to do. They carry, carry, pass on, store, they make corridors and rooms, they stockpile winter supplies, and everything is done very orderly and efficiently. That observation is so important, says the Proverbs poet. It shows you cannot simply solve things by running away from problems. There is no other option than to tackle and solve them.

I started this meditation with the Dutch Proverb: 'Het is kiezen of delen'. It is a matter of choosing or sharing. The idea behind it is as follows: when two parties have to divide something (for example, books or items from an inheritance), one party is allowed to divide the property into two parts, and the other party is allowed to make a choice first. It means that the dividing party is forced to take the chosen party into account. It could easily have been borrowed from Jewish wisdom.

It is striking how the apostle Paul tells us exactly the same things, yet in a different way (Eph 5:11-15). Paul urges the Ephesians to follow the way of Jesus, which is not the path of least resistance nor the way of an easy compromise. We always have to choose the straight path before God. Following Him is not looking for easy compromises. We should choose the light and avoid the darkness. We should wake up and rise from deadly despondency, and Christ will shine on us! Faith is not letting anything go but always trying to make the right choices for a new perspective: the coming of the Kingdom of the Lord.

In Uncertain Times – Interfilm International Budapest Seminar (2023)

Karsten Visarius
Péter Muszatics
Ingrid Glatz-Anderegg
Gabriella Rácsok
Claus Löser

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, 1967, Fortepan / Archives of Semmelweis University

Karsten Visarius

IN UNCERTAIN TIMES. THE INTERFILM SEMINAR IN BUDAPEST 2023 – INTRODUCTION

"Giving a Soul to Europe" was the name of a programme for which INTERFILM organised a series of film seminars between 1997 and 2004, primarily in the countries and on the cinematographies of Eastern Europe. The seminar "In Uncertain Times" in Budapest (26-30 April 2023) continued this series of events, this time looking at the cinematography of Hungary.

The lectures, film screenings and discussions of the seminar were dedicated to Hungarian film history from the 1950s until today. One focus was on the religious dimensions of the films. The lectures of Ingrid Glatz on István Szabó's "The Taste of Sunshine" and of Gabriella Rácsok, who extended her considerations to films beyond the programme of the seminar, concentrated on this aspect. A second topic was the relationship of the films to Hungarian society and history, as well as their references to the European and global auteur cinema. The article by Péter Muszatics offers insights into the global context of Hungarian film history, whereas my own reflections in the following will attempt to bring up some aspects of the political and social background of the films presented in the seminar programme.

The INTERFILM seminar could not and did not ignore the current political situation. In a special focus entitled "The Maltreated Neighbour", it dealt with Ukrainian cinema on the horizon of the Russian military aggression on Ukrainian regions since 2014 and on the whole country since February 2022. Claus Löser's lecture honoured representatives of Ukrainian film art who are sometimes still wrongly attributed to Russian cinema.

The seminar was supported by the Reformed Church in Hungary by a considerably financial contribution, and by the Lutheran Church in Hungary. The opening took place in the Péter

and Gitta Esterházy Library, the screenings, lectures, and discussions in the Corvin Cinema (Corvin Mozi) which supplied excellent conditions for the whole event.

The film programme started with Béla Tarr's last film from 2011, "A Torinói ló" (The Turin Horse), which not surprisingly turned out to be a strong challenge for the audience. Tarr, actually still one of the most famous Hungarian filmmakers, declared that it would be his last film and remained faithful to his announcement until today. Radical in its reduction, relying on the subtle variation of recurring elements, the film provokes the expectations of viewers who insist on a more fulfilling cinematic experience instead of being confronted with ever less sensual impressions throughout two and a half hours till the end in total darkness – or nothingness. "The Turin Horse" presents an apocalypse without, and in contrast to, the grand rhetoric drama of the Bible (in the Revelation of St. John) and the action-packed Hollywood movies. On top of that, it denies the promise of the dawn of a new world and the salvation of the faithful and righteous. Instead, cinema itself terminates.

In the discussion, the film was called an apocalypse without God, even without any transcendence. It certainly is, but it's more. In the beginning (and in its title), it recalls Nietzsche's experience in Turin witnessing the torture of a horse by its coachman, shedding tears by embracing the suffering animal and falling into silence for the rest of his life, which he spent in a psychiatric hospital. For anyone familiar with Nietzsche's mockery about, or even contempt for (Christian) compassion, this scene is a turning point which denies his own philosophy glorifying the human will as the driving force of history and a promise for a splendid future, overcoming the weaknesses and passivity of a Christian culture informed by endurance and the cult of suffering. In Tarr's film, human will is reduced to a stubborn desire for survival, which is doomed in the face of the forces of nature and the course of the world in general. His protagonists, a crippled father and his daughter, experience a total dependency from events beyond their actions and wishes. The essence of "The Turin Horse" is a negative metaphysics. In respect to politics, I regard it as a prophetic allegory, pointing forward to – concerning the internal time of the film's story – the totalitarian movements of the 20th century, and – concerning the time of its creation – to the new authoritarian, right-wing movements in many European countries.

Béla Tarr's minimalist apocalypse was followed by a classic of Hungarian cinema, Zoltán Fábri's "Körhinta" (Merry-Go-Round, 1955). It tells the story of the rebellion of a young couple against the patriarchal order of a village, and especially the bold resistance of a young woman against her father even when he tries to destroy her love by resorting to means of violence. A second storyline, which at least today arouses some sympathy for the father, is the conflict between his insistence on private peasant land ownership and the political intentions of most of the poor villagers to proceed to collective farming instead. The film opens with an iconic sequence in which the lovers whirl around in the air in the seats of a merry-go-round, an image of mutual attraction, enthusiasm, and freedom. Nevertheless, Fábri's "Merry-Go-Round" remained controversial among the participants, with Hungarian viewers

taking it as a propaganda movie and others as an indication of the growing desire for liberation from Soviet rule, which culminated in the Hungarian uprising in 1956.

Miklós Jancsó's "Szegénylegények" (The Round-Up, 1965) can certainly be read as a reflection of the failure and the suppression of this movement. Situated in a prison camp in the emptiness of the Hungarian lowlands in 1860, it displays a choreography of power exercised by the ruling Austrian military against imprisoned members of resistance groups, maintaining their fight underground after the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution in 1848. A mixture of orders on the verge of absurdity, psychological terror, and only sometimes open violence and cruelty, the film combines disillusionment and a quiet exposure of the mechanisms of oppressive political governance.

A different approach to reacting to the same experience of a failed revolution marks István Szabó's "Apa" (Father, 1966f), an early work of the probably internationally best-known Hungarian film director. His main character is a young boy who creates an idealised image of his father, a doctor, whom the child never really knew because he died shortly after the war. Only as a young man, he starts to explore the real life of the absent father figure. A dominating fantasy, a fascinating, self-created image instead of a missing reality and their gradual fading obviously point to the promises of socialist theory (or propaganda) and the disappointing reality of socialist rule; self-reflection and growing political awareness, even if remaining implicit, overlap.

A decidedly different world and a different worldview represent the films of Márta Mészáros, labelled the first feminist Hungarian film director. The seminar presented her 1975 film "Örökbefogadás" (Adoption), awarded the Golden Bear and the Otto Dibelius Award of the INTERFILM Jury in Berlin 1975. A mixture of documentary and fictional elements, it portrays Kata, a woman in her forties living alone and working in a factory, who wishes to have a child of her own and, after being rejected by her married lover, decides to adopt. The film avoids formal smoothness and coherence and instead focuses on the resolute and self-confident determination of a single woman who remains aware of the possibility of failure. Thus, the director prefers a sober pragmatism over a maybe more impressive heroism. The reactions of the participants differed between rejection (of a formally dissatisfying film) and respect (for a film following personal aesthetic and substantial choices). As a footnote, I would like to mention that dissent and openness to discussion belong to the essence of INTERFILM projects.

In chronological historical order but screened as the last film of the seminar follows Ildikó Enyedi's "Az én XX. századom" (My 20th Century, 1989), another film by a female director but even more individual and stylistically challenging than Márta Mészaros' "Adoption". As a guest of the seminar, the artist answered questions and remarks after the screening, a real delight for the participants. The challenge of the film rests on treating the 20th century as a great promise based on technical inventions like electricity, long-distance communication by the telegraph, and entertainment like the cinema, inspiring the imagination instead of the age of frightening threats like the two World Wars, totalitarian regimes, and the atom

bomb. History, the film insists if only phantasmagorically, is not determined but an open process. The heroes of the film, female twins, follow two totally different fates, one as an anarchist and a potential assassin, the other as a successful vamp. Humour, inventiveness, and reflection combine to create great cinematic pleasure. In the same year, when the film was published unexpectedly, the Iron Curtain fell apart, suddenly transforming hopes and dreams into reality.

The ambivalence of fulfilled dreams, at least in a certain respect, expresses a Hungarian film of the beginning of the 21st century, Nimrod Antal's "Kontroll" (Control, 2003). It is also an example of the "globalisation" of Hungarian film, the director being born in the United States to Hungarian parents, studying film in Hungary in the nineties of the 20th century, and in 2005 returning to America. (Other, and earlier, examples of Hungarian film artists gaining fame abroad are mentioned by Péter Muszatics.) The film centres on a crew of ticket inspectors in the Budapest metro, despised by the passengers and developing a specific underground living style, marginalised and prepared for any disappointments. The metro in Antal's film somehow figures as a second world of the hidden and unconsciousness of modernisation, initiated by the liberation from totalitarian oppression in the political changes of 1989/1990. One wonders whether this image of an underground world, beyond the officially visible Hungarian reality, is still valid today.

The latest Hungarian film at the conference, an international co-production with Latvia, Germany and France, "Természetes fény" (Natural Light) by Dénes Nagy (2020), awarded the Silver Bear at the 2021 Berlinale, deals with Hungary's military cooperation with Nazi Germany during World War II and tells the story of a Hungarian unit fighting against Soviet partisans far behind the front line. The inhabitants of a village, whom they suspected of cooperating with their enemies, fall victim to their desire for revenge, awakened after an attack and heightened by insecurity and disorientation. The director, also a guest and discussion partner at the seminar, addresses the guilt also of those who were not directly involved in the murders. The "natural light" of the film's title is a dim twilight that not only characterises the shadowy terrain of the rural, sparsely populated hinterland of the external plot but also the emotional and moral ambivalences of its protagonists.

When Dénes Nagy recalls the violence and cruelty of war in the past, the Ukrainian film of the conference, "Atlantis" by Valentyn Vasyanovich (2019), jumps into the near future of a war that was already underway at the time of its creation and spread to the entire country in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The film is set in 2025 in a devastated, no longer habitable region. There, the members of a humanitarian mission are searching for buried and forgotten war victims, who they exhume, try to identify and lay to rest in a dignified burial. It is a post-apocalyptic scenario that harks back to Béla Tarr's meditation on the end of the world − and at the same time, reveals that we have already arrived in an apocalyptic reality. However, Vasyanovich does not dismiss the spirit of humane resistance. It is manifested in the gesture of bestowing honour on the dead.

Péter Muszatics

MERRY-GO-ROUND: HUNGARY'S FILMMAKERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE COUNTRY

1901. A former photographer, Béla Zsitkovszky, instructs the best Hungarian actors of the time on the roof terrace of the Budapest Uránia Tudományos Színház (Urania Public Educational Theatre) – now a beautiful movie theater. Filming begins with the recording of Salome's dance, Sári Fedák presents a Japanese dance, Lujza Blaha and Mihály Kiss dance csárdás. The first Hungarian film, *The Dance (A táncz),* is being made.

1914. In Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), theatre director Jenő Janovics, who is obsessed with filmmaking, and Mihály Kertész, who has returned from a Danish study trip, make the film *The Undesirable (A tolonc)* in a recently created open-air studio at the central place Sétatér, next to the theatre's summer stage. The former is the producer and screenwriter, the latter is the director, and the leading roles are played by Mari Jászai, Lili Berky and Mihály Várkonyi. Várkonyi later became a noted Hollywood actor as Victor Varconi, and Kertész became world famous as Michael Curtiz – we will come back to him later. Soon, Sándor Korda will also arrive in Kolozsvár, whom Janovics will make the chief director of the newly established Corvin Film Studio.

1917. Korda, already the owner of the Kolozsvár Corvin Studio, buys a large lot in the suburb of Budapest, where he builds one of the largest studios in Europe. The Corvin Studio, later renamed Hunnia and then Mafilm, which became a big studio complex, still operates today – while Korda leaves Hungary forever. We will also return to him.

1932. Director Béla Gaál films *Dream Car (Meseautó)* in Lillafüred, Northern Hungary, in the fairytale-like Palace Hotel. One of the greatest successes of the era, it inspired dozens of films of a similar genre – even a British remake was made in 1935 – and made Zita Perczel and Gyula Kabos stars. Kabos is later forced to emigrate to New York, Béla Gaál

dies in Dachau, and the Palace Hotel becomes the location of the first Hungarian National Film Week in 1939.

1933. Sándor Korda, already as Alexander Korda, makes a very English film in London: it presents *The Private Life of King Henry VIII* in a cheeky and satirical manner. One of the screenwriters is Lajos Biró, and the set is designed by Korda's younger brother Vincent. Charles Laughton, who plays the king, wins an Oscar, and the British film industry, which until then had been hidden in the shadow of Hollywood productions, comes into the spotlight. This is partly due to Korda and his ambitious activities as a producer, director and founder of Denham Film Studios. He will be the first British (and Hungarian) filmmaker to be knighted.

1941. A young, Transylvanian-born director shoots his first feature film in the Hagymás Mountains, in the Eastern Carpathians (today Romania). A year later, the world premiere of the poetic and realistic *People of the Mountains (Emberek a havason)* was a huge success at the Venice Film Festival. István Szőts inspired young artists like Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti or Carlo Lizzani to make realistic – later called neorealistic – films. After the production of a banned feature film and the failed 1956 revolution, Szőts left Hungary and settled in Vienna.

1942. In Hollywood, Mihály Kertész, now known as Michael Curtiz, directs a seemingly average studio production starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Emigrants from more than twenty European countries work in this Warner Bros. film, for example, the Hungarian comedian Szőke Szakáll (in America: S.K. Sakall) or the actor Peter Lorre, born as László Löwenstein, who became famous previously in Germany. *Casablanca* is an unexpected and enormous success, winning the Oscar, and after several unsuccessful nominations, Curtiz also receives the award for Best Director.

1947. Géza Radványi films in the castle of Csesznek, Western Hungary, with actor Artúr Somlay and some orphans. They almost play themselves in the post-war shock and the euphoria of surviving. *Somewhere in Europe (Valahol Európában)* points to the future; perhaps this is the reason for worldwide success. Radványi – together with one of his fellow screenwriters, the legendary film theorist Béla Balázs – started Hungarian film education in Budapest but emigrated in 1949. In France, Italy and Germany, he remains a convinced, true burgher (in other words, a late, convinced bourgeois, as Géza *von* Radványi, similar to his older brother, the writer Sándor Márai) while instructing actors such as Romy Schneider, Michel Simon, Maria Schell or Jean-Paul Belmondo.

1954. 28-year-old Károly Makk makes his first film at the Lake Balaton. The screenwriter moved the plot of the fresh, colorful joie de vivre *Liliomfi* from Transylvania to Balatonfüred and Badacsony – where the director returned many times. Just a few years later, in 1958, for example, with his black-and-white, gloomy, cathartic masterpiece *The House Under the Rocks (Ház a sziklák alatt).*

1955. Zoltán Fábri shoots the film *Merry-Go-Round (Körhinta)* near Debrecen, Eastern Hungary, in the Kádár vineyard. The film and its protagonist, Mari Törőcsik, were also noticed by the young François Truffaut at the 1956 Cannes Festival. In the

following decades, Törőcsik will become one of the most sophisticated actresses of the Hungarian cinema, while the other star of the film, the not less charismatic and talented actor Imre Soós, commits suicide in 1957.

1965. *The Round-up (Szegénylegények)* is made on the Great Hungarian Plain in Apajpuszta. A year later, Cannes talks about the endless and waste land, the brilliant choreography of the space and the actors, the mercilessly precise and perfectly cinematic expression of power and vulnerability. 45-year-old Miklós Jancsó will become a world-famous director within a few days. From Vienna, István Szőts proudly observes the international successes of his students and followers – Ferenc Kósa, Sándor Sára, István Gaál and others – and the triumph of the Hungarian new wave.

1971. In Selmecbánya (Banska Štiavnica, Slovakia), Zoltán Latinovits plays *Sindbad* (*Szindbád),* the hero of the writer Gyula Krúdy's novellas – long said to be unfilmable. The film is the portrait of an ageing man who is at home in the East and the West, an old-style gentleman on the edge of worlds, cultures and ages. The miracle, the revival of the old and sunken Hungarian Kingdom, is carried out by the director Zoltán Huszárik.

1980. The Austrian actor Klaus Maria Brandauer stumbles lost in the cold wind and blinding spotlights in the Budapest Népstadion (People's Stadium), playing the German actor Hendrik Höfgen. *Mephisto* is a deeply German and deeply Central European film about the desire and compulsion to adapt. The film makes Brandauer, who was barely known until then, a world star and director István Szabó, an Oscar winner – the first Oscar won by a Hungarian film.

1998. A stuffed whale lies in the main square of the South Hungarian town of Baja, and the German actor Lars Rudolph realizes, looking into its eyes, that the line between killers and victims is narrow. János Valuska, played by him, is a timeless figure tied to a certain place and time – the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The *Werckmeister Harmonies* is a similarly time-bound and yet timeless dystopia. Béla Tarr articulates the collapse of civilization on film: the crisis of the center can perhaps be better seen from the province.

2014. *Son of Saul (Saul fia)* is being made in Mafilm's Budapest *s*tudios and on the banks of the Danube. A year later, Cannes talks about the narrow frames, the brilliant choreography of the space and the actors moving in it, the unusual and brave depiction of Auschwitz, and the shocking display of the loss of traditions. The poet, Géza Röhrig, and the 39-year-old director, László Nemes, will become world famous within a few days. The Cannes Grand Prix is followed by the first Hungarian Golden Globe and the second Oscar for a Hungarian feature film.

The above reference to the past – years and places (more precisely, filming locations) – was written without the slightest intention of completeness. Hungarian film is infinitely rich, and Hungarian filmmakers from Budapest to Hollywood have created a fine amount of value for it. With the dance on the roof terrace of Urania, an adventure-filled, exciting, sometimes shocking, sometimes funny, but long and meaningful journey began, which has not yet ended. Moreover, in recent years, it seems to have gained a new impetus.

In addition to the successes of domestic talents, a real success story of recent decades is service production. From Steven Spielberg to Dennis Villeneuve, from Ryan Gosling to Emma Stone, from Yorgos Lanthimos to Ridley Scott, from Russell Crowe to Angelina Jolie, the most prominent directors and actors made and make their films in Budapest, with hundreds of Hungarian artists and craftsmen – two of them won Oscars (in the category of Best Production Design, for *Dune* in 2019, for *Poor Things* in 2024). The production costs spent in Hungary approached one billion dollars in 2023 and will probably exceed one billion dollars in 2024, making Budapest, along with London, the filming capital of Europe.

What could be the secret of the local and worldwide success of Hungarian filmmakers? Perhaps they brought something with them from the 20th-century Hungary, burdened by the storms of history and politics, which, on the one hand, trained them and educated them on life skills (survival skills, to say) and, on the other hand, made them suitable for telling stories in a simple, yet profound way that would be understood everywhere in the world. That might be the secret of their "human touch". This secret seems to be still alive and effective.

Emanuel breaks the bread and says grace (Sunshine 1999, 00:15:29).

Ingrid Glatz-Anderegg

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION IN POLITICALLY UNSTABLE TIMES – A RELIGIOUS STUDIES ANALYSIS BASED ON THE FILM *A TASTE OF SUNSHINE*[*]

Dear friends of Interfilm, dear guests

"Never give up your religion. It can keep you balanced and take you to the other shore." These words from the movie Sunshine can be seen as the credo of director István Szabó.

In his unmistakable style, the renowned Hungarian Oscar winner, who turned 85 this year, often depicts the fate of people in difficult and uncertain times. His stories are not only about political upheaval and the challenges it brings but also about the personal conflicts and challenges that people face in such situations. These are insights I have gained over the past few years while writing my dissertation on the image of man in Szabó's films. This is what I would like to tell you today based on the movie A Taste of Sunshine, also called Sunshine.

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[*] (SUNSHINE) (Hungary, Germany, Austria, Canada, 1999) by Oscar winner István Szabó. Script István Szabó and Israel Horowitz.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Historical remarks

In the film Sunshine, the aspect of religion is very strong. In order to understand the individual sequences, a brief historical overview is helpful.

Szabó talks about the history of his country:

When you live in Central Europe, in Hungary, where difficulties come from all sides, from politics, from religion, from work, whether you live alone or with someone, it is a constant task to balance the boat in order to go on living. This is "Steading of the Boat." "Steading of the Boat" means to have no rest. Here in Central Europe, there is no rest. Something is always coming. And beware of the sense of victory. Today it seems, you are a winner, and within two hours something may come to show you that you haven't won at all.[1]

During the Habsburg era, Budapest was one of the most important educational centers in Europe. In 1849, Kossuth led an uprising against Austria and declared Hungary's independence. However, with Russian help, Austria put an end to the uprising, and Kossuth fled into exile. Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916), however, could not permanently resist the Hungarian aspirations for independence. Weakened by defeat in the war against Prussia in 1866, he granted greater autonomy to the Hungarians in return for the Hungarian crown in 1867.

After World War I, the Austria-Hungary dual monarchy disintegrated. In 1918, Hungary was proclaimed as a fully independent state as a democratic republic. But in March 1919, the Communists overthrew the new government, and a Soviet Republic was established. After only four months, Miklós Horty seized power, restored the kingdom, and became imperial administrator. In 1920, Hungary had to give up more than a third of its territory under the Treaty of Trianon. After 1933, Horty leaned increasingly towards fascist Germany. An economic agreement was signed in 1934, followed by anti-Jewish laws from 1937 to 1941. These are detailed in the movie Sunshine. Hungary regained some of its lost territories with this policy but was forced to enter World War II on the side of the Nazis. In 1944, German troops occupied Hungary. With the support of the Nazis, the Hungarian fascists came to power. They established a reign of terror and forced the Jewish population to live in two ghettos. Szabó also reports on this in Sunshine with shocking pictures. Horty's successor, Ferenc Szalasi, announced a total mobilization against the Soviets. At the same time, the terror regime deported or murdered about 400,000 Hungarian Jews in the following months.

After World War II, Hungary once again became a republic with democratic structures and a multi-party government. Soon, however, the Communist Party came

1 Glatz, Ingrid: *Interview with István Szabó*, July 2013.

to power. Mátyás Rákosi returned from the Soviet Union and became prime minister. He ruled with open terror for forty years. In October 1956, students and the Writers' Union demonstrated. Within a few hours, the demonstration turned into an open revolt. The short struggle for freedom ended with the invasion of the Soviet army, and János Kádár took power. In the 1960s and 1970s, Kádár pursued a course of national reconciliation. In the mid-1980s, the communist one-party system slowly disintegrated. In 1989, then Interior Minister Gyula Horn took a historic step: In May, the border fence with Austria was dismantled, and in September, Hungarian border guards removed the barriers, electric fences, and minefields. The country opened its borders to the West. The country became a republic again - a republic with a royal crown on its flag. In 1990, Hungary became the first Eastern Bloc country to join the Council of Europe. In 1999 it was officially admitted to NATO, and in 2004, Hungary became a member of the EU.

1.2 Design notes

This brings me back to the movie Sunshine. In this film, the voice of Ivan Sonnenschein, the youngest of the family, tells in one hundred and eighty minutes the moving story of his Jewish-Hungarian family, which, over four generations from the middle of the 19th century to 1960, struggles against religious and social barricades, political rulers as well as internal dissension.

The protagonist of each generation is a male descendent trying to make it in the changing power relations. In their quest for recognition and success, the protagonists of the four generations are willing to make great concessions to their faith and family tradition. But in the end, the efforts to adapt are not always successful. Repression, torture, and imprisonment are unavoidable. At the end of the film, the youngest descendant, Ivan, returns to his great-grandfather Emanuel's house after his release from prison in 1959. He sets out to find a lost recipe book containing the ingredients for a special herbal elixir. Believed to be cure for many ailments, the liqueur once helped his family become wealthy. But instead of the recipe, Ivan encounters stories of longing, passion, and betrayal from the past. With these stories and the memory of his wise, warm-hearted grandmother, he finds the key to a life of hope and fulfilment, to a "Taste of Sunshine".

When analysing the film in terms of communicative contextual references and indirect meanings, it becomes clear that the director and screenwriter István Szabó impressively combines the story of the Jewish-Hungarian Sonnenschein family with his own personal dramas and family stories as well as with political events, thus creating a moving picture of European history of the past century. "This will be a century of love, justice and tolerance" (00:33:23). These words of the protagonist Ignatz Sonnenschein at the New Year's celebration in 1900 show the hope of the people at the beginning of the 20th century. By the end of the film, after agonizing images of revolution, fascism, Stalinism, two world wars, and the Holocaust, the audience realizes that none of Ignatz's New Year's wishes have been fulfilled. In no

other of Szabó's films are the challenges and sufferings of generations of Jews in Hungary so drastically portrayed as in Sunshine.

An interview with Susan Suleiman,[2] among others, proves that the director is dealing with his own experiences in this film. Szabó says that his mother and her relatives belonged to the Jewish upper class. They lived in a world of wealth and intellect at the beginning of the 20th century. Because Emperor Franz Joseph I was quite generous to the Jewish people at that time, they felt that they belonged fully to the Hungarian-Austrian population. Szabó's grandfather was even offered the dignity of a baron. But, since Szabó's grandmother felt that they did not need such honors, her husband refused, which later turned out to be the right decision. Sunshine tells of these and other decisions. The sensitively depicted scene of the head of the family, Emanuel, breaking bread at the table, as well as those of family celebrations such as weddings and funerals, suggest that Szabó still has a strong personal connection to Jewish rituals, even though he was raised Catholic.

The depiction of the liqueur company is also part of the historical connection. With the story of the production of the bittersweet drink "A Taste of Sunshine", which is both the name of the film and the name of the liqueur, Szabó refers to the Zwack company in Budapest, which produces the famous herbal liqueur "Unicum". The company was founded in Pest in 1840 and has been producing the alcoholic herbal drink according to the family's secret recipe ever since.

Another reference to historical events can be seen in the character of Adam, the fencer. In the movie, Adam wins the gold medal at the 1936 Olympic Games. That year, several Hungarian fencers won medals in the team competition and one in the individual competition. One Hungarian, Rudolf Karpati, won the gold medal in individual sabre. There were also two famous Jewish fencers from Hungary who converted to the Catholic faith: Attila Petschauer and Endre Kabos. Petschauer was killed before the Olympic Games in a brutal way like the protagonist of the movie, Adam. Kabos, a left-hander (like the protagonist Adam), competed in 1936 and won 24 out of 25 events. So, the film is a kind of homage to these Hungarian-Jewish athletes with the role of Adam. Black and white original footage of the march-in and Hitler's opening speech in the Berlin Olympic Stadium underscore the historicity of the story.

In his trilogy, Mephisto (1981), Oberst Redl (1984), and Hanussen (1988), Szabó and his team already dealt with the theme of career and power claims in politically unstable times. It also comes into play in Sunshine. In this movie, the connection between religion and identity is particularly clear. The analysis of the five main protagonists shows how the importance of religion in the search for identity changes over four generations. Each man's name symbolizes a generation and a political era in Hungary. Apart from Emmanuel, the filmmakers rely on actor Ralph Fiennes. Fiennes plays Ignatz (a lawyer), Adam (an Olympic fencing champion),

2 Suleiman, Rubin: On Exile, Jewish Identity, and Filmmaking in Hungary: A Conversation with István Szabó, *kinokultura.com,* 24-01-08.URL: https://www.kinokultura.com/specials/7/ssi-szabo.shtml Last Accessed: 06-02-2013.

and Ivan (a collaborator with the Stalinist police). Fiennes won the 1999 German Film Award for these roles. Valerie, played by Jennifer Ehle (as a young woman) and Rosemary Harris (as an older woman), is the link between all the generations.

2 The individual protagonists in their family and social environment

Fig. 1 *Emanuel with his grandchild Adam (Sunshine 1999, 00:37:17).*

2.1 Emanuel (mid-19th century to 1916)

Moral order, piety, and humility characterize Emanuel. Scenes at the family table are a sign of cohesion throughout the film. It becomes clear that for Emanuel's generation, religion and tradition are the cornerstones for weathering such "storms". Memories of ancestors provide support.

But Emanuel's faith and tolerance are put to the test: To make a career, his three children, Ignatz, Gustav, and Valerie, change their last names. Their Jewish origins should no longer be visible in their names. Just a few minutes into the movie, Emanuel is in for another shock: Valerie, the daughter of Emanuel's brother who lives in his house, and Ignatz, his son, announce that they want to get married. They are expecting a child (00:24:36). Emanuel's eyes wander over the picture of his father on the wall. He remains calm, however, and urges his angry wife to be reasonable. The solemn wedding scene in the great synagogue of Budapest testifies that even in this situation, Emanuel has enough grandeur, support, and love to exercise tolerance over his beliefs.

An image of Emanuel holding his grandchild, Adam, concludes this generation's period in the film (fig. 1). Emanuel speaks the words that indicate the direction of the film's underlying theme: "If we are to find happiness at any point in our lives, we must know who we are" (00:37:18). Emanuel's identity is shaped by religion, family, and tradition.

The anniversary of Emanuel's death coincides with that of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor. With the death of the emperor, previous values seem to crumble, and with them, the just treatment of the Jewish population. This makes the search for identity more difficult, especially for the Jewish people.

Fig. 2 *Ignatz is a broken man (Sunshine 1999, 00:50:04).*

2.2 Ignatz – Identification by reputation (second half of the 19th century to about 1922)

Ignatz is the symbol of the next generation. He represents the transition from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the socialist Soviet Republic. His inner peace and adherence to religion and family tradition are no longer as pronounced. The character of Ignatz is portrayed as a person with a powerful desire for recognition. Emanuel, Ignatz's father, advises his son not to accept the tempting offer to run for the ruling party and to remain an independent judge. "Our people should not venture too high, even when asked," he warns (00:37:05). As a result, Ignatz declines the offer for the time being. But when he learns that his brother is joining the Socialists, Ignatz becomes frightened and fights for the monarchy. He wants to prove that he is on the right side. To do so, he must take one more step: The president of the court advises Ignatz to change his name. Young Sunshine cannot resist power. He presents his family with a fait accompli. He wants to give up his name, and thus indirectly his attachment to the Jewish faith, in order to serve the emperor. After the outbreak of the war, he is promoted to chief lawyer of the armed forces. The emperor invites him to Vienna (00:42:07). According to the voiceover, this audience seems to be the most important moment in Ignatz's life (00:45:18).

While the Sonnenschein siblings agree to the name change, the political changes in the country later destroy the family's peace. The outbreak of World

War I in 1914 divides the brothers: Gustav, the brother of Ignatz, criticizes the government and takes part in socialist uprisings. He fights against hunger and poverty. His fight for the weak is in direct contrast to Ignatz's pursuit of success. Personal encounters with the most powerful in the government strengthen Ignatz's loyalty and love for the emperor. When Ignatz learns of the emperor's death, he cuts a notch in his coat collar as a sign of mourning, according to Jewish ritual. He places a photograph of his father in his room and one of the emperors next to it on his small desk (00:44:49). One might think of it as a small home altar. Ignatz sits in front of it in the proper imperial uniform.

After a brief cut, we see him at his father's funeral, wearing a Jewish hat. He is still a Jew; he still has support in his family and in Jewish traditions. But religion is no longer the center of his life. Ignatz pretends to be incorruptible. At the same time, he fails as a judge and as a human being because he supports the government in a state corruption scandal (00:45:07). He knows the questionable nature of his actions. In the bathroom of his apartment, he stands in front of the mirror. With a look of contempt on his face, he spits at his own reflection (00:45:49). He feels his forlornness. Valerie comments sharply and decisively on her husband's political actions: "Ignatz, you're selling your soul." A little later, she files for divorce (00:47:32), arguing that her husband has become a person without feelings. "I can't afford to have feelings," he says dryly. He tries to rape Valerie but then collapses on the floor in shame, crying (fig. 2).

Ignatz is a broken man. He has lost himself. He no longer even feels love for his wife. Since he served in the war, he was rarely at home and hardly knows his sons. As an officer of the emperor, he follows their development only in photographs. Neither his original faith nor his family can support him anymore.

Historical black-and-white photos show that Ignatz's life is not the only one that has gone off the rails. The year is 1919. Revolution breaks out in Hungary and the Communists seize power. "It was as if the Empire and his marriage were falling apart in the same way," the voice of the narrator comments (00:51:20). The camera captures Ignatz's face in a large crowd. "Ungrateful people. You owe everything to the Empire," he mumbles. Shortly thereafter, Socialist soldiers storm the Sunshine family home and place Ignatz under house arrest. Disillusioned with life, he dies shortly after World War I. Once again, a funeral is staged in a Budapest synagogue (fig. 3).

Fig. 3 *Funeral of Ignatz in the synagogue (Sunshine 1999, 00:57:10).*

Fig.4 *Adam is threatened by colleagues because he is Jewish (Sunshine 1999, 00:57:32).*

2.3 Adam – top-class sport against a feeling of inferiority (1900 to 1945)

Adam, the eldest son of Valerie and Ignatz, is now at the center of the story. It begins with a group of boisterous students streaming out of the church next to their schoolhouse. At the entrance, a tall boy suddenly turns and points his sword at Adam (fig. 4).

He calls him a Jew and forces him to his knees. "This Jew stinks. He reeks of Jew." The classmate demands that Adam apologize for the air pollution he has caused. The camera conveys power relations through the perspective of the shots. It emphasizes

the position of the stronger by looking from below the kneeling Adam. The images suggest the threat but also the sense of inferiority that Adam must feel in the face of this situation. With these frightening images, the movie already clearly hints at the drastic change in the situation for the Jewish population. Looking at the historical circumstances of the time, it becomes clear that Adam is a symbol of one of the most troubled times in Hungary. The depression and chaotic conditions favored the rise to power of the Communists on the one hand and the rapprochement of the opponents with Hitler's Germany on the other. During this time, the protagonists search for a meaningful adult life. The movie combines anti-Semitism with an increased striving for success. This gives the impression that there is a connection between the two. The intense desire for respect could be attributed, among other things, to the increasingly anti-Semitic mood in society and the resulting feeling of inferiority among Jews. For Adam, the schoolyard humiliation becomes a key experience. Spurred on by his brother, he embarks on a successful fencing career. As a result of his tireless training, Adam is accepted into the bourgeois fencing club. But as the story continues, success comes with a price. To advance internationally, Adam must join the officers' club, which is reserved for Christians. Ignatz "only" had to change his Jewish surname to get ahead. In Adam's generation, Jews are forced to deny their religious background if they want to get ahead. Religion is still part of society; it is out of the question to abandon one's religious affiliation altogether. In this, the movie is in line with social research. According to the Hungarian sociologist of religion, Miklós Tomka, 95% of people over the age of 75 can recall their religious upbringing.

The protagonist, Adam, strives for success and is ready for anything. He identifies neither with his family nor with his religion. Only the feeling of being Hungarian and fighting for his nation seems to give him strength. The conversation at the family table shows the change in family structures. The camera slowly brings the two brothers, Adam and István, into the frame, while Valerie, the mother, is only seen in the reverse shot. In earlier scenes, Emmanuel was always seen first, at the head of the table. This seat is now empty. Valerie, as the head of the family, is sitting across from her sons. She is literally sitting on the other side (01:02:12). The two sons are discussing Adam's future. He tells his brother that he wants to become a fencer at the highest level. When István asks him if he would give up his Jewish faith to do so, he says: "I want to be Hungarian" (01:01:51). Valerie counters that at Pre-Sent it is not nationality but religion that is important to get ahead. "That's crazy that someone can force religion on you" (01:02:07) is István's reply. This criticism falls flat. Instead, Valerie deftly argues why her religion is essential to her: "Our grandfather taught your father and me to be proud of being Hungarian Jews. So I could never convert. Even though I haven't prayed since I was a child" (01:02:16). The filmmaker uses the keyword prayer to visualize the arc of Adam's decision: The camera cuts to a Catholic church. Adam is sitting in the middle of a group of people preparing to convert. He repeats the words of the Creed to the priest in a monotone: "Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son

of God" (01:02:23). While the other participants look at the priest, Adam's eyes are fixed on a wall. He seems to mechanically repeat the confession. In a few seconds, the camera captures Adam's inner conflict between conformity and identity preservation. The scene ends with Adam's baptism (fig. 5).

Fig. 5 *Adam's baptism (Sunshine HU/D/A/CDN 1999, 01:03:30).*

With the abandonment of the Jewish religion, the film marks a low point in terms of the break with the ideals of Adam's ancestors. Everything that has sustained the family over the years becomes obsolete: the name as the figurehead of a successful business in Budapest, the religious community, and, through it, the rituals and traditions of the religion. The protagonist, Adam, as well as the generation he represents are forced to find their identity in other values after such major adjustments.

Adam is lucky in his personal life. A woman he met in the conversion course returns his love after several attempts. They become a couple (01:12:19) and are blessed with a son, Ivan. In the officers' club, however, he experiences less emotional moments. The chief greets Adam in a large, elegant hall with the words: "You are now a member of the Officers' Club. You are not important, only the hit and the victory of the team. You made the right choice. Assimilation is the only way" (1:08:32). These words are in complete contrast to Emanuel's motto: "Never forget who you are" (00:17:34). Nevertheless, Adam's athletic rise is successful. He fences for the Olympic team in Berlin. The movie shows that he is completely assimilated by Adam, who prays the "Our Father" when choosing a suitable sword (01:21:58). The call to God seems to have been answered. The 1936 Olympic victory is the high point of Adam's career. He is subsequently applauded by the Nazis in Berlin, celebrated as a national hero at home (fig. 6).

Fig. 6 *Victory celebration under the Nazi cross (Sunshine 1999, 01:20:47).*

But Adam's gold medal does not prevent the Sunshine/Sors family from having to leave their home under the new Jewish laws (01:43:18). Adam is expelled from the officers' fencing club. He and his son Ivan are taken to a training area. Under cruel torture, a military officer interrogates Adam about who he is. Repeatedly, Adam answers in a mechanical tone: "Adam Sors, fencing champion of Hungary, Olympic champion." But the torturer only wants to hear one thing: Jew. The images imitate depictions of the Passion of Jesus. Although Adam is not crucified at the end, he is hung from a tree. In front of his son Ivan and hundreds of camp inmates, three Jew-haters spray him with cold water until he freezes. He is literally "cold-cocket" (fig.7).

Fig. 7 *Adam is "cold-cocked" (Sunshine 1999, 01:47:45).*

In these troubled political times, the rise and fall of people in Hungary changed unpredictably to extremes. Historical images at the end of this sequence show destroyed buildings of Budapest, and the voice of the narrator reports that most of Adam's relatives were shot on the banks of the Danube (01:48:27).

2.4 Ivan – Back to the Roots (about 1930 until 1960*)*

A movie cut takes the viewer to the next generation. An old woman with two suitcases in her hands rises from the rubble. The images are black and white at first, then change to color (1:48:57). The woman is Valerie, walking back to her former home. She and her employee, who has also returned, are trying to get the household back on track. Unexpectedly, Gustav, the brother, appears at the door one day (01:50:02). He has returned from exile in France. Even more unexpected is the return of Ivan, Adam's son. Unlike the encounter with her brother, Valerie does not light up at the sight of her grandson (01:50:48). Ivan looks haggard and unhappy. Valerie realizes that the young man is from the camp but that her son Adam did not survive. Ivan tearfully explains that he saw his father die in agony with his own eyes. The small family mourns Adam around the family table. Once again, this table unites the Sonnenscheins/Sors (fig. 8).

Fig. 8 *Ivan takes the seat at the top of the table (Sunshine 1999, 01:51:16).*

Fig. 9 *Ivan as Stalin's "preacher" (Sunshine 1999, 02:00:32).*

Ivan has to find his way in his new life. He wants to do something about the injustice done to his father. He becomes a police officer, a member of the machinery that controls every aspect of society in the post-World War II Soviet bloc. There, he is given the task of denouncing former state employees and finding his father's murderers. Ivan searches homes and exposes people. But corruption continues under the new regime. Nevertheless, Ivan remains loyal to the new system. He gives great speeches against fascism and praises Stalin for liberating and saving Hungary from the Nazi reign of terror. Ivan's speech is like a sermon. He worships Stalin like a saint or like God (fig. 9).

But he does not seem entirely comfortable in the role. The camera shows him walking dejectedly out of the hall after the speech. The narrator's voice in the movie tells us that Stalin has died, and his atrocities are now being exposed by the new government. Ivan continues to appear on screen as a police officer. His superior, Knorr, is very kind to him. He promotes and protects Ivan. Even more tragic sounds the order from a higher authority: The official orders Ivan to interrogate Knorr and accuse him of involvement in a Zionist group. Jewish employees were to be dismissed. After several painful hearings, Ivan decides to give the job to a colleague. The general will not accept this and threatens him. He follows him into the shower. Like his father at the time, Ivan stands naked in front of the functionary (fig. 10).

Fig. 10 Ivan testifies to Knorr's innocence in the shower (Sunshine 1999, 02:22:54).

Ivan survives, but Knorr is tortured and dies of internal bleeding. Ivan must identify the body. A relative asks him to make a speech at the grave. It is here, at the grave, that Ivan turns away from his former professional life.

His speech touchingly shows the inner change of the protagonist (02:27:59). It shows strong similarities to the eulogy for the deceased Erzsi in the last film of Szabó Abschlussbericht (2020) and amounts to an admission of guilt:

> *Andor Knorr, one of her murderers, stands at her grave today to say goodbye. I was one of the first interrogators. One they trained. We thought we could make the world a better place for everyone. But instead, we made it worse for everyone. By exposing criminals, we became criminals. Our politicians lied to the people when they said they were doing everything for their good. And then the people lied to the politicians. The people said they could trust them. So I'm not just saying goodbye to you today. I'm saying goodbye to myself today. I watched as my father was tortured and executed. And I did nothing. And then I watched them do the same thing to you. And again I did nothing, nothing at all. I promise here, at your grave, that I will do everything in my power to punish those who have made a crime of our ideals. [...]. Andor Knorr, my friend, farewell* (02:27:57-02:29:26).

What Ivan's ancestors – as well as the protagonist of the movie Hanussen (1988) – failed to do, Ivan succeeds in doing: leaving an ailing system and his self-denial. He has the courage to be a new man. He resigns from the police force. In short scenes, the camera shows Ivan rejoicing in the crowd as Stalin's column is brought down and smashed. As the Soviet tanks approach in 1956, Ivan goes to the podium and exhorts the people to stand together and stay together as one people. He loudly proclaims: "We must not be afraid." But the revolution fails, and Ivan is

sent to prison for three years. His grandmother Valerie visits him there, and after his release, he returns to her. Sadly, he tells his grandmother that the pocket watch, the family heirloom, was no longer among his personal belongings when he got it back in prison. Valerie comforts him. The disappearance of people weighs much heavier on her. This tragedy, she says, leads her back to faith. In response, Ivan speaks in a hushed voice: "If there is no God, and there never was, why do we miss him so much?" (02:36:45). These words show the turmoil of Ivan's generation between all political ideologies and suppressed religious feelings.

Like his father, Adam, Ivan is a symbol of one of Hungary's most troubled political eras. How can a person who grew up in such changeable, uncertain times continue to live? How does a man find the courage to be after torture, death, camps, and prison have shaped his life? The audience does not get a direct answer to this question but rather a recommendation. The final scenes of the movie show Ivan waking up from a dream. He exclaims: "I have no face!" (02:41:45). Ivan has not found his identity. He no longer knows who he is or who he should be. His beloved grandmother can no longer help him; she has died. But while cleaning out his house, Ivan finds a long letter containing wisdom about life from his ancestors. Emanuel, Ivan's great-grandfather, wrote this letter to his son Ignatz. But as not only Emanuel but gradually Ignatz and Adam address the camera in direct speech, the words take on an all-encompassing meaning. They seem far more important to a dignified human existence than the Sonnenschein family recipe book that was once so vital to the company's success. The book is casually tossed into the trash by the cleaning crew. The letter, however, remains in Ivan's hands:

> *My dear son Ignatz*
> *You have now left the safety of your home to do what you have always wanted to do. To make laws, like Moses. To make law, like King David. And to exercise the power from which the Almighty has excluded us, or perhaps protected us, for thousands and thousands of years. You are entering a new world in which you will surely succeed because you have knowledge. Learning has always been a sacred duty for us Jews. Our exclusion from society has given us the ability to adapt and to see connections between things that seem incompatible. But if you think you have power, you are mistaken. If you think you have the right to place yourself above others because you think you know more than they do, you are mistaken. Conceit is a sin. Never allow yourself to be carried away by it. Pride is the greatest of all sins, the source of all other sins. Never give up your religion. Not because of God – God is present in all religions. But if your life becomes a single struggle for recognition, you will never be happy. Religion may not be perfect, but it is a well-built boat. It can balance itself and take you to the other shore. Our life is nothing but a boat floating in the water, kept in balance by eternal uncertainty. And as for the people you are going to judge, remember this: all their actions are nothing but a struggle for some security. They are human beings like us. Therefore, do not judge them by their appearance or by what you have heard about them. Do not trust anyone. Verify all things for yourself. Do not bow to power. Despise any sense of status. Do not boast of what is yours.*

> *Property and possessions ultimately lead to nothing. Property and possessions can be destroyed by fire, can be washed away by flood, can be destroyed by politics. Don't get involved in what you can't do. It creates fear, which makes you sick. Practice discipline. I think of you with all my love. Your father, Emanuel Sunshine* (02:43:13-02:45:04).

The words move Ivan to change his name. He wants to be called Sonnenschein, like his ancestors, a German name that many Hungarians cannot spell at first. But it is a piece of identity, a piece of lost family history. Ivan concludes the story of his family by saying:

"For the first time I walked down the street without feeling like I had to hide something. Great-grandfather Emanuel must have been the last one to feel that way. I wanted to find meaning in my life. And the only way to do that was to stand up for my life. The secret was not held together by the recipe book but by my grandmother. The only one who had the gift of breathing freely" (02:46:43). These were Ivan's last words in the movie.

Fig 11 *Valerie photographing her family (Sunshine 1999, 00:06:01).*

2.5 Valerie – The supporting column (second half of the 19th century to about 1960)

"Politics made a mess of our lives. And still life was wonderful" (02:37:22). These are the words of Valerie in her old age. Much has already been said about her in the chapters on the men of the Sunshine/Sors family. However, another look at this protagonist is in order because she is the link between the generations. She is not the main protagonist, and yet throughout the movie, she radiates the strength and serenity that the men, Ignatz, Adam, and Ivan, lack. She would have every reason to be disappointed and resign. She lost both her parents as a young child. She was raised by her uncle's family. She fell in love with Ignatz, her uncle Emanuel's son. After an

intense struggle for their love, they became a couple, but her husband was so obsessed with the pursuit of success that he neglected his family and died disappointed with life. The hardest blow for Valerie was the fact that her sons Adam and István, as well as her two daughters-in-law and a grandson, were killed during the Hungarian persecution of the Jews (01:44:08). Valerie survived the Holocaust only thanks to a hiding place in Budapest. Upon her return, she must watch her only remaining grandchild, Ivan, struggle to find his way in the confusing world of Hungary. She is also denied the use of her home, which she must share with a foreign couple. Eventually, she puts Ivan up in the only room she has left. But all these terrible blows of fate do not break Valerie. The character of Valerie conveys a human ideal that shines above all suffering. Valerie succeeds in finding the right balance between tradition and adaptation, family and self-determination, as well as in dealing with her religion. Her character is characterized by naturalness and honesty. Valerie finds the right path between assimilation and preserving the values that are important to her. There are many approaches that show Valerie's ability to adapt: She naturally accepts Emanuel as her father and calls him by that name. She lives with her husband and sons in her in-laws' house. She never complains about her fate in all the turbulent political times. But she is not simply portrayed as an oppressed woman without an opinion of her own. She radiates security. She acts as a photographer with great naturalness (fig. 11). She participates in political discussions and speaks her mind. She is not afraid to warn her husband against being too conformist. When her husband becomes increasingly distant during the war, she decides to divorce him. But when Ignatz is placed under house arrest, Valerie returns to the Sonnenschein/Sors home. The conversations she has at the end of her life with her grandson Ivan during and after his imprisonment also show her great empathy and strength.

To what extent does the movie convey the reason for this amazingly strong attitude of Valerie's character? The actresses who play Valerie – in her youth (Jennifer Ehle) and in her old age (Rosemary Harris) – portray a calm, cheerful, but also profound woman. What distinguishes her from the male protagonists is her lack of exaggerated need for prestige and power. She does not want to take over the family business, nor does she want to photograph for the state. She enjoys her independence as an artist and her role as a wife and mother. She also agrees to change her name, but on her deathbed, she insists that her name is Sunshine (02:39:05). This can be interpreted to mean that she never really gave up her identity. And she remains Jewish. She admits to Ivan that she was never deeply religious (02:36:43). But the basic religious feeling seems to have helped her weather the storms of life. The viewers of the movie learn one of the main reasons for her cheerful outlook directly from Valerie: She reveals to Ivan how she helped herself to cope with dark times: "I tried to look for something beautiful every day and take pictures. It is important to find joy in life" (02:26:02). Character, wisdom in life and a religious commitment seem to make up Valerie's strength. It is hoped that some of her confidence and courage will live on in her grandson Ivan. Szabó nourishes this hope with the image of the dying Valerie in

Ivan's arms (fig. 77) and with Ivan's final words, "She was the only one who had the gift of breathing freely."

3 Conclusion: The absence of God has consequences

This film clearly addresses the aspect of human lack and the consequences of lack of religion. The relationship to religion is closely related to identity formation. The screenwriters Szabó and Horovitz impressively show that identity has to do with both how a person sees himself (self-image) and how others see him (external image). A good example of this is Adam, who sees himself primarily as a Hungarian and a famous fencer. In the end, he is recognized by those in power only as a Jew.

The protagonists, Emanuel and Ivan, provide the framework for the entire family event. If one asks what the protagonist Ivan experiences that is fundamentally different from Emanuel's, it is noticeable that the aspect of religion in the youngest Sonnenschein is only addressed after his stay in a concentration camp. Prayer does not seem to have been a way for him to alleviate his despair. Ivan, in his younger years, is an example of a modern man as described by the German American theologian Paul Tillich in his book *The Lost Dimension*. The theologian is convinced that the modern man of the Western world lacks the dimension of depth. This means that man has lost the answer to the question of the meaning of his life, where he comes from, where he is going, what he should do, and what he should make of himself in the short span between birth and death.

"Never forget who you are," Emanuel admonishes his son at the beginning of the movie. This sentence is also found at the end of the movie in the letter that Ivan reads. But who is Ivan? For Emanuel, the answer was obvious. At the age of 12, he moved to Budapest with the blessing of the Jewish community of his village. He could not continue his father's business at home, but he could in Budapest. He confidently shared the recipe for the liqueur used to heal people and built his own business. His strong religious ties gave him guidance and support. Moses and David were his role models. Moses as the one who received the commandments of God and spread them among the people, and David as the prudent ruler with a special closeness to God. The laws of the Jewish community were guidelines for Emmanuel. But they were not carved in stone for him. Rituals and symbols had been part of his identity since childhood.

Ivan's life was very different. His father was forced to convert to the Catholic faith because of his career, although he brought no tradition or symbols of the Christian faith with him. Ivan's parents' role models were the heads of state. Their laws changed with each overthrow. So there was nothing for Ivan to cling to as a young man. His speech at Knorr's grave vividly describes his feelings: he was betrayed by the rulers and betrayed himself on their behalf. Feelings of guilt are inevitable. After his imprisonment, he begins to wonder who he is and where his life is going. He wants to know why his family turned to communism (02:36), and he wonders why he misses God when he was taught that He does not exist. The young man is looking for depth in his life. It becomes clear that the revival of religion can be a creative force.

Ivan says goodbye to a part of his family history. This is clearly shown in the images of the house being cleared out after Valerie's death: even the "sacred" recipe book ends up in the garbage truck. But he takes something essential with him: It is the memory of his warm grandmother. And it is the guiding principles of his ancestors, recorded in the letter. Equipped with these, he dares to creatively begin a new life, a life with the German-Jewish name of Sunshine. In this way, he also gives direction to his religious life. It can be assumed that he wants to get on the track of the missing God. The protagonists, Emanuel and Valerie, show that the religious community can support people in their basic religious needs. It helps to find a balance in life.

The movie Sunshine is a symbol of human freedom. All the men in Sunshine had the opportunity to decide for themselves who and what they wanted to support and fight for. At the same time, however, the personal life story is determined by the history of the times and is therefore also the sphere in which man is determined by fate – in contrast to his freedom. If Emmanuel's sons and grandsons were living in Hungary today, they would have to decide for themselves whether to collaborate with Orban's regime or not. But their decision would not have life-threatening consequences – at least not yet. Then, as now, people's desire for happiness and their longing for meaning and fulfilment in life are paramount. Emanuel is convinced that happiness is related to identity. These questions give a person a depth that can be called religious. The movie suggests that Ivan comes closer to this depth by coming to terms with himself and his family history. This is how he regains his lost face. By choosing the name Sunshine, he feels liberated from lies and secrets. He feels free. The music and cinematography show this feeling of freedom with happy sounds and a bird's eye view of Budapest. Valerie's joy of life seems to have been transferred to him, and therein lies the path to depth. "Joy is deeper than suffering, joy is something ultimate." These words lead back to Valerie and her last words, which may be a recipe for life. She said: "I liked waking up every morning and trying to photograph something beautiful every day" (02:26:02).

Fig 12 *Valerie the supporting force (Sunshine 1999, 02:37:22).*

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, at the entrance, in the middle, actress Erzsi Simor, 1940, Fortepan / Fortepan

Gabriella Rácsok

RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS IN HUNGARIAN FILMS

Introduction: some preliminary notes

This presentation invites the reader into a dialogue or dialogues with some Hungarian films that contain and allude to some religious, in our case Christian, elements. It does not provide a thorough analysis of all the religious elements that can be found in Hungarian films between 1896 and 2022. The choice of religious elements and films is, of course, arbitrary on the author's side and is rather narrow. Yet the films were chosen to reflect the theme of the seminar: "In Uncertain Times".

When the author of this paper talks about films, or rather when she enters into a dialogue with a film, she does that as a theologian and not as a film expert. To refer to the theory of the Czech theologian Ivana Noble,[1] in this dialogue,

1) the language the author is more at home with is the language of theology, and the language of film is only her second or, third or even fourth language…

2) the fact that theology is the author's "mother tongue", does not mean that she considers it a better language;

3) the author must admit and respect that the religious elements used by the director or the scriptwriter do not carry the same meaning for them as for her;

4) the author must admit her need for humble and careful watching and listening and creativity to be able to understand the use of religious elements in films;

5) the author must also accept and respect the pluralist interpretation of religious elements in films.

1 Noble, Ivana: *Theological Interpretation of Culture in Post-Communist Context – Central and East European Search for Truth*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, 6–8.

The Christ-figure in Miklós Jancsó's Season of Monsters (1987) – the murder of an enervated, helpless Christ

In the early films of Miklós Jancsó, a distinct orderliness prevails – a two-tiered power structure in perpetual motion. Within this framework, we encounter a world of oppressors and the oppressed, manipulators and the vulnerable. However, this dichotomous arrangement is far from static; it remains unpredictable, concealing new events and traps. As time progresses, this meticulously choreographed order undergoes deformation. By the seventies, it begins to shift, and in the second half of the eighties – ushering in the era marked by the *Season of Monsters* – the orderliness is inverted. [2] In the words of Gábor Gelencsér, it transforms into "chaos that becomes a system."[3] Not a new form is born in Jancsó's oeuvre, but the old form is blown up. The relationship with the established Order is turned on its head, giving rise to unstructuredness.[4]

In the opening sequence of *Season of Monsters*, Jancsó masterfully captures a sense of disorientation. Simultaneously, he signals his deep connection to his own cinematic history, his unique self-expression, and his perspective on the world and history. These threads are then deliberately severed. The film begins with a set of images – driving from a tunnel toward the Chain Bridge in Budapest – that mirrors the final scene of his 1963 film *Cantata* (*Oldás és kötés*). It is a poignant reminder of where we started and where we have arrived. Following this virtuosic "prologue," we find ourselves immersed in the familiar world of Jancsó's films. Former students gather for their 30th anniversary reunion and Professor Kovács's 60th birthday at a farmhouse. There is singing, clinging, dancing; naked girls and singers emerge; helicopters hover in the sky, while cars circle on the ground. Through the abstracted movement of this group, we trace the fate of the 1956 generation. Soon, we are thrust into a series of enigmatic murders, surrounded by a blend of literary texts and legends – from Pascal to Hegel, from Polycrates' ring to the Shroud of Turin, from poet Endre Ady to the opening sentence of the Bible. Even the reincarnation of the devil and Jesus Christ make appearances. Yet, these symbols and allegories remain elusive, lost in incomprehensibility. Conceptually intricate images and unarticulated metaphors convey the irrational experience of the "end state" of the eighties.[5]

The basic narrative, dramatic conflict (if it is possible to speak of such a thing) between Bardócz and Komondi in the *Season of Monsters* is this: the former represents the legitimacy of the natural state of personality, talent, inequality in general, while the latter wants to compulsively and aggressively realize the idea and practice of full equality between people. Elitism contra egalitarianism. The tension between these

2 Gregus, Zoltán: A katasztrófa értelmezése – Jancsó Miklós portré 1., *Filmtett Erdélyi Filmes Portál*, 27-09-2011, URL: https://filmtett.ro/cikk/jancso-miklos-portre-1 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

3 See Gelencsér, Gábor: A Jancsó-filmek térszemlélete, in Idem.: *Más világok – Filmelemzések,* Budapest, Palatinus, 2005, 166.

4 Gelencsér, Gábor: „A megszerzett bizonytalanság" – Rend és káosz Jancsó Miklós művészetében, in Idem.: *op. cit.,* 160.

5 Ibid., 162.

two men flares intermittently, only to be submerged once more in a whirlwind of intricate machinations, pretenses, and metamorphoses. No one remains identical to themselves or their actions. Amidst this, omnipresent TV monitors broadcast events from an alternate dimension, adding to the disorienting atmosphere. As the film hurtles toward its cataclysmic conclusion, characters face destruction, and the grand spectacle reaches its apocalyptic zenith. Yet, even this apparent demise is illusory – a profaned doomsday. The executioner, an outsider, a mute figure akin to a village fool, roams the house. Armed with a rifle, he shoots all the characters, then heaps hay upon them, igniting a bonfire. The boundaries blur, reality wavers, and chaos reigns.

In the next scene, a Christ-figure (played by Béla Tarr) in a snow-white jumpsuit appears. He enters the scene earlier as a *deus ex machina*, the construction crane man, who arrived to pull out Komondi's car from the river. First, we see him with Bardócz and later with Komondi. Now, yielding to the devil's temptation, he needlessly, almost unwillingly, resurrects the dead.

> Devil: They should be resurrected. (To Christ): Resurrect them!
> Christ: Me?
> Devil: Isn't that why they sent you? (Christ shakes his head. And goes on playing the piano.)
> Devil: Why are you still pretending? Everyone knows you're here to bring a little joy into this rotten world. Weren't you appointed to raise people from the dead? Must you ask your father for directions for every stupid case? Come on, resurrect them! If you don't, you're a murderer too… Like your dad who put us here in this bloody world and, as a final twist, added this death thing! What fun does the old turd get out of making everyone equal in death? One hell of a great idea! Let me be the first to congratulate him.
> Christ: Don't be rude!
> Devil: Get started!
> Christ: Which one should I start with?
> Devil: In the order in which coincidence has placed them. (A strong wind starts blowing… All are raised.)
> The former 'tempter' gives a knife to Komondi and Bardócz, and gives what seems to be a Judas' kiss to Jesus.

Bardócz and Komondi, the "ancient opponents", are on "common ground" finally in one thing, in killing Christ in return.[6]

Jancsó's films consistently delve into the dynamics of power – exploring attitudes toward it and mapping out a unique "geography of power." These cinematic works serve as visual reflections on the pervasive influence of authoritarianism within political thought. Whether expressed through elitism or egalitarianism, the hierarchical relationships of subordination and superiority persist, shaping the distribution of rights and duties. The justification for such hierarchies often rests

6 See Bíró, Gyula: „Mert jó meghalni" – Jancsó Miklós: Szörnyek évadja, *Filmkultúra,* Volume 23, 1987/4-5, 108–113, 112.

on a deceptive sense of collectivity. Paradoxically, this collective voice is often monopolized by a minority – an elite group that speaks and judges on behalf of the whole. Even when proclaimed as egalitarian, this ideology fails to prevent the emergence of inequality. As George Orwell wryly noted in *Animal Farm*, "Some are more equal than others." All totalitarian ideologies are ultimately elitist; the party, the leaders of society [represented by Bardócz and Komondi in the film] monopolise knowledge and virtue and hand out deserved punishments and rewards on behalf of the community. Totalitarian ideologies are godless, Christless ideologies. If we consider Bardócz's elitism or Komondi's egalitarianism, both absolutize their own authority. Since neither leaves room for God's humanity shown in Christ (cf. Karl Barth[7]), and both ideologies are endangered by God's radical love shown in Christ, both must get rid of him.

At last, following a cycle of deaths and resurrections, and the brutal slaying of a feeble, vulnerable Christ-like figure, the characters depart from the scene of their tumultuous journey – cramped together in a cattle truck. Behind them lies nothing but desolation.

In an empty, bare-walled room, pigeons fly; the surface of the pond water is covered with flames and smoke; the rain is pouring like a torrent of fire; and finally, we hear the opening words of the Bible first in Hebrew and then Hungarian: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God saw that it was good." Is this just the beginning of the end?[8]

The hidden Christ-figure in Kornél Mundruczó's Jupiter's Moon (2017) – the son of a carpenter: a surreal redemption story

Kornél Mudruczó's film is a dystopia with strong religious overtones, exploring questions of faith and redemption. The 'moon of Jupiter' is, as the film begins, one of 67 known companions to the largest planet in our solar system. The moon of Jupiter, referred to in the title, is called Europa.

Aryan comes from a Syrian town, [Homs (Emessa)] ravaged by civil war, and tries to cross the Hungarian border illegally with his father (who, like Joseph of Nazareth, is a carpenter – a small detail that is not insignificant) and dozens of fellow refugees. When the group is surprised by the border police under the cover of night, Aryan is separated from his father and brought before László, the self-righteous boss of the refugee camp, who does not think twice about shooting Aryan. Although he is shot three times through the chest, he does not die: his spilled blood rises to the sky, and he himself follows. Though the shots should have been fatal, Aryan gains a superhuman ability: he can levitate at will – reference to a kind of transcendent reality.

This is when the real protagonist of the film, Gábor Stern, a physician, enters the scene. He is apathetic and cynical and wants to be forgiven for his great crime

7 Barth, Karl: The Humanity of God, in Idem.: *The Humanity of God,* Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, 37–65.

8 Gelencsér: „A megszerzett bizonytalanság", 162.

(he is responsible for the death of a boy on the surgery table), so he helps refugees to his girlfriend Vera's hospital in exchange for a bribe. Stern is deeply disturbed by Aryan's supernatural abilities, and while he does not rule out witnessing some kind of redemption, his practicality leads him to conclude that the refugee Aryan – a potential biblical angel or even Christ-figure – will use his "talent" for something else: to swindle money from the sick and dying, who are soothed by visions of heavenly afterlife.

The doctor (who has since been fired by his boss, László) promises to help Aryan find his father in exchange for his partnership in this money-making miracle business. They find themselves in increasingly diverse social environments, bringing people comfort and, of course, taking their money in return. The ruthless László is on their trail, determined to catch Aryan and, at the same time, find a rational explanation for the inexplicable, the boy's ability to levitate, as his basic human need demands.

Gábor Stern is the real hero of the film, as he changes most spectacularly on screen. At first, he has nothing to lose, only the thrill of making a quick profit – but eventually, he comes to the conclusion that his own redemption is not won by stealing money from the suffering but by his devotion, which he must take to the point of self-sacrifice.

The most intense moment in the film – and the most saturated with symbolism – is when, on the rooftop offering Aryan temporary shelter, Stern embraces his companion and asks him to stop running away from him; then, in an unexpected gesture of humiliation, bends down to tie his shoelaces (a scene that rhymes with an earlier one: their first encounter in the examination room of the refugee camp), and Aryan, who is becoming an increasingly Christ-figure, puts his palm on the doctor's head – an act of blessing. It is a moment, not only for Stern, when redemption seems closer than ever.

Mihai Fulger concludes his review of the film: "As the narrative arc traversed by the protagonist shows the evolution of a non-religious person towards a new kind of transcendent reality, and ultimately trying to preserve this reality at all costs, I think that the new Mundruczó film speaks primarily about the need to find faith in a world from which the sacred (even disguised as profane, referring to Eliade) seems to have been radically eradicated."[9]

Ildikó Enyedi: Simon, the Magician (1999) – a film on resurrection: "a counter version to the official teaching"[10]

Church tradition has regarded the mysterious Simon the Magician as the first gnostic, but very little has been established about his true identity. He was a Samaritan who lived in the 1st century. A highly influential founder of a religion that could influence the masses, he collaborated with early Christianity for a while and then turned against it. That is about all that can be safely gleaned from the literature on him.

9 Fulger, Mihai: Vízkereszt és megváltás, *Filmtett Erdélyi Filmes Portál*, 21-05-2017, URL: https://filmtett.ro/cikk/vizkereszt-es-megvaltas-mundruczo-kornel-jupiter-holdja Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

10 A quote from Ildikó Enyedi in: Bori, Erzsébet: Nincs veszve minden (Enyedi Ildikó filmrendező), *Magyar Narancs,* 21-10-1999, URL: https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/nincs_veszve_minden_enyedi_ildiko_filmrendezo-63621 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

According to the legendary Acts of Peter, Simon appeared in Rome and measured his power against that of St Peter there. They both attempted to bring a dead man back to life; Simon only succeeded in getting the dead man to move his head, but Peter brought him back to life (chapter 28). The great test (chapter 32), however, came when Simon performed his miracle, which had won him many admirers on a previous occasion, in the presence of Peter, when he rose to the heights and flew over the buildings of the city and the surrounding hills. Peter prayed that the evil sorcerer would be put to shame, and he did indeed manage to make him fall. This incident deprived him of his authority in the city, and he died a few days later. According to another source, he buried himself with his disciples after promising them that he would be resurrected in three days, and this presumptuous act caused his death.[11]

It is mainly from these apocryphal documents that Ildikó Enyedi's film story is born but is "turned inside out"; in the director's words: "the story of Simon the Magician is in fact a counter-version to the official teaching."[12] While the biblical-apocryphal foundation subtly underpins the storyline, understanding the plot does not require this knowledge. References to these texts serve to enrich and layer the narrative with an odd mix of sadness, irony, and humour. In this retelling, traditional roles are upended and reimagined. Peter, the apostle sent forth in Christian lore, and Simon, the magician dazzled by his own allure, swap roles. The secondary characters, too, find their roles muddled – like the girl and the disciple (who is an Ethiopian footman/policeman). True redemption and miracles are not attributed to the contemporary magician Peter, a celebrity, but to a reclusive man on a quest for love, who experiences a resurrection in and for love. Enyedi preserves certain apocryphal elements, transporting us from ancient Rome to modern Paris – not via flight or levitation, but by train. Instead of raising the dead, there is the unmasking of the murderer; there is the presence of an alien adversary, Peter, from whom Simon wants something – not power bought with money, just French words (to be able to talk with the beautiful French girl he has fallen in love with). The narrative unfolds with a challenge and a duel, culminating in a resurrection after a symbolic three-day entombment.[13]

In Ildikó Enyedi's words, "this film […] is […] a farewell. All these bright, flashing possibilities, motifs. It does not want to be part of this world, to be a phenomenon, but to look back on it, to say goodbye, to turn back from the threshold. I am unable to judge how good the film will be. What I am saying now is about its character. It will be a simple, blocklike and quiet film."[14] And indeed, a kind of inner world of

11 Ildikó Enyedi summarizes from Kákosy, László: *Fény és káosz – A kopt gnósztikus kódexek*, Budapest, Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1984, in Enyedi, Ildikó: A misztika vége, *Filmvilág*, Volume 41, 1998/12, 4–9, URL: https://www.filmvilag.hu/xista_frame.php?cikk_id=3879 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

12 A quote from Ildikó Enyedi in: Bori: op. cit.

13 Gönczy, Ágnes: A jelenvaló csoda, *Iskolakultúra*, Volume 15, 2005/1, 21–34, 27.

14 Enyedi: A misztika vége, 9.

silence is created in the film, where even the miracle becomes almost invisible is pushed inwards.[15]

According to a review written by Ágnes Gönczy, the world of the film is the world of Peter the Devil, of falsehoods and illusions, where the total sense of existence is only present in one person, Simon the Magician. The second millennium is now truly fuelled by the hysteria of the expectation of wonder. But it is not content with just any miracle; it needs a miracle that is loud, spectacular, noticeable. One that wants to rise without dying, and for this false purpose, it sacrifices the moments, the fullness and the experience of moments, and with it, the whole of life.[16] In György Tatár's words:

> "Peter in the film wants to be resurrected without dying, and this is his virtuosity: it is his ceaseless practice that makes him a professional resurrector. His tomb alone is empty, above all because he hasn't died. In the magic of resurrection without death, accompanied by an ECG, any real resurrection […] seems to consist of nothing but death."[17]

Throughout the film, Simon is adamant about not being a miracle worker. This is hinted at early on, a nod that only makes sense against the backdrop of the apocryphal literature. Simon staunchly dismisses the idea of flying to Paris, opting for more grounded travel. The so-called miracles he performs are subtle or go unnoticed – like shielding a girl from demeaning security guards, pacifying an anxious crowd in the hotel, offering solace to a distressed man in an elevator, or even nudging a computer cursor. Yet, these acts do not quite qualify as miracles. Even more straightforward is Simon's resolution of the criminal enigma that leads him to Paris, achieved through scientific means. Encountering one's true love is no longer deemed miraculous – it is simply the power of love at work. Simon may be labelled a magician, but he does not perform miracles; the true wonder lies within him, in the harmony of his being and his moral wholeness. The genuine enchantment he brings forth is in transforming lives, guiding people to rediscover their true selves without relying on mystical words or spells.[18] To quote Tatár again:

> "Simon is resurrected in every moment in the same way as he was resurrected from eternal non-being by his birth in some time. His life is resurrection itself, lived in a way inextricable from the time when he was not. The moments of his life are not preparations for some later moment he would like to reach: the moments do not serve the end. When he is sleepy, he lies down to sleep in a side street. If he has no money to get anywhere, he

15 Gönczy: op. cit, 26.
16 Ibid., 28.
17 Tatár György: Az igaz apokrif, *Filmvilág,* Volume 42, 1998/10, 4–7, URL: https://www.filmvilag.hu/xista_frame.php?cikk_id=4589 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.
18 Gönczy: op. cit., 28–29.

> begs. If he's in love, he doesn't look for his beloved, he sees her across the street. Time is not finished at the end of the whole, or never, since the number of possible goals is infinite, and so are the unfulfilled goals, but each living moment has achieved what it could have achieved, and can safely lie in the grave of time at any time. Each moment hopes to be resurrected into a next moment, but in order to do so, it does not allow itself to be caught up in the goal of the next or even later moments. Each moment is in itself ripe and closed, and if something else follows, it is an indescribable miracle."[19]

In the final frame of the film a smile lights up the girl's face. "There was a resurrection after all. For her. For hope. For love."[20] "She turns to face us. Her tense little face lights up all at once. She returns someone's smile, we return hers. An apocryphal smile."[21]

Gönczy explains that in Ildikó Enyedi's reading, the world, our world, is also waiting for "redemption", for re-creation, for reorientation. The essential difference, however, is that her films are not primarily about chaos, or apocalypse, but they approach and think through the question from the perspective of the desired unity, of wholeness, without promising certainty or total redemption. They do not deny the "end of the world", but proclaim life worth saving, lovable in spite of its fragmentation and deformity, and worth living.[22]

Ildikó Enyedi admits that it is difficult for her to talk about this film: "Everything I say seems to be just pompous agitation. Even what I am saying right now. I wanted to make a film of integrity, just like Péter Andorai [playing Simon] is a character of integrity, and it almost makes me suffer when I break this integrity by talking about it."[23]

Béla Tarr: The Turin Horse (2011) – a film of Apocalypse; an altered version of the Code of Canon Law

"'I'd like to make another film about the end of the world, and then I'll stop filming.' This is what Béla Tarr told a French journal in December 2010, and then he made The Turin Horse, the "last film" that really is the "last film" about the end of the world. András Bálint Kovács made the following comments on this: "So, the first half of the plan has been realized. Only time will tell what will happen to the second half."[24]

The Turin Horse presents an apocalyptic tale, yet it stands apart in its unique approach. Béla Tarr's depiction of the end times diverges sharply from the typical Hollywood portrayal of humanity's demise. While the outward distinctions are clear, they are not the defining factor. The film's portrayal of the apocalypse does not unfold across a sweeping global canvas, broadcasted for all to see, but rather within the

19 Tatár: op. cit.
20 Gönczy: op. cit., 29.
21 Tatár: op. cit.
22 Gönczy: op. cit., 29.
23 Bori: op. cit.
24 Kovács, András Bálint: Az utolsó Tarr-film, *Filmvilág,* Volume 54, 2011/3, 4–9, URL: https://www.filmvilag.hu/xista_frame.php?cikk_id=10546 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

confines of a singular place and story. The divergence from Hollywood's maximalist, vivid, and expansive spectacles is stark. Hollywood's apocalyptic scenes are grand, featuring iconic landmarks like the Statue of Liberty submerged, Los Angeles splitting open, or the Eiffel Tower collapsing into the Seine. Such cataclysmic events demand a vast stage and a heavy human toll, echoing the monumental destruction described in the Book of Revelation, where "the heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place." (Rev 6:14) In contrast, "The Turin Horse" eschews mass devastation. No cataclysmic deaths occur on screen; instead, an unrelenting wind howls, and by the sixth day, both fire and sun are extinguished. This pervasive darkness serves as the sole, undeniable indicator of the apocalypse within the film's narrative.[25]

The original screenplay, written by László Krasznahorkai, is based on four texts by the author. One of them is a short essay written and published in 1990 under the title *Latest in Turin*. This text, just one and a half pages long, is based on the great German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's mental breakdown. Apart from a narrator's voice reading the first paragraph of the essay, there is no mention of Nietzsche in the film. One might wonder if the inclusion of the German philosopher adds to the story.[26]

In *The Turin Horse*, Béla Tarr diverges from his typical thematic explorations. Instead of familiar motifs, he immerses us in an apocalyptic realm, far removed from ordinary hell. The characters within this desolate landscape are not merely "lost" in their existence; they inhabit a state of non-life, devoid of choice. Here, there are no grand conspiracies or betrayals, as every occurrence unfolds independently of human agency. Remarkably, this film stands as Tarr's sole work where human relationships remain unexplored. The central characters – a father and daughter – coexist silently, their dependence on each other evident. Yet, their relationship remains static, devoid of transformation or thematic development. Their sparse conversations revolve around immediate physical necessities or practical instructions. Other peripheral characters who briefly appear do not engage in meaningful human contact with them.[27]

Tarr's film delves into the vanishing essence of nature. Here, human connections have already dissolved, preceding any unfolding events. The inexorable processes of nature remain impervious to human influence. Consequently, the characters' conversations become redundant, mere echoes in the void. The fate of humanity mirrors that of the ailing horse: both subject to an inescapable natural course. Interestingly, despite the titular focus on the horse, it remains peripheral to the plot. Instead, the film portrays how the people surrounding the horse are stripped of their defences, akin to the horse's vulnerability. There is no distinction between them; they,

25 Schubert, Gusztáv: Ítéletidő, *Filmvilág,* Volume 55, 2012/5, 4–5, URL: https://www.filmvilag.hu/xista_frame.php?cikk_id=10876 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

26 Kovács, András Bálint: *A kör bezárul – Tarr Béla filmjei*, Budapest, 21. Század Kiadó, 2013, 283–284.

27 Ibid., 288.

too, become as fragile as the horse. When this realization dawns upon them, their behaviour mirrors that of the horse, surrendering to the same elemental forces.[28]

According to Krasznahorkai's essay, the core of Nietzsche's tale lies in comprehending profound vulnerability. Both authors exhibit a deep awareness of human fragility, regardless of circumstances or consequences. This shared sensitivity is a unifying thread across Tarr's films. However, it reaches a radical zenith in *The Turin Horse*. Here, vulnerability is laid bare in an uncompromising manner, unlike any other film.[29]

The Krasznahorkai texts on which *The Turin Horse* is based (*Latest in Turin, 1990; Isaiah Has Come, 1998; Walking in a space without blessing, 1998; The World is Going Forward, 2002*) give a very precise explanation of the fall of humanity.

The World is Going Forward (2002),[30] a one-sentence monologue of more than a thousand words, is given in the mouth of the neighbour Bernhardt on his second visit coming for palinka. His words evoke a moment of awakening to a sense of doom: "It is dark all over the world."[31] "…as if a winding chain were rattling somewhere in the distance",[32] a new world era is coming, and the beast that has been with us and in us since the beginning is unleashed. In the Tarr oeuvre, this suspicion or feeling is present from the very beginning, but it is actually in *Damnation* (*Kárhozat*) that it first takes on a clearly cosmic and transcendent form.[33]

The *Isaiah has come* (1998) is already a summary of certainty, a precise analysis of the process leading to collapse, a philosophical distillation of the human tragedy told in *Satan Tango*, the novel (1985) and the film (1994), and then in *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989), and *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2001). "Everything is ruined and degraded"[34] – begins the prophet *of Isaiah Has Come,* who, in the film, becomes the neighbour coming for palinka. (This is his first monologue.) Fortunately, this is not a great realization, but without God or transcendence, without human "nobility", it is not possible and not worth living. If there is "neither god nor gods, then there is neither good nor exalted"[35] human any more. It is an awkwardly simple-minded explanation that the Enlightenment would have collapsed here, and the old order and faith can return triumphantly. The shallowness of blind faith is no cure for superficial rationalism.[36]

28 Ibid., 292–293.

29 Ibid., 293.

30 Krasznahorkai, László: Megy a világ előre, in Idem.: *Megy a világ*, Budapest, Petőfi irodalmi Múzeum, 2024, URL*:* https://reader.dia.hu/document/Krasznahorkai_Laszlo-Megy_a_vilag-14280 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

31 Krasznahorkai, László: *A torinói ló – forgatókönyv*, 2014, 44, URL: http://www.krasznahorkai.hu/docs/A_torinoi_lo_forgatokonyv.pdf Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

32 Ibid., 47.

33 Schubert: op. cit.

34 Krasznahorkai, László: *Megjött Ézsaiás*, Budapest, Petőfi irodalmi Múzeum, 2024, URL: https://reader.dia.hu/document/Krasznahorkai_Laszlo-Megjott_Ezsaias-13791 Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.; and Idem.: *A torinói ló – forgatókönyv*, 13.

35 Krasznahorkai: *Megjött Ézsaiás*.

36 Schubert: op. cit.

The third monologue in the film is taken from *Walking in a space without blessing* (written for Imre Bukta for the opening of his 1998 exhibition in the chapel of the Kiscell Castle). The coachman's daughter syllabifies a few lines from the apocryphal ritual book. On day three some gypsies come to their well and conquer some of their peaceful, slow-moving time. The old gypsy gives the girl a book as a token of her kindness, which can be termed as an anti-god text defaming religious practices. It denounces religious institutions by pointing out their authoritarian nature and their scandals. The text is an altered version of the *Code of Canon Law*, Book 4 – Function of the Church, Part 3 – Sacred Places and Times; Title 1 – Sacred Places:

Original text[37]	Krasznahorkai's text[38]
Can. 1210 Only those things which serve the exercise or promotion of worship, piety, or religion are permitted in a sacred place; anything not consonant with the holiness of the place is forbidden. In an individual case, however, the ordinary can permit other uses which are not contrary to the holiness of the place. Can. 1211 Sacred places are violated by gravely injurious actions done in them with scandal to the faithful, actions which, in the judgment of the local ordinary, are so grave and contrary to the holiness of the place that it is not permitted to carry on worship in them until the damage is repaired by a penitential rite according to the norm of the liturgical books.	III. Only those things which serve the exercise of worship are permitted in a sacred place; and anything not consonant with the holiness of the place is forbidden. Sacred places are violated by gravely injurious actions done in them with scandal to the faithful; it is not permitted to carry on worship in them until the damage is repaired by a penitential rite; the Ordinary says to the congregation, "The Lord was with you! ", then morning becomes night, night ends, then midnight and early evening, but the congregation is now not awake, but sleep is oppressing it, and the Ordinary, at the dawn of twilight, takes the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle, puts out the perpetual candle, and says: …

Krasznahorkai's version describes the liturgical act of final withdrawal, the bitter experience of the universal failure of faith, and the impossibility of salvation. In the film, we hear the girl reading the words of the ordinary:

> "Let us not beg! For our minds are not filled with righteousness, nor are we glorified in the sight of the Lord. And do not, O Lord, accept the gifts of your bitter church, for in this sanctified house, your people have not obtained eternal salvation through the mysteries. And surely it is worthy, just, fitting, and salutary that we should confess all this, and now sadly withdraw from this temple of prayer, built by human work, and so make this temple here the house of unattained salvation and the ever-untouchable hall of heavenly sacraments." (III.)

37 Code of Canon Law, *vatican.va.,* URL: https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann1205-1243_en.html Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

38 Krasznahorkai: *A torinói ló – forgatókönyv*, 26–27, and Idem.: Járás egy áldás nélküli térben, in Idem.: *Megy a világ*, III.

It also hints at the end of the world: it reads, "the Lord was with you …", the past tense hints that God has left the world to ruin, to consume itself in its own sins. On behalf of the Church, the Ordinary performs the "withdrawal of consecration" of the church: he takes the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle, extinguishes the perpetual oil, wipes the memory of the holy oil from the four corners of the altar, and the church loses its sanctity, because the congregation, "though they have honoured you, have not learned from your word".[39] *The Turin Horse*, in fact, is the act of this withdrawal. Father and daughter perform the liturgy; we are long past the beginning of the apocalypse, the slow, centuries-long, millennia-long doom of human misery.

Balázs Krasznahorkai: Ravine (2021) – a film about (re)birth; using ritual sounds in film

According to the synopsis, Bálint Grassai, an obstetrician living and working in Budapest, returns to his home village in Maramures to bury his father. In Romania, he is forced to face his 17-year-old son Simon, whom he has abandoned. To complicate the troubled father-son relationship, his son has become involved with a gang of local thieves led by Dumitru, who refuses to let him go. Most analysts agree that the story told by the film is far more complicated.

Primarily, the title serves as our compass. On one hand, the ravine symbolizes a web of fractured human connections: the bond between Bálint and his father, whose funeral he has attended, the emotional distance from his brother who remains at home, and the void separating him from his son. Yet, it also subtly etches a geographical, civilizational, and cultural abyss – a stark divide – between Hungary's capital and a secluded mountain village in northern Romania. These realms exist as distinct universes, connected only by elusive threads, where traversing the gap exacts a steep cost.[40]

The ravine in question can also symbolize the village itself – an 'enclave' nestled high in the mountains, secluded from the outside world. This rugged terrain operates under its own distinct set of rules, akin to a chasm with autonomous laws. Within this 'enclave', life is both frugal and precarious. The local police can be easily swayed through bribes, and informal personal relationships hold more sway than institutional roles. These connections – whether kinship, friendship, or complicity – serve as both protection and menace. Notably, Dumitru's demand for the doctor's land in exchange for the boy's release – using tactics of pleading, blackmail, abuse, and even murder threats – underscores that the true currency here is not money, but land.[41]

But ravine also serves as a natural formation: a narrow, rocky valley flanked by imposing cliffs. Within this rugged terrain, a poignant drama unfolds: Simon, in

39 Krasznahorkai: *A torinói ló – forgatókönyv*, 27.; and Idem.: Járás egy áldás nélküli térben, XI.

40 Horváth-Kovács, Szilárd: Sűrű, erőteljes szimbólumaival a Krasznahorkai-film egy napjainkban játszódó máramarosi ballada – megnéztük a Hasadékot, *Transindex*, 30-07-2023, (12-08-2021), URL: https://multikult.transindex.ro/?cikk=29146&suru_eroteljes_szimbol Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

41 Ibid.

a meticulously orchestrated and desperate escape, plunges into the ravine, and his father unwaveringly remains at his side. As their hopes wane, the father stumbles upon a crucial discovery: a narrow cave passage leading to their escape, where he actively assists his son into the light of day. This gesture carries profound symbolism, especially considering earlier conversations between the obstetrician and his son about abortion. The mountains, cliffs, woodlands, sticky mud, steep slopes, winding paths, and, above all, the vast sky – the ultimate frontier – transcend mere visual elements. They play an intrinsic role in the film's narrative. These elements, both in their tangible physicality and their rich symbolism, render the human presence insignificant within this terrifyingly sublime context.[42]

The father-son conflict is the dominant plot thread, but the particular atmosphere, the imagery, and the landscape symbolism also open up the story to more universal, religious-metaphysical issues.

To the question, what is the main motive of "Ravine"? Director Balázs Krasznahorkai answered: "For me, it is definitely birth. All its 'versions': birth, rebirth, resurrection, new beginning. Of course, in the 'shadow' of birth, of the beginning, there is always death, the end, and the fear of it."[43]

Sound is also very fundamental in the film. In the opening scene, when it is revealed that Bálint Grassai's wife is expecting a child in Budapest, the heartbeat 'echoing' through the ecograph fills the whole scene. It is in this environment that the doctor learns that his father has died. As soon as he arrives in Maramures, one of the strong acoustic elements that emerges is the praying or calling to worship on an Eastern Christian religious-popular instrument: the toaka or semantron. Director Balázs Krasznahorkai admits in an interview that "at an early point in the script's development, it was important that the story be set in a Greek Catholic context."[44] The sound of the toaka or semantron is heard from somewhere in the background in several key scenes of the film, e.g.,

- when sitting on the porch of the house Bálint was brought up, and looking through the personal belongings of his father from his consulting room: stethoscope, doctoral certificate and from there looking at the burnt remnants of his father (00:16:26);
- mountains in the background, approaching again the parental home, this time entering it, helps to lie down his drunken son (00:23:50);
- the mountains again; Bálint sets off after his son in the woods to find him and hide together from Dumitru's chase (at 00:57:30);

42 Ibid.

43 Rátz, Ráchel: Krasznahorkai Balázs: „Egy életveszélyes expedícióhoz tudnám hasonlítani a forgatást", *Papageno*, 22-09-2021, URL: https://papageno.hu/film/2021/09/krasznahorkai-balazs-egy-eletveszelyes-expediciohoz-tudnam-hasonlitani-a-forgatast/ Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

44 Varga, Zsófia: A biztos váratlan hasadékában – Interjú Krasznahorkai Balásszal, *kultura.hu*, 16-09-2021, URL: https://kultura.hu/a-biztos-varatlan-hasadekaban-interju-krasznahorkai-balazzsal/ Last Accessed: 28-12-2023.

- in the ravine; after Simon confesses his crime (01:15:44);
- and it is the toaka or semantron sound that greets the father and son as they emerge from the ravine (01:22:34).

The final scene is indeed an image and sound of rebirth and reorientation. In the key scene of Ravine, the main question is whether the doctor, who helps children into the world, can now bring his own long-abandoned son back into the world, literally (through the narrow opening in the rock) and metaphorically (will their relationship improve, will Simon forgive Bálint).

Concluding thoughts

The aim of this presentation was to identify religious elements in Hungarian films that can be seen as cinematic representations of disorientation and reorientation. We have met Christ-figures, helpless and redeeming. We have seen examples of how the ecclesial tradition can be a source of cinematic narrative. We have also seen examples of how filmmakers may use sacred texts and sacred sounds, and how they process the theme of resurrection.

The author and certainly the readers are aware that a religious element or elements in a film do not make a film religious. We must be careful with such qualifications and identifications. Just as it is not the religious elements used in a film that make it religious, it is often not the subject matter or the author's intent that makes it religious. Rather, it is the use of the film and the context in which it is presented and interpreted. The medium of faith in this form, especially with regard to the relational element of faith, is not only the film (image and sound) itself but everything that the individual or the community does with the film or by its means.

Claus Löser

THE "UKRAINIAN CINEMATOGRAPHIC MIRACLE" – INCOMPLETE NOTES ON THE HISTORY AND PRESENCE OF A EUROPEAN CINEMATOGRAPHY

Preface

Only after Russia started the war did Ukrainian culture and cinema become the focus of Western and European interests. This is embarrassing but fixable. Until then, for many, this great country on the southeastern flank of Europe had remained a terra incognita both in general and in terms of its culture. It was only after the beginning of the war that Ukraine's presence and history became of obvious interest - both to people who showed solidarity with the resistance to the invasion and Putin's sympathizers. For the latter, the focus was reduced to the search for arguments for the imperial thesis that Ukraine had always been a part of Russia, just as the Ukrainian language was only a Russian dialect from this point of view. The whole culture was interpreted as a kind of folkloric mutation of the great Russian mother culture, which only existed at all by Moscow's grace. Conversely, for the Ukrainians themselves, holding onto their own culture was a question of survival. Their language - regularly denounced as a peasant language - was the core of its existence. The fate of the national poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), who was born as a serf and who was only bought out by friends at the age of 24, speaks volumes. He was forbidden to write in his mother tongue. And for a long time, he was totally banned from writing at all. More than ten years of his short life he had to spend in prison and exile.

Yes, there is this continuity of ethnic oppression that leads from the Tsarist Empire to the Soviet Union to the Putin Empire. Ukraine shared this danger of cultural and national extinction with the Baltic peoples, for example, and also with numerous ethnic minorities. The handling of the Kremlin with the Ukrainian culture was not always existentially threatening. Again and again,

there were more tolerant phases. Above all, folk art, in the form of music with singing and dancing or with traditional handcrafts, was at times strongly promoted - especially during the thaw phase from 1956 to around 1966 under the communist General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, who himself came from a Ukrainian peasant family.

Now let us finally talk about cinema. Incidentally, to this day, there is no special publication on Ukrainian cinema in Germany; only a few scattered newspapers and online articles have been published. But there is no question that a "Ukrainian film miracle" exists today. Unlike the Georgian or the Romanian "film miracle" a couple of years ago, it was not promoted by the major international festivals or by the French feuilleton. It only gained greater attention at the beginning of the war, but it had existed for a longer time before. To understand its metamorphosis better, we need to take another quick look back in time.

Historical frame

The chapters of Ukrainian film history are based on the historical turning points of Ukraine since the end of the First World War.

Generally, we can speak of four phases of Ukrainian cinema in this context:

1) Pre-revolutionary cinema (1893-1917)
2) Cinema in the "Independent Ukrainian State" (1919-1924)
3) Soviet cinema (1924-1991)
4) Cinema since independence (from 1991).

In addition, there are some important sub-chapters, for example:

- Film during the German occupation (1941-1943)
- Thaw phase (1953-1965)
- Stagnation (1970-1985)
- Perestroika and Glasnost (1986-1991)
- Phase of transformation (1991-2004)
- Orange Revolution (2004-2014)
- Euro Maidan (2014 until today), divided into the occupation of Crimea and Donbas (2014) and the beginning of the massive war against Ukraine (from 2022).

It is, of course, not possible to talk about all the chapters here. For example, pre-revolutionary cinema has to be left out altogether. By the way, that's very interesting. In Western Europe, for example, it is still completely unknown that there was a cinema pioneer, Yosip Timchenko (1852-1924), who shot films on self-constructed equipment in Odessa and developed, edited and presented them as early as 1893. (The early history of cinema should actually be rewritten.)

In the early period of Soviet cinema, of which Ukrainian cinema became a part, one person stood out: Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894-1956), who became worldwide famous with his films "Arsenal" (1929) and "Earth" (1930). Until today, he is one of the three most famous film directors in the young Soviet Union, alongside Sergei

Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. Dovshenko was someone who always tried to save Ukrainian culture. He promoted Ukrainian cinema and wrote literary texts in Ukrainian. But even as head of the film studio in Kiev, he was unable to prevent the massive Russification. In 1933 he was deposed by Stalin and ordered to Moscow. Here, he was forced to shoot propaganda films. He died in 1956 and was no longer able to realize his artistic plans.

Overall, a systematic "de-Ukrainization" of filmmaking took place during the more than 70 years of the Soviet Union. Recently, the Ukrainian language had almost disappeared from the films of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. The studios in Odesa and Kiev worked as service providers for Russian-language films. Specific Ukrainian elements (music, architecture, landscape) were more or less used only for decorative purposes. But there were exceptions, especially in the period of the thaw, roughly between 1960 and 1970, which was in the Ukraine also called the "period of poetic cinema".

For example, cinematographer Yuri Ilienko (*1936) directed two radically allegorical films: „Fountain for the Thirsty" (1965) and "The White Bird with a Black Spot" (1971). In "Fountain for the Thirsty" he resisted Russian hegemony by shooting the film almost without using any language. Both films were censored and partially destroyed.

A second exception was the Georgian artist Sergei Paradžanov, who was a student of Oleksandr Dovženko at the Moscow Film School. Dovženko advised him not to stay in Moscow after his studies but rather to go to the provinces, for example, to Kiev, out of the main focus of the KGB. There, in 1964, he filmed "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" – a fairytale parable based on a legend of the Hutsuls, an ethnic Carpathian minority. This film was also censored and cut. When the film premiered in Kiev on September 4, 1965, Ukrainian patriots used the occasion to stage a protest. Before the film started, they held up posters demanding a revival of Ukrainian culture and the release of political prisoners. The organizers of the action were arrested and disappeared in the Gulag for years. Paradžanov himself was arrested in 1973 for "pornography and homosexuality". He spent four years in labour camps and was banned from working until 1984.

Heroine of individuality

There is one personality whose importance cannot be overestimated: Kira Muratova. She was born in 1934 in the city of Soroki in the former Kingdom of Romania, in an area that is now part of the Republic of Moldova. Her father was a Russian communist, and her mother a Romanian Jew, also a communist. She grew up in Bucharest but decided to move to Moscow in 1950. Here, she first studied philosophy, then film directing. From 1961, she worked for the Odessa Film Studio, where she finished two feature films together with her husband, Oleksandr Muratov. In 1971, she finished her first own film: "Long Farewell". On the first view, it is a harmless observation of a single mother with her almost grown-up son. But in this film, Muratova

did everything differently than was required by "Socialist Realism". Her radicalism was expressed above all in the form, less in the plot. She worked with documentary elements, built dreams and irritating close-ups in, and played with the sound and so forth. When the film was finished, a scandal broke out. The director of the Odessa Film Studio and Muratova herself were fired. She went to Leningrad for several years, where she worked in a public library. In 1983, she returned to Odessa. Here she filmed „Under Gray Stones". This morbid dream play was cut so badly by the censors that Muratova removed her name from the opening credits.

The Long Goodbye

She was an artist who remained consistent throughout her whole life and who accepted years of professional ban in order not to betray herself. All of her films bear witness to the struggle against the "Homo sovieticus". She tried to leave the difficult legacy of communism behind and create something new. She was only able to work freely after the end of the Soviet Union. She made a conscious decision to stay in Ukraine afterwards. There, she made thirteen films between 1989 and 2012. The best-known of them was "The Asthenic Syndrome" (1989) - it won the Silver Bear of the Berlinale. By the way, this was also the only one of her films that had a distributor in Germany. Her second well-known film is "The Piano Tuner" (2012). Just as she had looked sceptical at the Soviet present, she was just as unoptimistic about the chances of a conflict-free transformation shortly after the fall of the Soviet empire.

The new Generation

Kira Murowa is the mother of the new Ukrainian film. She died in Odessa in 2018. Her lifetime achievement is immense. With her consistent attitude, she built a creative bridge from the Soviet Union to independence and beyond - although she was

no longer able to comment on the start of Euro-Maidan with her own films. Because, unlike most representatives of her generation, she never allowed herself to be corrupted by Soviet cultural policy, she embodied a continuity that young filmmakers who were more than 60 years younger could build on. It is no coincidence that this generation first became publicly known during the Euro Maidan between November 2013 and February 2014. At that time, numerous documentaries were created directly on the central square in Kiev. They documented the demonstrations which fought for the union with Europe and against the embrace of Russia. Some of these films were of high artistic quality, such as "All Things Ablaze" by Oleksandr Techynskyi, Aleksey Solodunov and Dmitry Stoykov. Sergej Losnitza, who was no longer quite young at that time, also made an important film on the subject. But parallel to the concrete political work and its documentation, young directors worked in the studios on fictional stories.

Others may mention different personal examples - for me, the most significant turning point in the fictional field of Ukrainian cinema is tied to one specific film: "The Tribe" (Plemja), made by Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy in 2014. As with Kira Muratova's "Long Farewell", the plot is not unimportant. But the form is even more innovative. The director, born in 1974, achieves great things here. The sacrificial stay of the deaf teenager Sergej in a boarding school is told in extremely long sequences that become more and more horrible. Not a single word is spoken. Finally, he rebels against the all-crushing despotism with a shocking all-round attack. Sergej leaves this place, disappearing into the space from where he came: nothingness. Frightening and cruel but also tender and impossibly precise, the film offers rare glimpses into a mighty 'order' of tyranny and exploitation. Slaboshpytskiy created a powerful parable of both the Soviet and the post-Soviet era. The film is a single, silent outcry and an expression of the will to break out of this cycle.

The Tribe

Facts, voices and positions

The title "Plemja" (The Tribe) refers to an infamous propaganda film from the mid-1930s. "Stalin's tribe - Plemja Stalina" showed endlessly long parades of young athletes on Red Square in Moscow, with which the almost physical homogeneity of a new Soviet nation was invoked. Every individuality was erased here, and there should be no more personal identification any more apart from Stalin himself. This new tribe worked like a machine. It is only logical that the young artists of an independent Ukraine wanted to distance themselves as far as possible from this conformity. Their films denounce membership in a tribe and insist on the greatest possible individuality. Contemporary Ukrainian films reflect this diversity at all levels. Once again, it is not possible to explain this spectrum in a few sentences.

Some facts. In 2018, 48 feature-length films were produced in Ukraine. Of these, 26 were feature films, 4 were animated films, and 14 were documentaries. In the same year, 28 million (of 44 million) Ukrainian people went to the cinema, of which 2.5 million accounted for home productions, which was a share of 8.6%. In 2019, the two most successful films were 1) the ironic mother-son road movie "My Thoughts are Silent" by Antonio Lukitsch; 2) the film you just saw: "Atlantis" by Valentin Vasjanovitch – that means a comedy and a dystopia, which says a lot about the mood in the country. But there is a great diversity between these two poles.

It is not so easy to follow this development in Western Europe. After all, we have two festivals in Germany dedicated to Eastern European cinema: in Wiesbaden and in Cottbus. Berlin has the largest communities of young people from the former Eastern bloc in Europe. In 2009, a group of young Ukrainian women founded the "Ukrainian Cinema Club", and Brotfabrik Berlin has hosted this film club since 2014. This put me in the privileged position of being able to see many of the new films from Ukraine. The reason for inviting the cinema club to the Brotfabrik was my shock at the annexation of Crime and the kidnapping of film director Oleg Sentsov. We organized a solidarity evening together with Wim Wenders and the European Film Academy. We have been working together since then.

Here are some of my favorite films in a nutshell, the order does not mean a rating: **1**) "The Earth Is Blue as an Orange" by Iryna Zilyk – a documentary about a single mother in Donbas **2**) "Stop Zemlja" by Katerina Gornostai – a documentary about some young people looking for orientation in Kyiv; **3**) "Bad Roads" by Nataliya Vorozhbyt – an episodic film from Donbas, based on the director's stage play with the same title; **4**) "Mariupolis" a documentary by Lithuanian director Mantas Kvedaravičius, who was captured, tortured and murdered by Russian soldiers in March 2022; **5**) „Roses. Film-Cabaret" by Irena Stetsenko – an incredibly vital documentary about the female theater-music-group "Dakh Daughters", who also performad live at the Maidan in 2014 and **6**) "Atlantis" – the film you just saw. By the way, Valentin Vasjanovitch was the cameraman of "Plemja". So, the circle is closing on this point. Vasjanovitch is now regarded as Ukraine's most talented and promising director.

Screen Priests and Screen Pastors – Interfilm Hungary Sárospatak Conference (2023)

Beáta Kézdi, Gabriella Rácsok
Anett Lovass
Peter Paul Huth
Viktor Kókai-Nagy

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, 1968, Fortepan / FŐFOTÓ

Beáta Kézdi,
Gabriella Rácsok

PORTRAYING PRIESTS AND PASTORS ON THE SCREEN – INTERNATIONAL INTERFILM CONFERENCE HELD IN SÁROSPATAK

How are Catholic priests, Protestant pastors, and churches in general portrayed in movies, TV shows, and series? – this was the question that the participants of the international conference on "Screen Priests and Screen Pastors" sought to answer. The event, organised by Interfilm Hungary on 13-14 October 2023, was attended by journalists, theologians, pastors, and students at the co-organising Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy, which also hosted the conference.

The two-day event included presentations in English followed by discussions and film screenings. First, the participants could listen to a lecture by Anett Csilla Lovas, literary scholar, religion teacher, and research assistant at the Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy, on the American television series *The Leftovers*, focusing on the person of the Episcopalian Reverend Matt Jamison, his dramatically changed life and ministry. HBO's self-produced science fiction series is based on Tom Perrotta's best-selling book of the same name. The starting point of the series is shocking in itself: two percent of the world's population disappears overnight, and there is no explanation. In her lecture, enriched with film excerpts, Anett Csilla Lovas presented the devoted character of Reverend Matt Jamison, born in Mapleton, New York, his relationship with his wife, who was injured in an accident, falls into a waking coma and then miraculously recovers, and his doubts and struggles with God and his variegated life.

Afterwards, Marek Lis, Roman Catholic priest, professor at the University of Opole, and president of SIGNIS in Poland, gave a presentation on the priest figures in Polish feature films of the past decades and the changes in their portrayal, illustrated richly with cinematic examples, but at the end of his presentation, he also touched on the characters of the Catholic priests appearing in the Polish TV series.

On the afternoon of the first day, those interested could watch Virág Zomborácz's first feature film, *Afterlife* (2014), at the local cinema in the centre of Sárospatak. After the screening, Beáta Kézdi, journalist, editor-in-chief of *Lutheran Life* (*Evangélikus Élet*), and member of Interfilm Hungary, talked about the film with Tamás Fabiny, President-Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, and Viktor Kókai-Nagy, theologian and associate professor at the Debrecen Reformed Theological University and János Selye János University, including the toxic family atmosphere and characters, and the process of growing up. In her first feature film, Virág Zomborácz is particularly good with irony; we can see great acting and an interesting coming-of-age story. In the story, we happen to find ourselves in the everyday life of a rather depressing rural pastor's family, where, following the sudden death of the father, a Lutheran pastor, the son, himself also a theologian and almost completely depressed, tries to find his place in the new situation, to find himself, and eventually to follow in his father's footsteps in some way. The film, not lacking absurdity, works with a number of highly symbolic scenes, making the viewer laugh but also think. At the end of the discussion, the participants' comments led to a truly rich discussion about the grotesque humour of the work and the interpretation of the individual symbolic scenes.

On the second day of the conference, first, German sociologist, political scientist, historian, and former member of the feature film department of ZDF German television, Peter Paul Huth, gave a presentation on the 1989 film *Jesus of Montreal* (*Jésus de Montreál*), written and directed by Denys Arcand, in which the power of the Gospel to shape individuals was a prominent theme. The almost two-hour Canadian-French film drama follows former actor friends reunited in a Quebec church at the request of Father Leclerc, who is not particularly a saint, to perform an unusual modernised passion play based on the Gospel of Mark. During the rehearsal process and as the story progresses, the church turns against the protagonist and the author of the play, but Daniel becomes increasingly one with the character of the crucified Saviour. In his presentation, Peter Paul Huth pointed out that the film won an award at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival, was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film that same year, and the critics of the Toronto International Film Festival named Arcand's movie one of the 10 best Canadian films of all time.

The final lecture – with the double commandment of love (Mt 22:37-39) in focus – was delivered by Viktor Kókai-Nagy on the hit television series *The Young Pope*. The Italian-French-Spanish-American-English co-production drama series starring Jude Law was written and directed by Oscar winner Paolo Sorrentino. The story of young Lenny Belardo, who is elected Pius XIII and becomes the first North American Pope, is a charming and, to put it mildly, a cynical and vain character. In his presentation, the theologian focused on the beginning of the story, the so-called star Pope, the miracle-working head of the Church, and the past behind the character and his relationship with God, making us want to watch the rest of the series based on the first episode.

The second screening of the event was Daniel Jaroszek's *Johnny*, the second most watched movie in Poland in 2022. The movie paints an authentic portrait of a young stray who was first caught at the age of twelve and who is used to spending six months on the outside after a year in prison before being put behind bars again and of a dedicated priest, Johnny, who, in the words of his mentor, is good at three things: noticing, understanding and embracing people. As for the title character, Father Jan Kaczkowski was one of Poland's most popular priests until his death in 2016. According to articles about him, he was born premature, in the seventh month of pregnancy, and his physical disabilities – left-sided paralysis and severe visual impairment – were the result. He was ordained a priest in 2002 and received a doctorate in theology in 2007. He wrote his dissertation on the dignity of the dying and on helping the terminally ill. In 2008, he also completed a postgraduate course in bioethics. Since 2009, he has been director of the St. Padre Pio Hospice House, which he founded in Puck. In addition to this work, he was also a parish priest and a teacher of religion in a secondary school. He also wrote several books and a vlog. In 2016, he became an ambassador for World Youth Day in Krakow. He died of a brain tumour at the age of 39.[1] "For many people, *Johnny* has become a very important film because it gives hope, and as you can see from the reactions, this is what we need nowadays. We are very happy that after leaving the cinemas, viewers, just like Patryk, start to look at the world around them differently", said Robert Kijak, the producer of the film.[2]

The screening was followed by a discussion, the closing of the conference, and a summary of the conclusions, where it was also announced that Interfilm Hungary was planning to hold its third international conference in 2025.

1 Regényi, Huba: A Johnny felkavaró és inspiráló film Lengyelország egyik legnépszerűbb papjáról, *Magyar Nemzet*, 01-05-2023, URL: https://magyarnemzet.hu/kultura/2023/05/a-johnny-felkavaro-es-inspiralo-film-lengyelorszag-egyik-legnepszerubb-papjarol Last Accessed: 06-11-2023.

2 Grynienko, Katarzyna: BOX OFFICE: Daniel Jaroszek's Johnny Dominates Polish Box Office,-*FilmNewEurope*,1 Grynienko, Katarzyna: BOX OFFICE: Daniel Jaroszek's Johnny Dominates Polish Box Office,FilmNewEurope,10-11-2022,URL:https://www.filmneweurope.com/news/poland-news item/124165-box-office-daniel-jaroszek-s-johnny-dominates-polish-box-office Last Accessed: 06-11-2023 0-11-2022 URL: https://www.filmneweurope.com/news/poland-news item/124165-box-office-daniel-jaroszek-s-johnny-dominates-polish-box-office Last Accessed: 06-11-2023.

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, 1970, Fortepan / FŐFOTÓ

Anett Csilla Lovas

IN SEARCH OF MEANING IN THE SERIES *THE LEFTOVERS*

October 14th, 2011 – according to the fiction of the series The Leftovers, 2% of humanity disappeared that day: women, men, children, babies, the elderly, Muslims, Christians, Jews, atheists, scientists and labourers, the healthy and the sick... without any explanation. The Pope got raptured, as well as Jennifer Lopez, Salman Rushdie, or Shaquille O'Neal – among millions of unknown victims. And according to one of the main characters of the series, they were also guilty victims. Everyone wants to find the answers for the event called Sudden Departure, but maybe no one seeks them as desperately as the character named Matt Jamison, the Episcopal priest of Mapleton, who, like a detective, investigates the crimes committed by the departed. I will focus on his complex character below.

The series is based on Tom Perrotta's novel *The Leftovers.* The novel was published in 2011, gained critical acclaim, and became a bestseller. As early as 2011, HBO acquired rights for a series that started in 2014. The series consists of three seasons and 28 episodes. The creators were Damon Lindelof (he was the showrunner of the science fiction drama *Lost*) and the writer Tom Perrotta. The novel and the series differ on several points. The pastor Matt Jamison was a repugnant side character in the novel, and his mission seemed ridiculous. However, he became one of the main characters portrayed by Christopher Eccleston in the series. He is a friend of Kevin Garvey (played by Justin Theroux), the Chief of Police in Mapleton (in the novel, Kevin is the mayor of Mapleton and an ideal politician, but in the series, he often behaves violently and is full of doubts), and Matt is the brother of Nora Durst (played by Carrie Coon). Nora lost all her family members in the Sudden Departure, and in the middle of Season 1, she becomes the girlfriend of the former

mentioned Kevin Garvey, and she accompanies Kevin through the series. So, these three characters are more intertwined in the series than in the novel.

All of them live in the small town of Mapleton, the setting for the opening scene, which is still bustling with life, though nothing is the same as before the sudden departure. The plot picks up three years later when we get a more accurate view of the events of October 14th through the eyes of Kevin Garvey. It turns out that 2% of humanity disappeared without a trace, and anyone who watches the pilot will soon realise that the series is not about explanations: this is not a crime story, not an action movie, but a hard-hitting psychological drama that does not only pose questions about the Self and the Other in the light of a crisis (and consistently answers none) but also takes a nuanced look at the relationship between transcendence and the human being. Various reactions to the inexplicable emerge: members of a cult called the Guilty Remnants dress in white, become chain-smokers, take a vow of silence, and remind the leftovers of the departed with their quiet but persistent presence. Others follow Holy Wayne, a powerful yet questionable prophet who helps people recover from their grief with a single hug. Others go mad, like Kevin's father, and others repress their emotions, like Kevin himself.

The unstable state of pain and confusion becomes nearly unbearable in the community of Mapleton. Many seek consolation from the Christian church and its theologians, but they have no answers either. Jesus speaks in Matthew's Gospel about the signs of the End Times: "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." (Mt 24,40-42)[1] In the fiction of the series, the prophecy of Jesus is only partially fulfilled since the most important moment is left out: the Lord does not come. How can we persevere with a God who does not come despite his promises?

Sort of like the Episcopalian priest, Matt Jamison, who bears the name of Matthew the Evangelist. Although Kevin Garvey is the protagonist of the series, Matt's fate is just as unpredictable and full of pain, loss, and doubt as Kevin's. He gets three "solo" episodes throughout the entire series. We first meet him in the third episode of the first season, where we get an insight into his life and personality. Matt did not lose any family members on the day of the Sudden Departure, but his wife Mary falls into a coma after a car accident – the accident can be seen in the first minutes of the episode shown earlier. He takes care of his wife and his small congregation as well. As a preacher, he finds himself questioning his own beliefs and confronting the limits of his faith, making him a symbol of the existential crisis that permeates the entire series. Beyond his spiritual struggles, Matt's character is marked by his determination to expose what he believes to be the truth. He becomes a self-appointed moral guardian, investigating and documenting the departures and the lives of those left behind. He tries to convince a handful of believers that what

1 I use the text of the New International Bible in this essay, because the series also quotes from this version.

happened three years ago was not the Rapture because the people who disappeared were not saints, and what happened could not have been the Lord's will. To this end, he is producing flyers with photos of the lost and their sins – so much to the dismay of the community that he is not only losing his church but also having to give up his church ministry in Mapleton. As Damon Lindelof puts it in the video explaining the character's motives, he is a priest who has nobody to preach to.[2] But his quest for truth transforms him into a complex and morally ambiguous figure, challenging conventional notions of heroism.

We can see many Bible references In Matt's first solo episode (S01E03, "Two Boats and a Helicopter"). Matt gives his wife a bath and puts her to bed at night, sobbing silently in the dark. The way Matt holds Mary in his arms can remind us of the depictions of the Pieta in the arts; this scene sheds light on Matt's sacrifice. There is a painting by Albrecht Dürer, Job on the Dungheap (With His Wife) on the bedroom wall. We can see Job's burning house in the background. The painting shows quite the opposite of what we see in the episode: here, Job's wife takes care of Job, not the other way around. The painting is in Mary's bedroom, and maybe it gave her a kind of "programme" or agenda as a wife of a pastor. But the image becomes important to Matt, who identifies himself with the Old Testament character. As journalist Thomas Horton puts it about the episode:

> „Matt has become something universal to us, a symbol of mankind's struggle to maintain some sort of goodness in a world that can be all too cruel. His kindness, his humanity, his faith, his temptation…all of his traits bring the lessons of Job to a larger audience. We all hopefully strive to be better people in the face of our hardships, regardless of our religious beliefs."[3]

Matt partially loses his wife, and soon, he loses his congregation as well for financial reasons. He must find another purpose: to reunite the isolated members of the Guilty Remnant with their families. However, this mission also fails in the final episode of the first season (S01E10, "The Prodigal Son Returns), when most of the cult members are destroyed in a huge fire. Just before the tragedy, the cult leader Patti has committed suicide, and Matt asks Kevin to help bury her and read from the Bible. The passage from the Book of Job 23, 8 to 17, is read in Kevin's hushed voice. The broken Job says here: "I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread." This quote adds a further layer of complexity to the notion of 'departure' as a key concept in the series and it adds a further layer to Matt's character as well. The language is important here, I think: the events of October 14th are often referred to as the Sudden Departure. Even the 2%

2 The Leftovers: Character Spotlight: Matt Jamison, *Facebook.com,* 15-05-2017. URL: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1912283142343105 Last Accessed: 09-09-2023.

3 Horton, Thomas: The Trials of Matt Jamison, *Medium.com*, 05-11-2015. URL: https://medium.com/cinenation-show/the-trials-of-matt-jamison-3ac798e1573c Last Accessed: 09-09-2023.

of the humanity departed in a mysterious way. Matthew, the equivalent of Job in the series, had not departed from the commands of the Lords' lips, and among the tragic circumstances, he treasured the words of his mouth more than his daily bread.

The scene is accompanied by a beautiful score by Max Richter, with close-up shots of Matt's determined face and Kevin's tearful eyes or medium shots of Kevin and the morning sunshine streaming through the trees. Although the series does not decide on dilemmas of transcendence for us, it often suggests through cinematic means that there may be something beyond the human condition; I believe that moving the camera towards the light in dramatic moments is a subtle way of doing this. Idyll and tragedy, beauty and horror, fierce faith and trembling doubt are all woven together in these few minutes, which are maybe some of the most powerful scenes in television history.

Matt's loyalty will guide him through the next season, where he will find a new mission. While the first season focuses on his struggle for his community, the second season shifts the focus to his individual trials. As he continues to search for answers to what has happened to humanity and his wife, we get to know him more and more as a suffering, questioning, doubting man who still trusts that God is somehow present in this upside-down world.

And this image leads us to the concept of utopia and dystopia. We cannot now recall the debates related to the genre of utopia or dystopia, so I would like to quote only one relevant author. In his book *Dystopia – A Natural History* Gregory Claeys puts that

> „Most of what we associate with 'dystopia' is thus a modern phenomenon, wedded to secular pessimism. The word is derived from two Greek words, dus, and topos, meaning a diseased, bad, faulty, or unfavourable place. … In common parlance, the word functions as the opposite of 'utopia', the bad place versus what we imagine to be the good place, the secular version of paradise."[4]

The series includes at least two dystopias and one utopia related to this idea. Season one is about a "diseased, bad" community of Mapleton as a dystopia; however, Season 2 is set in "the secular version of paradise", the utopistic town of Jarden. In Season 2, we meet Matt again in church ministry; he has been appointed priest of the town of Jarden, Texas, also known as Miracle, because no one left on that particular October 14th. In addition to his vocation, Matt also chooses this place for personal reasons: on the day of the disappearance, his wife Mary falls into a coma after a car accident. The priest believes his wife can recover in this town, and she does indeed wake up one day, only to fall back into her former state the next day.

After losing Mary again, Matt's painful monologue in his second solo episode, S02E05 ("No Room at the Inn"), can be interpreted as a desperate prayer to God,

4 Claeys, Gregory: *Dystopia – A Natural History,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, 4.

who is both present and absent, just like Mary. Matt has not stopped searching for answers but is growing angry and impatient. Is it a test? – asks, and his question brings to mind the quotation from the Book of Job read earlier. "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold." Even though Matt is living in some kind of utopia at the moment, he is not yet at the point where he is sure, like Job, that "he will come forth as gold".

This moment will only come in the third season. In season 3, he learns of a relapse of the terminal illness from which he was cured as a child, and he sees his recovery as a divine miracle. He finds a new mission even in this situation: in his final months, he writes a gospel of Kevin, who is going through hell on earth and in the afterlife and who Matt strongly believes could be the new Messiah sent by the Lord.

However, later it will make deeper sense why Matt chose a passage from the Book of Job as a funeral oration. The fifth episode of Season 3 is called It's a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World. The title is reminiscent of the 1963 comedy It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World, directed by Stanley Kramer. According to its trailer, The New York Journal American called the movie "the wildest chase comedy on record"; the IMDB states that the film is about "a group of motorists, who witnesses a car crash in the California desert. After the driver's dying words indicate the location of a hidden stash of loot, they turn against each other in a race across the state to get to it."[5] The title of The Leftovers episode was probably motivated by the pun, but I think this particular episode may show the wildest chase of meaning in the television world. The priest on a ship bound for Melbourne witnesses a man named David Burton (Bill Camp), who claims to be God, push someone off the deck of an ocean liner. Matt wants to hold him accountable for his actions, but in a poignant dialogue, he falls under the influence of a man who claims complete nonsense and starts arguing with him as if he really is talking with God. An extract from a dialogue between the two:

> Matt: Then what do you take responsibility for? Dinosaurs? The black plague? Mount Everest? The Mona Lisa? The sudden departure?
> David: Yeah. That was me.
> Matt: [surprised] The sudden departure was you.
> David: Uh-huh.
> Matt: Why?
> David: Because I could.
> Matt: You're gonna have to do better than that.
> David: No, I don't.
> Matt: You do.
> David: Why?
> Matt: Because there has to be a reason.

5 Kramer, Stanley: *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), URL: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057193/ Last Accessed: 09-09-2023.

David: Why?
Matt: Everything in my life I've done for a reason.
David: Why?
Matt: To help people. To… to guide them. To ease their suffering, even though I suffered myself. I sacrificed my happiness. I let my family abandon me.
David: Why?
Matt: [yelling] For you!
David: Everything you've done you've done because you thought I was watching. Because you thought I was judging. But I wasn't. I'm not. You've never done anything for me. You did it for yourself.

David walks away, and Matt stays there, completely confused. In my opinion, it is no coincidence that there is so much resemblance between the two actors: they both have beards, are bald, and have blue eyes. It is a bit like Matt asking himself his own questions, or perhaps his face has become a reflection of God during his struggles.

The series brilliantly plays here and elsewhere with mixing the sacred and the profane. The end of this scene suggests that David was only a clever trickster, but for Matt, he was then and there the only person he could ask the questions of. In reply, he only hears what Job heard: the Lord will do what his soul desires just because he is capable of doing it. This is where the two key scenes of seasons one and three come together, as the confrontation with the sovereignty of the Lord provides no reassuring answers for either Job or Matt - yet both persevere in their walk with God, right up to the (in Matt's case, near) end of their earthly lives.

The conclusion Matt reaches may well evoke one of the most beautiful hymns written in English by William Cowper. This hymn is sung by many Hungarian congregations, and its title is God moves in a mysterious way. Let me quote three verses from the poem:

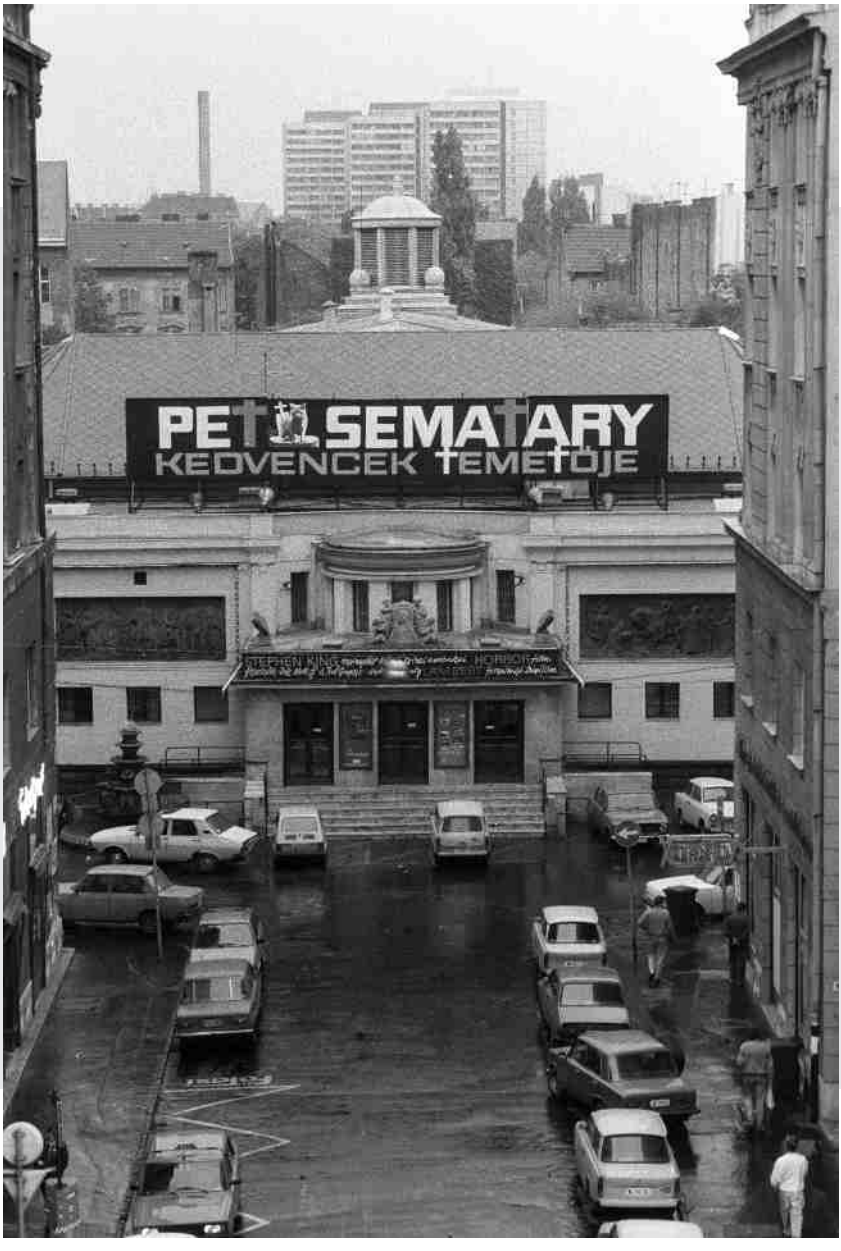
1 God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
and rides upon the storm.

2 Deep in unfathomable mines
of never-failing skill;
He treasures up His bright designs,
and works His sov'reign will.

6 Blind unbelief is sure to err,
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.

After the doubts and the constant searching for meaningless, Matt can finally accept God's sovereign will, and he is peacefully preparing for death. He comes to the conclusion that "God is his own interpreter", and maybe he will find his answers after death; in his last scene, he admits to Nora that, as a priest, he had no idea what he is talking about. He did not find the answers he wanted, but he departs peacefully while the other characters find out the reason for the Great Departure, but they become even more confused than before – because the answer is linked to another dystopia, another bad place.

So why the doubts, why the questioning, why the constant searching and wondering, if, sooner or later, we come to the conclusion: God does what He wants? These might as well be the words of Ecclesiastes, who says that all is vanity, so we should live life joyfully while it lasts. Matt must have realised the same thing: standing on the deck of the boat the morning after the talk with David, he gazes out at the dawn horizon, his eyes peaceful. He has accepted death and is almost certain that he will get no answers from anyone. Perhaps it is not sacrilegious to link The Leftovers and the Scriptures in this way, but both 'texts' seem to say the same thing: let us ask our questions and take up our own crosses even when we see no rational meaning, even when inexplicable things are happening within us and around us. It may be by accepting the experience of suffering and the lack of answers that we become sovereign human beings in dialogue with a sovereign God.



Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz seen from József körút towards the Corvin Cinema, 1990,
Fortepan / Katalin Erde

Peter Paul Huth

"JESUS OF MONTREAL" (JÉSUS DE MONTRÉAL, CANADA, 1989)

Religion and film have always been in a creative state of tension. Both cultivate a special attachment to transcendence, elevating everyday occurrences through signs and wonders. The portrayal of biblical stories became a classical genre of conservative Hollywood films with Cecil B. de Mille as its master. He was one of the first to put the character of Jesus on the screen in "The King of Kings" (1927). Later films like "Samson and Delilah" (1949) and, most successfully, "The Ten Commandments" (1956) with Charlton Heston in the role of Moses established the powerful image of biblical characters in the popular imagination.

In stark contrast to this iconography stands Pier Paolo Pasolini's "The Gospel According to St. Matthew" (Il vangelo secondo Matteo, 1964). Filmed in austere black and white Pasolini uses nonprofessional actors in the tradition of Italian neorealism. 24 years later, Martin Scorsese shocked the catholic establishment with his adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis' novel "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988). Here, Jesus survives the crucifixion and goes on living with Mary Magdalene.

Ten years later, the French-Canadian director Denys Arcand follows Scorsese with an unorthodox representation of Christ. "Jesus of Montreal" (Jésus de Montréal, 1989) is not a film about the historical Jesus but places the biblical story in the modern setting of Montreal in the 1980s.

Daniel Coulombe, an actor in a costume drama (Lothaire Bluteau), is spotted by the Catholic priest Father Leclerc (Gilles Pelletier), who invites him to "modernize" and play the lead role in a passion play that is held annually for tourists on the grounds of a church overlooking downtown Montreal. Daniel undertakes thorough archeological research about the historical figure of Jesus and his time.

He gathers a group of actors to play the biblical characters. Constance (Johanne-Marie Tremblay), a friend from acting school now working in a soup kitchen, to play the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ; Mireille (Catherine Wilkening), a French model working in TV commercials, is signed up to play Mary Magdalene; and two actors – one who dubs porn films (Rémy Gerard) and another who lectures at a planetarium (Robert Lepage) – fill the other parts. Living collectively in Constance's apartment, they write the new version of the play.

Although the premiere of their avant-garde production – which moves with the audience to different locations, one for each of the 14 stations of the cross – is generally well received, the priest objects to many of the changes and wants them to go back to the earlier version of the play, which they refuse to do.

Daniel accompanies Mireille to a TV-commercial audition; when the director humiliates Mireille, Daniel becomes enraged, smashes all the video equipment, and throws everyone out. This leads to a trial, where a show business lawyer offers to become Daniel's agent, and the judge, played by director Arcand himself, sends Daniel to a psychiatrist. Later, against the order of the priest, the actors give a final performance of their production and get into a fight with the police that ends with Daniel becoming critically injured . . .

"Jesus of Montreal" received very positive reviews at the festival in Cannes, where the film won the Prize of the Jury and of the Ecumenical Jury. It was also nominated for an Oscar as best foreign language film.

The American critic Roger Ebert praised the film as "an original and uncompromising attempt to explore what really might happen if the spirit of Jesus were to walk among us in these timid and materialistic times". Caryn James, in the New York Times, calls "Jesus of Montreal" an "intelligent and audacious…attempt to shake up stale religious assumptions, undermine religiosity with wit, and question the Gospels with a new reverence that springs from our modern, commercial world."

There are obvious parallels between the actor Daniel and the figure of Christ in the scriptures. The name Daniel recalls the Jewish prophet in the Old Testament who is thrown in the lions' pit because he dares to confront the Babylonian King Nebukadnezar with the truth. His last name, Coulombe, can be read as an allusion to the French 'colombe', the biblical dove representing the Holy Spirit. Our Polish colleague Marek Lis has meticulously listed the examples of biblical references to be found in the film. These references are skillfully and unobtrusively integrated as the story develops. In the opening sequence, we see a theatre production presenting an adaptation of Dostoevsky. As the lead actor is applauded by the public after his performance, he points to his friend Daniel saying, "*There* is a good actor". Just as St. John the Baptist is praising Jesus as the coming Messiah.

After Daniel's revision of the passion play proves to be tremendously successful, Daniel is taken by a lawyer and potential investor to the lawyer's office at the top of a large office building. The lawyer (played by Yves Jacques) who – looking out over the city from a skyscraper – offers Daniel profit and fame, telling him, "The city is yours,"

a reference to the temptation of Christ by Satan in the wilderness. When Daniel accompanies Mireille to the audition for a beer commercial and the director tries to humiliate her by telling her to undress, he smashes the video equipment and throws everyone out, just as Jesus did when he expelled the merchants and moneylenders from the temple.

In their historical study analyzing the image of Jesus Christ in the cinema *Savior on the Silver Screen*, Richard C. Stern, Clayton N. Jefford, and Guerric DeBona dedicate a special chapter to "Jesus of Montreal". The authors come to the conclusion that, "…(the film) evokes many, deep, troubling and thoughtful issues about the identity of Jesus and his influence on one's life, and, as well, provides a caustic critique of contemporary Canadian (Western) culture."[1]

Concerning the dichotomy of Daniel/Jesus, the authors state that "Daniel as an actor appropriates not the external features of Jesus, but the Savior's interior disposition of the Suffering Servant, and finally redeemer. Ultimately, as a person, who becomes more and more like Jesus, Daniel becomes paradoxically, a Jesus *without* a Hollywood aura…"[2]

It is not by coincidence that the film is titled "Jesus of Montreal" locating the story in a particular place and city. For a long time, Montréal has been the most Catholic of Canadian cities, just as the French-speaking province of Quebec was tightly controlled by the conservative Catholic Church. During the 1960s, Quebec went through a period of profound social and economic change, which was called "Silent Revolution" (Révolution tranquille). A process of secularization and the establishment of a modern welfare state were the defining elements of this change. The provincial government took over the institutions of health care and education, which had previously been controlled by the Catholic Church. It also enabled the establishment of unions and the emancipation of the French-speaking population from the dominance of the English-speaking elite.

"Jesus of Montreal" reflects this historical process and represents a gesture of defiance against the omnipresence of Hollywood movies in Canada. "Perhaps the most important thing to observe about *Jesus of Montreal* is that it is very consciously *not* a Hollywood movie. More importantly, it remains linked to Quebec theater, church and politics."[3]

It is not by coincidence that Denys Arcand's previous film was called "The Decline of the American Empire "(Le décline de l'empire américain, 1986). The film was an enormous success in Cannes where it won the FIPRESCI prize and went on to become the first Canadian film nominated for an Oscar. Despite the political title, the story focuses on dialogues about sex among a group of professors at the University of Montreal. At the same, the film is a declaration of independence from

1 Stern, Richard C. – Jefford, Clayton N. – DeBona, Guerric: *Savior on the Silver Screen*, New York / Mahwah, N.J, Paulist Press, 1999, 302.
2 Ibid., 326.
3 Ibid., 327.

the dominance of US-American culture and from the Hollywood movie industry. In what could be called a postcolonial gesture, Denys Arcand succeeds in putting Canada and Quebec on the map of world cinema.

"Jesus of Montreal" follows in the same direction of asserting the cultural identity of Quebec, which is opposite the Catholic history of Montréal. One should read the film as both as a religious and a political allegory, "Like the prophet Daniel and, of course, Jesus himself, Daniel comes as an innocent to a hopelessly secular society in an attempt to redeem it. Once there, he must teach his actor friends as Jesus taught his disciples…"[4] Daniel confronts not only the traditionalism of the Catholic hierarchy but also the commercial interests which are using culture for profit. "…there is hardly a scene in the film that does not place an emphasis on Daniel's prophetic role as a shy, cultural Savior."[5]

With "The Decline of the American Empire" (1986) and "Jesus of Montreal" (1989) Denys Arcand became the internationally best-known Franco-Canadian director. He was born in Quebec in 1941 in a catholic family. His mother once was a Carmelite nun, and he was educated at a Jesuit school. He studied history at the University of Montréal but got into films quite early and started making documentaries.

Preparing for the film, Arcand conducted extensive Christological research and consulted scholars. "I went as deep as I could into Jesus's life," he explains. "I was surprised to find that we know next to nothing about Jesus – anyone who pretends contrary is a fool. We know he existed, that he was crucified or hanged by the Romans, and about 20 sentences of his messages – the rest is mystery."[6]

Drawing on modern archaeological findings, Arcand's film raises the possibility that Jesus may have been the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier named Yeshua Ben Panthera, as he is called in the Talmud.

Denys Arcand calls himself a "lapsed catholic". "At 15, I abandoned religion and discovered sex and drugs. But even though I left the church, the teachings will stay with me until I die. I'm constantly asking such ethical questions as what kinds of films should I be making?"

4 Ibid., 330.

5 Ibid., 331.

6 Rosenthal, Donna: The Passion of Denys Arcand, *Washington Post*, 21-07-1990, URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/style/1990/07/22/the-passion-of-denys-arcand/95a5cf68-146c-4fe0-944e-93e53cc18e1c/ Last Accessed: 28-11-2023.

Viktor Kókai-Nagy

INTERPRETATION OF "THE YOUNG POPE" IN THE LIGHT OF THE GREAT COMMANDMENT OF LOVE (MATT 22:37–39)

Paulo Sorrentino's film is very good. The idea, the characters, the selected actors, and the story are also great. The pictures are almost painted. However, all this is only the opinion of an amateur film lover, which should not be taken seriously. Not to mention that as a "film critic," it would be a very late reaction after so many years. What always happens at the right time, however, is the evaluation of a film on the basis of certain aspects. This is what I am doing in this paper. I would like to share my own *subjectively* theological interpretation with the audience.

Even the title and theme of the film itself present a particular image, perhaps an expectation of the Roman Catholic Church: that a young man should finally be the head of the Church. The backdrop of this may be the idea that a young man may have a better understanding of the spirit of the time, be more open to change, think long-term, and have enough time to implement his plans and ideas. We start watching the movie with these assumptions. And the first few minutes seem to confirm our assumptions, as the young Pope's speech is "the most progressive Papal statement in history."[1] He speaks – after the sunlight pierces the gloomy sky thanks to his prayer – before a huge crowd in St. Peter's Square about how, in many issues, the Church has abandoned its followers, forgotten them. He mentions issues that are not simply progressive but meet the world's supposed expectations.

> *Ciao Rome! Ciao world! Ciao! What have we forgotten? We have forgotten you! […] I'm here for one very simple reason. To not forget anyone.*

1 Goodman, Tim: Critic's Notebook: How HBO's 'The Young Pope' Is Fooling Us All, *The Hollywood Reporter,* 16-01-2017. URL: https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/critics-notebook-how-hbos-young-pope-is-fooling-us-all-964674/ Last Accessed: 19-09-2023.

[…] I serve God. I serve you! We have forgotten the women and children, who will change this world with their love and kindness. And with their marvellous, divine disposition to play. Play is the only authentic means we have to make us feel in harmony with life. And to be in harmony with God, we have to be in harmony with life. We don't have a choice:we must be in harmony with God! And what else have we forgotten? We have forgotten to masturbate, to use contraceptives, to get abortions, to celebrate gay marriages, to allow priests to love each other, and even to get married. We've forgotten that we can decide to die if you detest living, we've forgotten to have sexual relations for purposes other than procreation without feeling guilty! Help! To divorce, to let nuns say mass, to make babies in all the ways science has discovered and will continue to discover. In short, my dear, dear children, not only have we forgotten to play, we have forgotten to be happy."

We could say that this is a banal start and only our well-educated behaviour stops us from finishing watching the film right away. What prevents this, however, is the fact that the Pope wakes up; it was only a dream... In contrast, he makes a very different voice in his first homily in reality:

„What have we forgotten? We have forgotten God. You! You have forgotten God. I want to be very clear with you. You have to be closer to God than to each other. I am closer to God than I am to you. You need to know that I will never be close to you.[…] Your hearts and minds filled only with God. There's no room for anything else. No room for free will, no room for liberty, no room for emancipation."

The first four episodes of the series show how the newly appointed Pope finds his way through the gaps of Vatican diplomacy, arrogance, and politics. The portrayal of the characters and life in the Vatican is full of negative and somewhat tabloid-flavoured topoi: conspiracies, petty power games, character killings, blackmail, and, of course, in the context of all this, commission many of the sins within the walls of the Vatican, which the Church has clearly condemned. The image of priests is stereotypically negative. It is really "a thriller of the soul"[2] in which there is no place for any positive image of the spiritual life of the people living in the heart of the Roman Catholic Church, and we do not meet any character who embodies any of the Christian values. Particularly strange in this context is the young American Pope, who is also not free from stereotypes, drinking Cherry Coke Zero, smoking, listening to popular music, and at the same time, extremely attentive to his diet. Slowly, he learns and begins to use intrigue, gossip, calumny, and a network of informers to preserve his position and defeat his opponents.

At the same time, his doubts also become clear. Interestingly, however, his doubts are not about his goals but his personal beliefs. This is the first human trait we can

2 Bentley, Jean: 'The Young Pope' Creator on Parallels to Donald Trump — and All Those Memes. Paolo Sorrentino talks with THR about the HBO drama as well as plans for season two, *The Hollywood Reporter,* 16-01-2017. URL: https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/young-pope-creator-parallels-donald-trump-all-memes-964459/ Last Accessed: 19-09-2023.

perhaps identify with, and which may even reassure us a little: even the Pope's faith is unstable. However, his initial joking statement that he does not believe in the existence of God disturbs the viewer, because it becomes clear that the head of the Church has an excellent relationship with the Lord of all. The words of his first confession reflect this inner confidence and doubt:

> "*I don't have any sins to confess.- Are you serious? - My only sin, and it's an enormous one, is that my conscience does not accuse me of anything.*" Later he says, "*I don't care about loving my neighbour as myself, I will never love my neighbour as myself […] I love myself more than my neighbour, more than God, I believe only in myself, I am the lord omnipotent. Lenny, you have illumined yourself! Fuck!*"

Director Paolo Sorrentino explains this phenomenon with the priestly celibacy: "Because Catholic priests are celibate, they're in a loving relationship with God. So when they experience a midlife crisis, it regards their love for Him."[3] It fits into this picture that shortly afterwards, falling to his knees in prayer, the Pope regrets the irresponsible statements he made to his confessor. „*It's not true that I don't care about anything. The only thing I care about is You. You alone. And if I've forgotten to thank You, I thank You now. And if I've sinned by presumption, I ask Your forgiveness now.*"

But it is not only his occasional doubt to the point of denying the existence of God peculiar, but also his attitude to popularity. Not only does he avoid publicity, and when it does appear, he hides his face, but he also severely diminishes the Vatican City State's income by not having objects and advertising materials with his face on them. The initially exciting mystical facelessness (Pontifexit) quickly alienates the faithful, not only from the Pope but also from church attendance, which drops significantly. But the Pope is unwavering and makes it clear that he does not want to divert the attention from the essence of the teaching of the Church with his youth and with his immodestly expressed handsomeness. "Catholicism has been to crack down on moral transgressions and to channel Daft Punk, Banksy, and J.D. Salinger – his own points of reference – by hiding his face from public view so that everyone can get back to the business of learning how to be Godly again. It is as effective a marketing technique as it is a point of principle."[4] Enough of cheap marketing; if the popularity of the Church depends on it, then it is better to be unpopular; if the faith of the believers depends on it, then it is worthless. The strength of the Church lies in being feared; fear gives the Church its power. The cardinals rightly fear that

3 Friend, Tad: The Spectacle of "The Young Pope". Paolo Sorrentino's new HBO series, starring Jude Law, is essentially a Cecil B. De Mille-style costume drama, *The New Yorker,* 15-01-2017. URL : https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/23/the-spectacle-of-the-young-pope Last Accessed: 19-09-2023.

4 Nicholson, Rebecca: The Young Pope review – stunning, thoughtful and visually arresting, *The Guardian,* 16-02-2016. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/dec/16/the-young-pope-review-stunning-thoughtful-and-visually-arresting Last Accessed: 19-09-2023.

the new Pope will destroy the Church. Indeed, this is the purpose of destroying the present form of the Church. This attitude is well characterized by an elderly expert on Vatican conspiracies, one of the cardinals: "*You surprised me, Holy Father. You're so young [...] and yet you have such old ideas.*"

We also learn from the Pope that he has serious problems with his past, with his parents not wanting him, having put him in an orphanage, and Sister Mary, who loves him dearly, cannot make up for their absence. On several occasions, he speaks about the emotional bleakness with which he struggles but which he is presumably accustomed to and for which he can only create acceptable explanations for himself and others. When he rejects the provocative physical intimacy of the Swiss Guard commander's wife, he argues that he loves God because it is so painful to love human beings, because he is afraid, because he is, like every priest, a coward who is incapable of bearing the pain. "*I have renounced my fellow man, my fellow women, because I don't want to suffer, […] because I'm unhappy, like all priests.*" Furthermore, he shares with his childhood friend the idea that a priest will never grow up because he will never be a father. In fact, that is why they take on celibacy. „*A priest never grows up, because he can never become a father. He'll always be a son. That is why we imposed a vow of celibacy on ourselves thirteen centuries ago, because we must always be the sons of God, never dare try to take His place.*" While it is disheartening that no positive intention appears in the whole series in favour of the priestly vocation, those around him see this emotional bleakness as a kind of holy apathy. But our Pope is not without emotion, "after five episodes (half of the first season), the show becomes a surprisingly serious meditation on loneliness and faith."[5] In his long-delayed speech to the Cardinals, he clarifies his plans (5th 35:56–48:40):

> "*Brother Cardinals, from this day forward, we're not in, no matter who's knocking on our door. We're in, but only for God. From this day forward, everything that was wide open is gonna be closed. Evangelization. We've already done it. Ecumenicalism. Been there, done that. Tolerance. Doesn't live here anymore. […] We've been reaching out to others for years now. It's time to stop! […] Brother Cardinals, we need to go back to being prohibited. Inaccessible and mysterious. That's the only way we can once again become desirable. That is the only way great love stories are born. And I don't want any more part-time believers. I want great love stories. I want fanatics for God. Because fanaticism is love. […] What I want is absolute love and total devotion to God. […] You can't measure love with numbers, you can only measure it in terms of intensity.*"

The main elements of this papal programme will be precisely those that divide society most. It says no to common law marriages, no to gay marriage, absolute prohibition of abortion in all cases, forbidding priests from giving absolution in the confessional to women who have had abortions, absolute prohibition of divorce in all cases, no

5 Goodman: op. cit.

to accept euthanasia, no to restrictions on the religious freedom. Homosexuals will not be allowed to study in seminaries and will be purged from the priesthood. As a Hungarian film critic states: "The story of *The Young Pope* is rather extreme, but it is not difficult to discover in it the long-standing fundamental conflict of the Catholic Church, the two-thousand-year confrontation between the orthodox and the reformers. The battle is still unresolved because it is undecidable, and if any of the parties were to win, it would be the end of the Vatican and the Catholic religion. [...] If orthodoxy triumphs, life stops, and the Church remains a decorative but empty shell, if, on the other hand, the vehement innovators triumph, throwing too many traditions into the dust, the spirit of the Catholic religion will be gone."[6]

In my opinion, however, there is another theological aspect to the story, and this is due to the peculiarity of love. The Pope is incapable of feeling for people, so he is not shocked when a young boy whose dream was to become a priest and who is rejected because he is gay commits suicide. His self-confidence is not shaken even when there is a worldwide wave of protests against all papal decrees. He wants a church in which there is no love for people, only admiration for God. For him, from the trinity of love, which we read about in Matt 22:37–39: „Thou shalt love the Lord thy God… Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (KJV), so from the trinity of love, God – neighbour – himself, the neighbour is missing: what remains are himself and God, which is therefore no longer love, but enthusiasm, fanaticism and the self-admiring Narcissus in the mirror of water. And yes, without this third indispensable direction of love, without love for one's neighbour, one becomes a tyranny.[7]

In the course of events, some leaked letters bring a turning point. In order to cover up his proven paedophilia, the American bishop tries to blackmail the Pope by sending the Pope's love letters from his youth to a journalist. He wrote these to a girl with whom he actually only got as far as touching her feet. He talks about the emotions that were troubling him in the letters. But there is an error in the bishop's calculation because the letters were never posted. So, the blackmail falls into the well, but the revealed confessions of love have unexpected consequences. At the beginning of the last part of the film, the film's narrator reports:

> "*The world has stopped turning. For days now something has been happening that we haven't seen for a long time. News and social networks, the front page of newspapers are not focusing on evil anymore, but on good. Not on war and terrorism, but on love. And all of this thanks to Pius the 13th's heartbreaking love letters.*"

6 Schubert, Gusztáv, Az ifjú pápa. Mennyei felfordulás, *Filmvilág,* Volume 60, 2017/1, 6–8, 6. URL: https://www.filmvilag.hu/xista_frame.php?cikk_id=13026 Last Accessed: 19-09-2023.

7 "What's more, he's a tyrant. He has a priest break the seal of confession to share his cardinals' secrets, the better to blackmail and rule by fear." Poniewozik, James: 'The Young Pope' Is Beautiful and Ridiculous, *The New York Times,* 12-01-2017. URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/12/arts/television/review-the-young-pope-is-beautiful-and-ridiculous.html%20-%2019.%2009.%2020 2023 Last Accessed: 19-09-2023.

The world stops for a moment, the conventional news disappears, and everyone talks about love. The publication of the letters, however, does not only change the perception of the Pope and thus of the Church, but the Pope is also going through an emotional evolution. Love, as the Great Commandment reveals it to us, is an isosceles triangle. For true love, all three corners must be 60 degrees. At the moment when one of these elements becomes more dominant at the expense of the other two, or if one of the elements is missing, the balance is disrupted, and love is no more love. In the final scene, in Venice, in the speech delivered on St. Mark's Square, there is nothing more to talk about than the love of the other, that third corner which he had hitherto ignored, more precisely, which had been a wounded torso in his life. Although it is the most banal, almost painfully syrupy, meaningless speech in the series, he speaks now face-to-face to the huge crowd. It indicates that the Pope has undergone a dramatic change. It is this change that the film's most important supporting character, the Secretary of the Vatican State, makes the viewer feel: "*And here we are again at the same age-old question: whoever said that a man can't love God and a woman at the same time? That's bullshit.*"

With regard to the topic of the seminar, I could summarise my remarks as follows: the series "The Young Pope" illustrates the true reality in the life of every believer, that even the Pope cannot fulfil his task if he lacks the balance of the great Commandment of love. But, of course, this is true not only for priests and pastors but also for all believers.

Articles

Marianna Bátoriné Misák
Anita Barnóczki

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, 1970, Fortepan / FŐFOTÓ

Marianna Bátoriné Misák

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER'S WIFE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CISTIBISCAN REFORMED CHURCH DISTRICT

I. The issue and state/conditions of the clerical marriage by the 16th century

The approach and starting point of celibacy have been the subject of many debates till today. Catholics and Protestants have radically different views on this issue. There is hardly another practice or institution of the Catholic Church that, almost from its inception and enactment, has concerned the public opinion of all time and which has been so divisive of society as this matter. Many people judge it without background knowledge, while others defend it unbiasedly. This practice has taken a completely different form since the beginning of the life of the Western and Eastern Churches. The reason for and the explanation of the differences of opinion, the disputes, and the difference between the practices of the two Catholic denominations are that "celibacy not of apostolic origin, much less it derived from a divine command, but is based on the church law, that is to say, it is not a doctrinal but a disciplinary institution, the Church has the exclusive right to determine its scope, and which, like all human, is subject to change and development."[1] However, all attacks against it are in vain, and it is still an existing jurisprudence. According to István Sipos, this is because it is an inner ethical feeling that is so much in harmony with the spirit of Christianity that "…it must survive any attack, and as the greatest ornament of the Church and the most beautiful flower of the most intimate seed of Christianity, the sprout of asceticism is necessarily immortal."[2]

Furthermore, like everything human, celibacy has also evolved. We have had no laws prescribing or regulating it in the first three

1 Zsigovits, Béla: *A papi nőtlenség (coelibatus) története Magyarországon*, Budapest, Élet, 1914, 3.

2 Sipos, István: *A celibátus (papi nőtlenség) története és védelme*, Pécs, Dunántúl Nyomda, 1913, 4.

centuries. It was legislated in the 4th century[3] and followed by a series of similar laws. The Eastern Church did not follow the early Gothic legislation. According to this, she maintained the rule that if a person was ordained unmarried, he could not marry afterward, but a marriage made before the ordination could continue. An exception was made for bishops, whose lifestyle in this respect was regulated in the 5th century.[4] The present state of the Greek Orthodox Church was laid down in the 7th century.[5] In the Western Catholic Church, the later centuries saw an increasingly radical change in this matter until Pope Gregory VII gave it a legal force.

The practical implementation of the law was in contradiction with the church legislation for quite some time. There were also places, such as Hungary, where the implementation of the law was rather slow. In 1092, the Synod of Szabolcs enforced the Byzantine Church's rules on clerical marriage and the beginning of Lent. Although Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) had banned married priests from ministry in 1074, the Synod of Szabolcs, following Byzantine tradition, provided that candidates for the priesthood could marry before ordination. In fact, married priests were not uncommon in Hungary in the second half of the 13th century. A decree issued in 1267 stressed that only unmarried priests could be elected bishops.[6]

The unfolding of the Reformation led to changes in many areas and thus put this practice on a different foundation. The native language culture appeared with publications written or translated into the mother tongue. The daily life of the Church was defined by the ad font, and the Holy Scriptures became the only acceptable standard. The mother tongue was also used in education, especially in the small schools established by the Reformed Church. However, changes also took place in family life. Alongside the nobility and the farming towns, the clergy played a significant role in the development and spread of the Reformation. By the time of the century of the Reformation, a sharp line had been drawn between the upper and lower clergy. "The upper clergy did not concern themselves with the pastoral care of the lower clergy and therefore broke away from the high clergy, who lived on the periphery of ecclesiastical life, mainly performing diplomatic and political tasks, and lived their lives in their own hands, within the framework of fraternities organized by themselves. The first Protestant synods were the result of the fraternities. This kind of detachment and abandonment in the life of the lower priesthood was accompanied by a kind of reappraisal of the situation, in the light of which we can say that the lower priesthood's turn towards the Reformation was, to a large extent, driven not only by the need to reform doctrine but by an evaluation of its own existential situation. And the problem of marriage was a central question in this situation.

3 The Council of Elvira (305 or 306). A turning point in the history of celibacy. It prescribed unconditional abstinence. Priests who entered the clergy while married were no longer allowed to remain married (Sipos: op. cit., 42.).

4 They could no longer be married.

5 For more information, see Sipos: op. cit., 53–69.

6 Dienes, Dénes: *A keresztyénség Magyarországon 1526 előtt*, Sárospatak, Sárospataki Református Kollégium Teológiai Akadémiája, 2001, 15.

We believe that the Reformation opened the way to this, and many priests took their first steps towards Lutheran teaching along these lines."[7]

The possibility of marriage, opened up by the Reformation, also brought with it the emergence of a new role, namely the role of the minister's wife. It goes without saying that the practice of celibacy – which in many cases was only theoretical by the 16th century – was unbiblical for many people, and it was the Reformers who set the example by getting married. In her doctoral dissertation, Márta Bernáth Somogyi deals with this issue, among others. Analyzing the Reformation in Strasbourg, she writes that the renewal movement that developed here initially had to struggle with the marriage of the priests. The clergy who joined the Reformation had to defend this previously unknown phenomenon. The rejection of celibacy needed reasoning. The best way for a minister to demonstrate that he belonged to the new faith was that he had a wife. The most striking was the case of Martin Bucer. When he arrived in the city, he was already married. The former Dominican monk married a former nun, Elisabeth Silbereisen. The city council assured him that he would be safe in Strassburg, but he was not allowed to serve in the Church for some time. Bucer also encouraged Wolfgang Capito to marry Agnes Roettel, the daughter of a Strassburg nobleman. Another minister, Anton Firn, married his former lover. They were wedded by Matthäus Zell. In his sermon, he proclaimed that marriage was a gift from God from the beginning and, therefore, cannot be disallowed for any reason. Zell believed that the marriage of the priests was the only way to raise the moral standard of urban society.[8] The marriage of priests also brought sociological changes since a wife was a member of the parish.

Katharina Schütz married Matthäus Zell, the minister of Strassburg, even earlier. Their marriage took place on 3rd December, 1523. Mrs Márta Bernáth Somogyi describes that their situation was not easy, especially for the wife, who had to defend herself and her marriage against numerous attacks.[9]

Martin Luther married a disowned nun, Katharina von Bora. Katharina was 17 years younger than the great reformer, and although Luther was reluctant at first, he never regretted his marriage to her. Katharina became one of the best wives.[10] Soon after their marriage, Martin Luther wrote: "I was married to show a donkey's ear to the devil and his companions, the troublemakers, the princes, and of course the bishops, who foolishly forbid churchmen to marry." "I am despised by my marriage, but I hope the angels laugh and the devils weep."[11]

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7 See more Dienes, Dénes: Reformáció a hétköznapokban, *Rubicon*, Volume 28, 2017/12, 32–35.

8 Bernáthné Somogyi, Márta: *A strassburgi lelkészfeleség, Katharina Zell munkásságának bemutatása iratai tükrében*, Debrecen, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem, 2013, 22. URL: https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/dea/bitstream/handle/2437/173410/Doktori%20%C3%A9rtekez%C3%A9s_Somogyi%20M%C3%A1rta.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y Last Accessed: 19-10-2017.

9 Ibid., 33.

10 Misák, Marianna: Luther Márton, in Dienes, Dénes (ed.): *A reformáció. Vezérfonal az egyháztörténet tanulmányozásához,* Volume II, Sárospatak, Hernád Kiadó, 2008, 11–34.

11 Cited in: Molnár, Krisztina: Mi a nő szerepe az 500 éves reformáció tükrében?, *karpatalja.ma,* 26-03-2018, URL: https://karpatalja.ma/karpatalja/hitelet/mi-a-no-szerepe-az-500-eves-reforma-

John Calvin's marriage took place during his stay in Strasbourg. Calvin showed very little feeling for love. He wrote to Farel about this: "I am not," he says, "of the kind of senseless lovers who are ready to cover up every fault with a kiss as soon as they are carried away by the beauty of a woman. The only beauty that captivates me is the beauty of a modest, kind woman, who is not a pompous, but thrifty, patient, whom I may hope will take care of my health."[12]As three potential wives were not suitable for the reformer, he finally married a widow, Idelette de Buret, whose husband he buried himself.

Idelette, with her quiet, gentle nature, was in every way fitted to provide Calvin with the background he needed for his work. Calvin paid tribute to her only a few times in his writings, but when he did, he was always complimentary. "My ministry was helped by faith." "She was the best company I ever kept." "She was also a faithful helper in my ministry."[13] According to Békefy, Idelette was a faithful companion. In addition to helping her husband in his work at home, she often accompanied him on his travels to look after his health, even though she was not in good health herself. She was his soul mate and a source of comfort to him just by her mere presence. Calvin's biographers repeatedly mention she was "a gentle strength, a personality".[14] She also needed strength and a strong character. It could not be easy for her as Calvin's wife. We can say with absolute conviction that Calvin loved his wife faithfully, but they also had to carry heavy burdens together: a very modest income as a minister and the management of a large and busy house where students were constantly coming to listen to the Master. On top of all this, the physical problems of Calvin's perpetual overwork also took their toll.[15] After only nine years of marriage, Idelette died on 29th March 1549. She was only 42 years old.[16] A week after her death, Calvin wrote to a friend: "She was not only determined to share with me the back-breaking and the serenity, but she was ready to go with me to death. After this, if I had not by force of strength controlled myself, I could not have borne this loss."[17] Calvin's letter, written to Farell during a period of severe mourning, testifies that he found Idelette the chaste, obedient, tolerant, and caring companion: "I have lost the faithful companion of my life, who would never have deserted me, neither in exile,

cio-tukreben/ Last Accessed: 06-11-2017.

12 Cited in: Pruzsinszky, Pál: *Kálvin János életrajz,* Volume 1, Pápa, Magyar Református Egyház, 1909, 334. URL: http://leporollak.hu/egyhtori/kalvin/eletrajz/pruzskal/PRUZSKAL.HTM Last Accessed: 06-11-2017.

13 Cited in: Békefy, Lajos: "Szolgálatomat hittel segítette" – egy reformátor-feleség megtalálása és elvesztése, *bekefy.agnusradio.ro,* URL: http://bekefy.agnusradio.ro/2014/10/szolgalatomat-hittel-segitette-egy.html Last Accessed: 17-10-2018.

14 Ibid.

15 Békefy, Lajos: Az elfelejtett asszony, *palheidfogel.gportal.hu,* URL: http://palheidfogel.gportal.hu/gindex.php?pg=25543575 Last Accessed: 24-10-2017.

16 Ibid.

17 Cited in: Ibid.

nor in misery, nor in death. She was my sweet mate who would have given her ears for me."[18] John Calvin rarely commented on the intimate details of his own or his family life. Nevertheless, outsiders always characterized their marriage and relationship by strong love, respect, and communion. For the Reformer, Idelette de Bure was a gift from God, of whom he remembered, "The greatness of her soul will influence the rest of my life more powerfully than a hundred precepts I have not fulfilled."[19] He was writing commentary to the second letter to the Thessalonians even in Idelette's last days, so he dedicated it to her as a tribute of his grace, gratitude, and remembrance.[20]

So far, we have tried to give European models on the question and practice of clerical marriage, which the Reformation put on a new foundation. The Reformers, on the basis and ground of the Scripture, held that marriage was of God, whereas the practice of celibacy was clearly a practice and tradition developed by the Catholic Church on the basis of quite different considerations and was legitimized over time.

We now turn to study the situation regarding our topic in Hungary at that time. Studying the sources, we find that in our country, too, we encounter the theme and phenomenon of clerical marriage and tackling this issue quite early. Thus, it is no coincidence, – writes Dénes Dienes –that the question of clerical marriage is a recurring and strikingly emphasized theme in the literature of the Hungarian Reformation. Even the first generations of the Reformers were concerned about it. The condemnation of priestly celibacy was given a prominent place in these writings. In his study, Professor Dienes is the first to mention András Batizi, who wrote two hymns on this subject.[21] We know that Mihály Sztárai, in his treatise The Marriage of Priests (1550), mocks the celibacy of Catholic churchmen and argues that priests were free to marry.

In his work, the main character is the Protestant priest Thomas, who can convince his audience that even the Catholic priest Böröck and the Vicar are looking for a wife after the debate.[22] Another relevant example is found in the study of Dénes Dienes. This is an excerpt from a sermon written in the margins of the pages of a Bible published in 1509, which also illustrates the contemporary approach to the issue.

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18 Cited in: Magyar, Balázs Dávid: *„Nem jó az embernek egyedül lenni", Kálvin János a házassági és családi életformára való nevelés reformátora,* Debrecen, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem, 2016, 59. URL: https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/dea/bitstream/handle/2437/231443/M.B.D.VegsoRoviditett_Ph.D._disszertacio_titkositott.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y Last Accessed: 24-10-2017.

19 Cited in: Békefy: Az elfelejtett asszony.

20 Ibid.

21 Dienes: Reformáció a hétköznapokban, 33.

22 Sztárai Mihály hitvitázó drámái, in Pintér, Jenő: *A magyar irodalom története,* Volume 2, *A magyar irodalom a XVI. században*, Budapest, Stephaneum, 1930, 452–460. URL: https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/MagyarIrodalom-magyar-irodalomtortenet-1/magyar-irodalomtortenet-pinter-jeno-5116/2-a-magyar-irodalom-a-xvi-szazadban-662/a-xvi-szazad-dramaja-9EA/sztarai-mihaly-hitvitazo-dramai-9F3 Last Accessed: 06-09-2018.

"Can you say, is it a big thing, should a priest get married? He must marry, too, if he does not want to become a devil. Could say again, even to me, that if the Lord God has not let and has never been before him, They are liars that say, the Lord God hath not forsaken him: for the Lord hath not forsaken him. St. Paul evidently writes this, whereas he says: a priest must have a wife. Not three so much as four whores, but the Lord God hath left the priest also, that he should not commit adultery, as the Lord God hath left the husbandman. Therefore, God hath suffered the priest also to marry as the peasant. They are liars who say that he never was married before because the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles of old were all married. Likewise, also the pious bishops and priests after the apostles have all been married for a thousand years. But the marriage of the priests was lost by Pope Hildebrand, who was not headed in the papacy by Gergel, who was the seventh pope. After him was the loss of Pope Calixtus. Until Tuesday, Pope Calixtus was a devil because he lost the marriage of the Lord Jesus Christ, although he had forbidden the truth."[23]

As the Reformation unfolded, so did the formulation of key doctrines and church laws. There was a need for articles by which the newly formed congregations, their members, and their ministers could regulate their lives. The forums where these articles were drafted were the synods. The provisions of the synods held in the first half of the century did not yet contain any passages on the marriage of ministers. There are, however, provisions on how and in what manner a pastor or a minister should carry himself, but the rules for their marriage were formed later. The reason for this is that in Hungary, with one or two exceptions, the marriage of clergymen was not as common in the first half of the 16th century as it was perhaps in our Western European neighbors.

II. Marriage, behaviour, lifestyle, and clothing in the light of the Canons

The role of the minister's wife is a very specific area, and we can only talk about it from the 16th century onwards. The laws of the Catholic Church forbade the marriage of priests. However, this did not prevent many members of the clergy from marrying, and even before the 16th century, the Catholic Church had a great challenge in dealing with its married priests. The spread of the biblically based doctrines of the Reformation led many to opt for marriage. Moreover, the marriage of priests marked the beginning of the development of the role of the minister's wife. Although Catholic parish priests had married before, their spouses could not officially be called wives because the Church did not recognise their marriage. The formalisation of this role also came with the Reformation movement. It was obvious that this newly created role had to be regulated. In the 16th century, the Protestant Churches, which were organising their ranks, outlined the question and practice of clerical marriage in synods, and in the context of these synods, they formulated the behaviour, dress code, life, and manner of both their ministers and their wives. These canons were used to

23 Dienes: Reformáció a hétköznapokban, 33–34.

describe first the articles on the marriage of priests and the articles dealing with this issue, and then the norms of behaviour, dress, and other norms relating to the minister, his wife, and their children, especially the daughters. Finally, the role or roles of the clergywoman were presented. Henceforward, the synods, and their articles are not discussed in the order in which they were convened or created but in the context of the themes outlined.

The Synod held in Debrecen in 1562 made the following statements on the marriage of priests: „Like all men, priests, bishops, and presbyters are commanded by nature and by the law of God to marry. The law of Moses commands the high priests and priests of the communion to get married. Thus, almost all the prophets, apostles, and ecclesiastical scholars, Tertullian, Cyprian, were married. The Council of the Apostles and some decrees command that priests and bishops should marry once. Ignatius, Eusebius, Nicephorus, Plato, and other historians, as well as the synods and decrees, show, – as Gracian shows that bishops and saints were married. Many Roman popes affirmed and upheld marriage. The Council of Nicaea, with so much prestige, allowed priests to marry. In fact, many priests and popes were married. The canon of the Apostles, the Synod of Carhaginia, Platina, Nauklet, and Agost also proves it through the example of Peter. The Council of Nicea also freely allows the Pope to marry. Those who forbid marriage to bishops and priests but allow them to have whores and concubines discreetly do evil. Woe to those who say that what is good is evil. According to Platina and the testimony of the synods, many Roman popes were married. And the Synod of Gangre also says that marriage cannot be dissolved for the sake of the priesthood and vows, and the canon of the apostles also teaches that priests cannot leave their wives for the sake of religion, as the apostles also took them with them."[24]

Here, the marriage ceremony is a scripturally based command. It uses examples from Church history, the marriage of the Church Fathers, the decrees of the Synods, and their commands to support marriage, and even makes it an obligation. In so doing, he questions the law of celibacy, which is neither based on the Bible nor previous synodal decrees.

The following provision of the Synod declares that marriage, including the marriage of priests, is ordained by natural and divine law and considers it to be of God. Thus we read in article 29 of the Tarcal-Tordai[25] 25 Creed: „As for marriage, we believe that it originated from God and that it is lawful and praiseworthy in all the rites of life [...] Finally, the prohibition of marriage, and the vow of abstinence from it forever, is confirmed by the Apostle they know it to be devilish, as he that is contrary to the evident word of God, and the morals of the pure in the marriage of the Sabbath."[26] These synodal decrees were issued in the spirit of the Reformation. In many areas,

24 Kiss, Áron (ed.): *A XVI. században tartott magyar református zsinatok végzései,* Budapest, Magyarországi Protestánsegylet, 1881, 171–172.

25 In 1562 was the Council of Tarcal, in 1563 the Council of Torda.

26 Kiss: op. cit., 404–405.

including marriage, they went against the practice of the Catholic Church. Also, in this, they tried to remain on the biblical ground, which gave them clear evidence that celibacy was not a law based on the Word of God, and what is more, the ancient Church did not practice it either. And they were obviously extremely strident when they believed that the Catholic Church had departed from the scriptural basis and therefore branded the prohibition of celibacy and lifelong self-denial as evil.

The Second Synod of Erdőd was convened in 1555. The 9th article of the canons of this Synod speaks about the marriage of priests. What the holy script teaches about the priests' marriage is evident. Those who cannot abstain themselves should marry in the name and fear of God: „For it is better to be married than to burn." And „a bishop must be a man of integrity, a man with one wife". Again, „the ministers of the Church must be regular with their wives". „Let the deacons also be men of one wife, who can rule well in their own houses, and to keep their offspring in subjection; for whoever cannot rule in his own house, how can he be ruling the Church". Let the priests who cannot live in celibacy be ever more diligent to see that they do not marry a dishonest person, but either a virgin or a respectable widow."[27]

At all points, the ministers were to be examples to the congregations. That is why the provision of the law is unintentional, so in their election, they should take care of the background and history of the women and girls they choose to marry. The provision recommends a virgin or a respectable widow. The examples were probably inspired by Western models since Zwingli and Calvin married widows, and Luther married a virgin. With the marriage of the reformers and ministers, the congregations faced a new situation because this practice was still very new. Its novelty is also shown by the fact that ministers often did not even dare to introduce their wives but presented them as sisters or other relatives or simply concealed them.

At the same time, the cardinality of marriage among priests is also confirmed by the fact that it was common for Catholic parish priests to be married, have a concubine, or live with a servant. In The History of the Reformed Church District of the Tiszáninnen, Dénes Dienes shares the information that János Horváth, the provost of Szepes, allowed his priests to marry and that he himself had eight or nine concubines and that after resigning his post he married. At the Synod of the Archdiocese of Esztergom in 1561, 119 priests appeared, of whom 62 were married, and 44 had communion under two kinds. Archbishop Miklós Oláh complained at the time that most priests simply did not obey the Church authorities, especially on the issue of marriage.[28] Dénes Dienes also writes that married priests were not uncommon. The Synod of Nagyszombat, in 1560, was attended by P. Vittoria, rector of the Jesuit College of Vienna, who found that among the large number of clergy present, there were hardly 12-15 who did not preach the false doctrines and were

27 Ibid.

28 Dienes, Dénes: *A Tiszáninneni Református Egyházkerület története*, Sárospatak, Hernád Kiadó, 2017, 88.

not married.[29] Anita D. Szakács also came to a similar conclusion in her research. She says it may be surprising for the modern reader to know that in the period of the Tridentine Council, which renewed the Catholic Church, the typical Catholic clergyman in Sopron was a married man with a family. „The wife of the influential and wealthy Archdeacon Sebestyén Dalmady, who lived in Sopron between 1551 and 1577, was called Márta Hernát. Farkas Fochter, who served as town parish priest from 1557 to 1566, married in 1559. Timót Murecker, a clergyman (1567-1570), an illegitimate son of a priest, married his mistress Orsolya in 1564. The continuation of this tradition is not at all surprising: the town priest Farkas Spillinger (1570-1589) also had a child from his mistress. His deputy, Konrád Glöckel, was also married. Spillinger's successor, János Schwendtner, is known to have been forced to resign from his previous post as dean because of his affair with a twenty-year-old Lutheran girl. After his death, the above-mentioned Konrád Glöckel was appointed to the office of town priest (1591-1593), but during his church service, it turned out that he could not provide authentic proof of his ordination or marriage, so bishop János Kutasy of Győr discharged him from the office of the archdeacon and asked him to resign his position as town parish priest."[30]

He goes on to mention a few more cases. Among them is the parish priest András Scherer of Ágfalva, who was a candidate for the Canon of St. Michael's Church position and whose scandalous lifestyle was notorious. He took a married woman as his partner and had five children from her: Mate Krinis, who came to Sopron in 1582; not only did he marry the runaway wife of a Viennese goldsmith, but he also beat all his fellow priests with his drunken and fornicating life. However, he soon earned the dislike of the Lutheran population. The town parish priest Miklós Akács (1594-1597) was married to his wife, Éva Micskey, by the Lutheran minister Simon Gerengel.[31] All these cases illustrate how the leaders and the votaries of the Church that had made the law itself found it challenging to observe and enforce the practice of celibacy. For this reason, the renewal and revival of the Catholic Church in the 16th century were less promoted by the sometimes scandalous lives of Catholic priests who were married or kept concubines, concentrated on their own needs, and paid little attention to the faithful. A stricter foundation and tougher discipline were needed.

On the other hand, on the long-standing issue of celibacy, the Reformation certainly acted as a motivating force, leading more priests to embrace the ideas of the Reformation, and as a result, more and more people took up the idea of public marriage. And this, according to many, became the difference between „true ministers" and „papist priests" because the former „have a legitimate wife," while the

29 Ibid., 64.

30 D. Szakács, Anita*: Új választások, új konfliktusok. Nős papok a 16. századi Sopronban, Rubicon,* Volume 25, 2014/8, URL: http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/uj_valasztasok_uj_konfliktusok_nos_papok_a_16_szazadi_sopronban Last Accessed: 06-09-2018.

31 Ibid.

latter „deal with bad women day and night".[32] It is important, however, to mention some examples from the lives of our ministers concerning secret and public marriage. Zoltán Csepregi, researching this period, writes about Johannes Kresling[33] – former parish priest of Besztercebánya – that at Easter 1525, Miklós Szebeni had shamelessly reported his marriage to archbishop László Szalkai of Esztergom.[34] He also writes in relation to Paulus Speratus that his concubine was a bourgeois girl from Salzburg with whom he had been living in a „secret marriage" since 1517.[35] Speratus' affair caused a scandal in Vienna, but he was given the opportunity to clear his name. He stayed away from the audition and his previously promised job in Buda fell through. He was invited to Morvaigló, where he took up his preaching post in 1522. „He presented his secret wife as his sister, and the real affair was not known to the people of Igló for years."[36] Speratus was not the only one to adopt a similar attitude. Péter Bornemissza notes about Márton Sánta of Kálmáncsehi that „This when they came to a new place, Batizi Demeter told him a secret, that he would take a girl, dressed as a boy, and dwelt with her: but at last, he would marry her."[37] He further added, „Though he did an abomination, yet he converted, and acted better than that, he was not like priest Adam Nitran, who had kept a woman as his chariot and horseman for a long time, and that woman who had been guilty of other sins was burnt, and he himself confessed his terrible things to priest Adam."[38] Tamás Esze describes the general opinion about the case of Kálmáncsehi and says that it was classified as gossip because Demeter Batizi told Bornemissza about it, who heard it from Kálmáncsehi himself. However, he sees no reason to doubt either Batizi's or Kálmáncsehi's words. In fact, he says that „Bornemisza is right: the case, for all its strangeness, is a tribute to Kálmáncsehi's humanity: he stuck to the woman of his choice, instead of „indulging in the habit of some in stray fornication," and when he left the Roman Church he married her without fear or scandal."[39] For Kálmáncsehi, cohabitation was certainly not merely a priestly adventure, but a necessity of his canonical status, from which he sought to free himself. Certainly, as soon as he began to think in Protestant terms, he married his hitherto hidden, disguised partner. He could not have done otherwise, for Protestant marriage ethics at the time of the Reformation were extremely severe in their condemnation of ministers who were deemed to be fornicators. Tamás Esze

32 Dienes: *A Tiszáninneni Református Egyházkerület története,* 88.

33 Johannes Kresling (Buda, 1488/90 – Selmecbánya, 1549). Humanist orator, minister, studied at the universities of Vienna and Cracow. He became a priest in Buda and preached in Körmöcbánya in early 1525. He was denounced for his marriage and imprisoned for it and for spreading the principles of the Reformation. After his release, he was again found in the mining towns and went abroad. In 1536 he returned to Hungary and continued his preaching in the mining towns.

34 Csepregi, Zoltán: *A reformáció nyelve*, Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2013, 34.

35 Ibid., 129.

36 Ibid., 130.

37 Esze, Tamás: Kálmáncsehi Sánta Márton Sátoraljaújhelyen, *Irodalomtörténeti közlemények,* Volume 74, 1970/5-6, 566–576, 568.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 569.

gives an example from Debrecen. Meliusz in Debrecen had „priest Benedict's hand, foot, and neck confined in the stocks so severely that he screamed. For this reason, when he lived in Székelyhida, he lived with his servant's daughter. After that, he was deprived of his preaching posts there in Debrecen".[40] The next relevant example he mentions is also from Debrecen, from 1556. Benedek Borbély was beheaded for the sin of fornication, together with the woman who lived with him.[41] In addition to the case of Kálmáncsehi, Dénes Dienes refers to a few other cases in his work mentioned above, which are also from the early period of the Reformation in Hungary. One of them relates to the minister Sommer, who got married when he was in Kassa. He met his wife during the catechesis. He married in public, not in secret. Dienes Dienes even notes that he did not keep a concubine, as was often the case in those days.[42] He also writes about the parish priest of Jászo, priest Gergely, who was already married in the 30s and 40s of the 16th century. He secretly married a woman named Margaret, with whom he had three children. Her situation came to light through an unfortunate incident. He was investigated for having an affair with a local girl. He denounced himself and asked for the death penalty. In his will, he left his children „among other things, a vineyard, which was contested by a member of the family, who claimed that the children were not born of a legal marriage. In 1546, the city council of Košice, as a court of second instance, ruled that although priest Gergely and Margaret did not get married in public then, the children were born of a legal marriage, and therefore dismissed the action."[43] The case of priest Gergely does not prove that Lutheranism was already present in Jászo at that time, but the fact is that the village already had a Lutheran minister in the second half of the 16th century. There was also a married priest in Miszlóka, under the authority of the lords of Kassa, in 1550. In Lucska, the parson had a wife and four daughters in 1561.[44]

For the Church, it was essential to know what kind of women their ministers married and how they lived and dressed. The previously quoted article of the Synod of the Erdőd of Eger puts it this way: „Let them avoid extravagant luxury in their clothing and in that of their wives or their children, and the clothing of both their own and their spouses should be decent. Neither should they wear the helmeted or folded-end headdresses of the Moabites or Mohammedans, as we see in our time that some wear this abomination with the unthrifty imitation of the heathen courts, lest the name of God be abhorred in such."[45] The articles of the Felső-Magyarország, published in 1595, also express similar views. The title of Article 43 of the code is clear: „Care shall be taken of family and dress." And we read in the exposition: „Their families shall be to the ministers as they ought to be themselves, as the apostle commands, and they shall put away as much as possible

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Dienes: *A Tiszáninneni Református Egyházkerület története,* 63.
44 Ibid., 63–64.
45 Kiss: op. cit., 38.

luxuries a) costly garments b) strange apparel, both from themselves and their wives, that they may not be seen to care more for outward than for inward decency. Let them, therefore, wear apparel suitable to their office and the dignity of their persons."[46]

It was evident to all that the ad fontes principle also applied to this area of the Church's life since the Church would be in danger of self-deception if the *vita apostolica* did not prevail in relation to the way of life and everything connected to it. Luxury could be most evident in clothing, so it is no coincidence that the article contains a restriction on this very point. For this reason, the minister and his family members were not allowed to lead a life of luxury, either in his clothing or his lifestyle. It was significant for the ministers' wives to dress with the utmost simplicity and modesty. Professor Dienes also mentions this canonical regulation as restricting the clergyman and his family members by forbidding the wearing of expensive and foreign clothes.[47]

Canon 84 of the ecclesiastical code of laws, collected and published in 1649 by István Geleji Katona canon, does not simply prohibit the luxury but also specifically lists what the ministers of the Church, their wives, and daughters had to keep away from. „And as not only the ministers themselves, but also their families, ought to be somewhat examples to the Lord's flock: very seriously, moreover by apostolic decree, they are commanded that even their wives and daughters have to walk in apparel free from all luxury and finery, adorning themselves with modesty and decency, not with curls of hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly robes, but with such respectable garments as is proper for women who are pious; not rivaling noble women with headdresses, headbands, silk aprons, necklaces, bracelets, bangles, girdles, coloured shoes, gold or silver fringed corsages with horsehair, shoulder-cloths, Grecian headdresses, and other ornaments of such kinds are improper to a clergywoman, but present themselves according to their own order and position."[48]

First of all, the article states that all members of the minister's family „ought to be examples to the Lord's flock". And even though this canon was written in the 17th century, the first and most important thing is that the minister is the head of a community, and therefore, not only he but also his family must lead an exemplary life. The words of the Apostle Paul are further referred to in the canon with special emphasis on the minister's wife and daughter. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, says the following concerning the dress of women and the wearing of luxurious articles, „If so be that women adorn themselves in honest apparel, with modesty and moderation; not with braids of hair and gold or pearls or costly apparel." (1 Timothy 2:9) The reference to this prohibition in the canon is very interesting: „not to be compared with noble women". We also find the relevant exhortation from the pen of Péter Juhász Méliusz, bishop of Transcibiscan Church District. „We forbid priests' wives to be luxurious and immodest in their clothing!

46 Ibid., 720.

47 Dienes: *A Tiszáninneni Református Egyházkerület története,* 137.

48 Kiss, Áron (transl.): *Egyházi kánonok, melyeket részint a magyarországi, részint az erdélyi régi kánonokból egybegyűjtött s a kor kívánatához képest több másokkal is bővített és kissé jobb rendbeszedett Geleji Katona István… 1649. S függelékül a Szatmárnémetiben 1646. évben tartott nemzeti zsinat végzései,* Kecskemét, Szatmári Református Egyházmegye, 1875, 47–48.

Let them not lust after pearls and curling their hair but wear modestly decorated dresses, free from the luxury, pride, and haughtiness of courtly and royal noblewomen."[49]

The aristocracy played a leading role in Hungary's political, economic, and cultural spheres in the early modern period. Representation was obligatory for them since an aristocrat of the nobility could show his power with his clothes, his wife's jewellery, and his court. Splendour was not a superfluous luxury but an essential part of public life. It is why the lords of the manor would pay the price of an estate for a piece of fine jewellery or clothes.[50] Certainly, the dress and jewellery that characterised aristocratic and noble women would have been attractive to women of a simpler background but slightly higher social status, including ministers' wives and daughters. The canons are clear. Not only in clothing but also in hair and jewellery, they required dress free of luxury and splendour. Due to her origin and social status, a noblewoman's fancy dress, jewellery, and stunning hairstyle were natural.

If we look at the contemporary outfit,[51] jewellery,[52] or hairstyle,[53] we can conclude that it must have been an attractive example, which some priest wives

49 Gaál, Izabella: A nők szerepe a reformáció terjesztésében Magyarországon, különös tekintettel Debrecen városára, *Egyháztörténeti Szemle,* Volume 7, 2006/1, 189–197, URL: http://www.uni-miskolc.hu/~egyhtort/cikkek/gaalizabella.htm Last Accessed: 05-07-2017.

50 Tompos, Lilla – Kiss, Erika: Magyar főúri öltözködés, *História,* Volume 23, 2001/7, 34. URL: http://www.historia.hu/archivum/2001/0107tompos_kis.htm Last Accessed: 24-10-2018.

51 Just for the sake of interest, it is worth a few sentences to describe this costume. The costume of the noblewomen of the 16th and 18th centuries was, it is safe to say, sumptuous. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the costume also revealed the gender, rank, marital status, and social status of the wearer. Those at the top of the social ladder could wear fine Dutch post, velvet with gold trim, coloured silk, damask, coral, pearls, gold lace, immaculate shirt shoulders, transparent veils, yellow and red boots, furs, gold, silver, and diamonds. Hungarian women's dress, like that of Western Europe, shows the influence of Spanish fashion in the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century. The dress of the courtly aristocracy was the wing-sleeved suit, with a less prestigious version of the lant-sleeved shoulder, or dress belt. The Spanish robe is long, cloak-like, decorated with braids and buttons. In addition to the fashionable Spanish costumes, Hungarian costumes can also be found in written sources.Atlas silk, velvet and damask were used to sew the square-cut, shoulder-strapped tops with clasps in the front. In the 16th century it was sewn together with the skirt, in the 17th century it was made separately.Under the skirt, a shirt was worn with a lace apron over the front.Lace collars trimmed with silk, pearls or gold thread could be worn on either shoulder.The headdress of the maidens was a cushion representing their maidenhood.This was often velvet, silk, glass or a ribbon trimmed with real pearls, scales or gold braids.The bonnet was a symbol of the women's marital status. The gloves and fans were a symbol of the nobility of noble ladies, and it is no coincidence that portraits of them often show them in their hands. For more information see Tompos, Lilla: *A díszmagyar*, Budapest, Magyar Mecurius, 2005, 149.; Ék, Erzsébet: *Magyarországi viseletek*, Budapest, Littoria, 1994, 160.; Nagy, Géza – Nemes, Mihály – Tompos, Lilla: *A magyar viseletek története*, Budapest, Magyar Mercurius, 2002, 256.

52 Jewellery was an indispensable accessory of the aristocratic dress, of personal representation.As a result of the great change in dress codes from the 16th century onwards, European ladies once again wore earrings, bracelets, necklaces of various lengths, and pendants not only on chains but also on the shoulder, sleeve or even in the hairstyle.In addition, jewellery included rings, belts, headdresses, hats, berets, and brooches to adorn the dress, and from the 17th century onwards, pendants containing small clocks and portrait miniatures.

53 The development of the collar style by the 16th and 17th centuries led to a change in hairstyles.The bun came to the fore and was decorated with various beads and pins.

certainly tried to follow. In their case, however, this did not come naturally from their origin and social status but seemed as a show-off. It is, therefore, not by chance that it was regulated by law.

Finally, the synods give some specific exhortations concerning ministers' wives. Interestingly, the emphasis is not on their sphere of activity or role alongside their husbands but on their speech, words, and behaviour. Moreover, it is primarily the husbands who are responsible for supervising their wives' conduct. „They shall also care with diligence that their wives be not insolent, chattering, lying, idle talkers, or spenders."[54] „They shall also arrange their lives and their morals that no vice, which their husbands reproach in other women according to the word of God, shall be discovered in them and which could also cause a great scandal for others [...] they should avoid foolishness, lewdness, bickering, and quarrelling like the plague, and should refrain from dancing."[55]

As we can see, the canons are quite detailed in their definition of the forms of speech and behaviour of the ministers' wives. Presumably, the contemporary clerical leadership was forced to be detailed based on their experience of females. They highlighted all the qualities ministers' wives were to refrain from and beware of but also outlined what they could excel at. In the Article, we see that the focus is on the watchfulness of their speech and words. „Let them not [...] be chatterers, liars, idle talkers." While our ecclesiastical forefathers drew on their experience, they could not have done without the scriptural basis in the formulation of any canon, where there are numerous references to correct speech, the sins of the tongue, the consequences of lying, and the words spoken in the right place for Christ-followers. According to the canon, it is equally essential that they should not be impertinent and spendthrift. Again, these two qualities are incompatible with a modest and exemplary life.

The last sentence of the relevant resolution of the national Synod of Szatmárnémeti is very striking. The earlier canons had also placed the ministers under their supervision or made it their responsibility to watch over their wives' proper conduct, dress, and speech. We cannot find any sanction for failure to do so in any synodal decisions. The exception to this is the decision of the Synod of Szatmárnémeti. Here, we read the following: „The husbands of promiscuous, lustful, and disobedient women shall be removed from their sacred service after one or two rebukes until the next assembly."[56] Choosing a wife was difficult if the minister wished to comply with the requirements. However, if he did not make his decision in full awareness of his responsibility, and if his wife was not of integrity, sober, and at peace with her surroundings, but quarrelled, caused constant trouble, and did not avoid dancing – and these are only a few of the prohibitions listed in the Synod of Szatmárnémeti – then it was the husband, and not her, who bore the consequences. After one or two admonitions, the punishment was a ban from serving until the assembly had met and

54 Kiss: *A XVI. században tartott magyar református zsinatok végzései,* 38.
55 Ibid., 47–48.
56 Kiss: *Egyházi kánonok,* 47–48.

decided on the matter. From this, we can understand the importance of choosing a partner with whom to live an exemplary life in the congregation. A minister's wife had to set an example, not only as a companion but also as a mother, a woman, and, last but not least, as a leading figure in the Christian community.

Finally, it is also important to note that, in addition to the many prohibitions, the canons also specified what the ministers' wives could excel in, lead the way in, and abound in. „But rather, they should be like women who show piety in their good deeds ought to be and should learn to obey their husbands as their masters quietly and with full self-surrender. For even St. Paul does not allow women, according to the commandment of God, to tyranyze their husbands."[57] „They should, therefore, follow after sobriety and integrity."[58] „On the contrary, as far as they know, let them present themselves as living examples of modesty in all things and of a good family character."[59] „Let them be chaste, obedient to their husbands, sober, skillful, and diligent in the household."[60]

As we can see, the texts of the laws contain plenty of things in which the ministers' wives could be „spenders". Pious acts of kindness and obedience to their husbands as lords, family-loving, sober, blameless, and modest, were essential for ministers' wives and their husbands to be role models in the congregation. Isabella Gaál, quoting bishop Méliusz, writes that they tried to follow these admonitions. It can be said that many of them were not only obedient wives and companions to their husbands but also provided spiritual help to those in need and helped to heal physical ailments. Medical books were to be found in almost every minister's family. It is true that most of them were still in manuscript form, but the ministers' wives were able to help many people by using them. However, the wives whose husbands became bishops wanted to do good deeds similar to those of the noblewomen by supporting young people studying abroad. He gives a few examples of this. Among these, we find Erzsébet Bocskai, Péter Károlyi's wife, bishop of Transtibiscan, who helped the young people studying in Wittenberg and patronised book publishing. Also, Klára Bocskai was a benefactor of congregations and schools.[61] However, we should also mention here that if a minister's wife performed her duties as a mother well and brought up her daughters correctly, the result was also reflected in the fact that, according to Izabella Gaál, the sons of the prominent citizens of Debrecen were happy to marry them. And the ministers' wives were thus brought into the most prestigious families of Debrecen and raised the next generation in faith.[62]

In conclusion, the role of the minister's wife was defined by the influence of the Reformation in many ways and areas. The questioning of the practice of

57 Ibid., 38.
58 Ibid., 47–48.
59 Ibid.
60 Gaál: op. cit.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.

celibacy and the biblical basis of clerical marriage opened up a new phase in the life of the clergy. In this respect, the example of the Western reformers found followers in our country. Relationships that were still secret ended in marriage, or secretly conducted marriages were made public. Unfortunately, the sources are scarce, so we have only been able to mention a few cases of priests marrying in early times. The canons of the synods laid down the foundations for this practice of law and the provisions relating to ministers' wives. From these, we can learn a great deal about how and what our church elders imagined the ministers' wives to be like, what qualities were forbidden or seen as good in their lives, behaviour, speech, clothing, and the upbringing of their children. Since this role was very much in its infancy, these canonical prescriptions were necessary.

Anita Barnóczki

PRAYER AND COMMUNITY – PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE BASIS OF JAMES 5:13-19

1 The central role of prayer in Christian practice

Prayer is thought of in everyday life as a relationship between the individual and God. Every Christian who prays has uplifting experiences of having been reconciled by prayer, of having been freed from the burden of sin, or of having experienced a joy of thanksgiving that was otherwise unavailable. At the same time, many praying Christians experience quiet, dry periods of prayer. But no one disputes the importance of prayer. One only needs to look at the volume of books on 'effective' prayer in an Internet search.

If we wish to shed light on the theological significance of prayer, we have a library of specialist literature at our disposal, but it is enough to refer to the work of the learned pastor György Szikszai, written in 1785, which has since been used by generations and has been published in countless editions.[1] From this, it is clear that we must pray because God has commanded us to; we must pray because we are dependent on Him, and it is good to pray. Every day, weekdays and Sundays, morning and evening, prayer is an integral part of the Christian way of life, a structuring force. It directs the Christians' attention from the earthly world to the eternal, thus giving them support in interpreting and narrating life's events and also helping them assess their own position before God and among men. Prayer thus fills one with confidence and hope, gives one a foothold and makes one content. It helps to strengthen family relationships, fulfil the parental vocation, and fulfil the civic vocation. Prayer is a strength, a support, a consolation in all our earthly afflictions, including the peril of livelihood and work, sickness and death, and the deepest situations of human destiny.

1 Szikszai, György: *Keresztyéni imádságok és tanítások*, Újonnan átnézett kiadás, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 1979.

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There is one more lesson in Szikszai's book that is relevant to our chosen topic: Szikszai takes it as evidence that one prays not only individually but also in one's family, extended family and church community. This is an aspect that is being pushed into the background nowadays as we approach everything more and more individually and are less and less able to think as members of a community.

This is where the letter of James comes to our help, bringing to the fore the complex interrelationship between individual and communal prayer and Christian church life.

2 How can James' epistle speak to us in the 21st century?

2.1 The essential aspect of community

James' epistle encourages the readers with instructions that are difficult for today's people; it encourages readers to be patient and persevere in the face of difficulties, e.g. 1:2; 5:7-11. It is not easy to imagine that someone wants to tolerate and persevere since we want to avoid difficulties. Often, it is not answers we want in the midst of difficulties, but we want them to disappear.

This is the manifestation of eternal human rebellion in our 21st-century understanding. This is an individualistic, self-contained, self-enclosed view since we think in terms of the individual, of ourselves. We try to think in community as Christians, but we cannot act as if we are not affected by the world in which we live. Moreover, our perspective is insidiously and imperceptibly transformed by what we watch, read or listen to on our computers or experience in our increasingly less personal conversations. It is enough to look around: we live in a world of individual rights that almost eradicates the rights of communities. We live in a world of individual opinions, which, despite being momentary, thoughtless and very often unfounded, are absolute truths, relegating the knowledge and moral values that come

from the community to the background. We live in a world of individual 'morals'. We alone are the standard; we ourselves are the cause and the end, and consequently, we are alone with our difficulties and our fears. What can give us momentary relief from this is only dissolution in the crowd and not community. [2] In today's world, we have rights. And everyone else is for us. Only we have no peace, no resolution and no healing. Because these are community-bound phenomena according to God's Word. The message of James' epistle cannot be understood outside of the community, and it can be downright inflammatory in the individual context of our day.

2.2 Understanding the general nature of the letter

The literature on the Epistle of James offers a wide range of ideas about the author, the recipients and the genre. Fundamental questions are: is the epistle an epistle or something else; is James James or someone else; was it written at the time of the first churches or at another time; was it read by Jews or others?

According to Ropes, James' epistle is only a letter in form but, in fact, a religious and moral treatise. It is not intended for a one-time reading or addressed to a narrow group.[3] Bauckham points out that it contains only the opening formula, not the closing formula of a letter typical of the period. Therefore, it is not a personal letter, nor is it addressed to a specific congregation, reflecting on its special problems. Due to its content, Bauckham regards it as a paraenesis for encouragement or a paraenetic encyclical.[4] This type of document was known in the period, and although they were generally in the form of letters, they carried a general content and circulated among the congregations.

The duality of the genre – a tractate in the form of a letter – results in presenting the author's firm advice, while at the same time, the suffering of the addressed believers unfolds before us as a story, which is caused by trials brought about by various spiritual and social conflicts, while God guides the congregation through spiritual trials and prepares them for the arrival of the desired new age. It is within this historical framework that the counsels and instructions of James are set,[5] which have strong parallels with Jewish wisdom literature.[6] These observations on the genre and literary parallels are sufficient for the purposes of this paper, although detailed analyses are given, for example, of the parallels, similarities with and differences between the Greco-Roman moralists, certain books of the Old Testament, Jewish literature of the period, other writings of the New

2 Saad, Gad: *The Parasitic Mind: How Infectious Ideas are Killing Common Sense*, Washington D.C., Regnery Publishing, 2020.; Pinker, Steven: *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, New York, Viking, 2002.

3 Ropes, James Hardy: *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991, 8.

4 Bauckham, Richard: *James. Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage*, London – New York, Routledge, *New Testament Readings*, 2002, 12–13.

5 Wall, Robert W.: *Community of the Wise,* Valley Forge, Trinity Press International, *The New Testament in Context,* 1997, 10–11.

6 Bauckham: op. cit., 29.

Testament, or non-canonical Christian literature.[7] For our topic, the epistolary form is important because of its emphasis on address (it is addressed to us), and the tractate character can play a role in problem interpretation and in offering practical solutions.

It is equally disputed who the author of the letter is. There are two main views on this: either James, the Lord's brother, wrote it as the leader of the Jerusalem community (in which case there is no problem with the date of composition and the circumstances of its composition following from this);[8] or it is a later, pseudonymous document from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century, the work of a Jewish Christian author living in Palestine, who bears the name of James only for the sake of authority.[9] Rather than presenting a library of pro and con arguments, it is worth interpreting this dichotomy as a message: whenever the document was written, readers are in a difficult situation. Their lives are marked by social, moral, physical and spiritual difficulties (in different ways, but equally so). The Christian Church is always part of and involved in the injustices of the world, and it needs encouragement and advice at every age. So, once again, it may be emphasized that James' epistle is also addressed to us, and is relevant in our difficulties, too.

The recipients are the "the twelve tribes in the dispersion". This has a very narrow interpretation, referring only to Jews living in the diaspora or Jewish believers living in Roman territories outside Palestine. Metaphorically understood, however, it refers to a very broad community: for example, the prophets use the term ("tribes of Israel") to refer to a future, restored Israel (Ezek 47:13, 22; Isa 49:6; Zech 9:1), and Paul says that "the Israel of God" is a "spiritual" rather than an ethnic people (cf. Rom 9-11; Gal 3-6), belonging to Christ (Rom 9:1-18), and being the true heirs of the biblical promise of salvation (Gal 3:21-4:7; cf. Jas 2:5). In a similar way, James' readers can be seen as having a religious and eschatological rather than an ethnic and national identity: they are a "spiritual" church whose life is guided by God's Word and whose destiny is to fulfil God's promised blessing. The metaphorical use of "diaspora" is also evidenced in Jewish literature as it applies to believers in general, including those who live in Palestine; that is, it should not necessarily be understood as a geographical delimitation but rather as a social stratum. In fact, diaspora Jews were sometimes expelled from their homeland for political (e.g. "revolutionary") and economic (e.g. unemployed workers or debtors) reasons: they were strangers both at home and abroad. In Palestine, the homeland was typically in the hands of wealthy landowners (5:1) who controlled both the economic (5:4-6) and religious (2:2-7) lives of their poor workers, sometimes in malicious and evil ways. In this sense, many of the poor Jews in Palestine, including the first readers of James, were dispossessed, homeless and helpless in their own homeland.[10]

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7 Johnson, Luke Timothy: *The Letter of James*, *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* New York, Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1995, 27–80.

8 E.g. Johnson: op. cit., 89–106.; Bauckham: op. cit., 17.

9 E.g. Ropes: op. cit., 9.

10 Wall: op. cit., 12–13.

So, James is not addressing people whose lives we might say were easier than today's or who may have struggled with completely different problems than today's Christians.

3 Prayer in a real and an ideal community

Although James' letter is addressed to people suffering from the state of the world, it makes no secret of the fact that the Christian community itself is not ideal. It is made up of individuals who tend to be mere hearers of the Word and not doers of it. Those who find it difficult to control themselves, who speak recklessly. Members of the church practice favouritism, honouring the rich and shaming the poor. There is discord among them because their wishes and desires guide their way of life. They envy each other and slander each other. And having already established that James' letter was not written to a single, dysfunctional church, we are dealing with general characteristics. How can James encourage anyone, as a member of a community so laden with sin, to relate to others with trust and hope, to count on them, and to be honest with them?

Meanwhile, James's warnings, exhortations, and teachings present us with a picture of the church that is quite the opposite of the previous one. In the introduction to his commentary, Strange thus sums up the ideal picture that can be gleaned from the letter:

> „Imagine a place where the beliefs that people profess and the things that they do form a seamless fabric. Because they claim that God is singular, a generous giver of good things, and no respecter of human distinctions, but a merciful and just judge who soon will render a verdict on all of humanity, they too take up single-minded action, maintaining undiluted devotion to God, caring for those who have no economic recourse, seating the poor in their assemblies beside the wealthy, slandering no one, praying for all. Conceive of a community in which all members—sown with divine wisdom—shun the warring factiousness that is the inevitable offspring of earthly wisdom, and instead cultivate peacemaking in the assembly as their common aim, maintaining purity by spurning the values of the world and submitting their own wills to God's. Imagine a people who endure hardship with unwearied hope, who patiently await the salvation of the Lord. Envision a place where the rich put their trust in God's providence just as the destitute do, where the sick find healing, where sins are openly confessed and forgiven, and where those who stray are sought out and returned to the fold."[11]

James' teachings on prayer are difficult to interpret without taking into account the eschatological nature of the letter. According to Moo, eschatology is generally unavoidable in James' epistle. He frequently warns believers of impending judgment to encourage them to adopt the right attitude and behaviour (1:10-11; 2:12-13; 3:1; 5:1-6,9,12), and reminds them of the rewards they can expect if they live a life plea-

11 Strange, James Riley: *The Moral World of James – Setting the Epistle in its Greco-Roman and Judaic Enviroments*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, *Studies in Biblical Literature 136,* 2010, 1.

sing to the Lord (1:12; 2:5; 4:10; 5:20). The phrases "the Lord is near", "the Judge is standing at the doors" do not refer to temporal nearness in James. James encourages his readers to live godly lives not by insisting that the Lord will surely come at any moment but by reminding them that he can.[12]

What James is encouraging is not only to understand the various sufferings but to pray. These are needed to strengthen the community on the road to God's coming reign. In this case, it will be prayer that addresses the inner, spiritual resources that fight against all forms and agents of inner evil, which are the real source of illness and suffering. For James, spiritual healing is necessary for physical healing, which in this form proclaims the coming triumph of God's reign.[13]

4 Prayer in sorrow and joy

James 5:13 asks two questions that generally frame a person's life. Suffering and joy are both overarching concepts to which he also links overarching actions.[14] Κακοπαθεῖ τις translated suffering refers to all forms of affliction and is not merely the opposite of εὐθυμέω.[15] And the latter does not cover cheerfulness expressed in a 'smiley'; it rather implies enthusiasm, courage of faith and assurance in the face of external pressure.[16]

James does not just recommend prayer in suffering as a possible good solution. The entire letter contrasts "good" and "bad" solutions. The call to prayer may be the opposite of the swearing in verse 12, that is, the Christian response to situations that provoke anger. The Christians who swear and seek to improve their situation by venting their passions sees prayer as just such a tool. Those Christians themselves are the real doers, and their action is to call upon God (in some way) or to make God act. It is the desire to suffer and to be free from suffering, the individual himself/herself, which is at the centre of this case. The human-centred approach is reinforced by the way the community lives, for if the rich and successful are valued, the unfortunate are not valued; if they try to prevail against each other, the suffering person is left alone. The suffering persons must conceal the deterioration of their situation and must compensate for their low status, at least at the level of words, their community participation cannot have a healing effect.

The community seen as ideal by James, towards which every Christian church must strive, can be a healing community precisely by restoring the order of values, recognizing dependence on God, and avoiding favouritism. Where the individual can undertake his/her misery and suffering, his share in return is not contempt but the supportive prayer and supportive action of others.

12 Moo, Douglas J,: *The Letter of James,* Grand Rapids – Cambridge, Eerdmans Publishing Company, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary,* 2000, 29.

13 Wall: op. cit., 262.

14 McKnight, Scot: *The Letter of James*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge, Eerdmans Publishing Company, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 2011, 253.

15 Ropes: op. cit., 330.

16 McKnight: op. cit., 438.

In suffering, James' teaching is self-evident, but more surprisingly, he directly attaches joy to it. A very large proportion of suffering, misery and hardship are the result of our human selfishness, of living according to our desires (Jas 1:14-15). Even when we have strength, faith and joy, the way we live it often causes pain to others, even if we do not want it. As an example, let us look at the social media competition of who is prettier, who is richer, who is smarter, or the Christian way of doing this, who is more blessed. Boasting only increases anxiety in others, not gratitude to God.

The singing (ψάλλω) that James calls for in the case of joy is not an individual and contingent action. In the background, we see the image of singing accompanied by the harp, which appears forty times in the Psalms, in which the use of the instrument is not the main focus, but the action is central. Those who have joy do not sing incidentally, but their joy is in its place, giving thanks for God's gift as members of a community. Not with the intention of boasting but as a confession of faith that strengthens the community and speaks of God.

5 In a healing community

James' third question directs attention to and gives guidance in a specific situation of suffering and illness. Only we, today's people, treat illness as if it were only a problem of our body, which can always be corrected with some external intervention. Our soul and body are one. And the wisdom of the ancient people is that most of the time, it is the specific manifestation of sin and the spiritual wounds it inflicts that manifests itself as illness. Therefore, James also uses a contrasting solution: a Christian must not behave like a pagan. The Christian must call to oneself the elders of the church who will pray for him/her and anoint him/her with oil in the name of the Lord.

Some use the term πρεσβύτερος to refer specifically to church elders, while others to mature believers in good standing. Considering that all three factors in verse 14 are instrumental in nature, both interpretations are acceptable. It is not the prayer itself,[17] or the oil itself,[18] or even the position of the influential leader (as interpretations have been distorted in all three directions in the history of the Christian church): prayer by faith is the key. But the involvement of the community holds more potential than one might first think.

James does not say that if someone is sick, we should look for their sin or that we should stand up in front of everyone and hold a spiritual self-flagellation, exposing ourselves to the gaze and opinions of others. James writes of a community whose members try to live their lives in awareness of all this, and the relationship between them is mutual. He is not teaching us about a condemning or confessing contest, which was meant to play the role of films and tabloids of the time as a boredom-

17 It is not the quantity, quality or form of prayer that is important in this case. Elijah's example explains what is essential.

18 Regarding the anointing with oil, Moo points out that Jesus sometimes used physical "props" in his healings, which were intended as an outward expression of concern and to encourage the faith of the sick person by being tangible. Moo: op. cit., 229.

expelling exercise. He writes about the community whose members all face the same thing, and by living honestly and building each other up, they help each other and themselves. Bonhoeffer's Ethics provides specific guidance on this point:

> "It is in her [the Church] that Jesus realizes His form in the midst of the world. That is why the Church alone can be the place of personal and collective rebirth and renewal. It is a sign of the living presence of Christ that there are men in whom the knowledge of the apostasy from Jesus Chrost is kept awake not merely in the sense that this apostasy is observed in others but in the sense that these men themselves confess themselves guilty of this apostasy. They confess their guilt without any sidelong glance at their fellow offenders. Their confession of guilt is strictly exclusive in that it takes all guilt upon itself. Wherever there is still a weighing up and calculation of guilt, there the sterile morality of self-justification usurps the place of the place of the confession of guilt which is made in the presence of the form of Christ."[19]

Praying for the sick and confessing sin creates a specific situation. When others pray for the sick person, they too are confronted with themselves and God in their sickness and dependence on God. That is, if they pray for the sick person with sincere faith. Here, the sick person is not only vulnerable, but it is precisely his/her condition that strengthens others in their dependence on God and trust in God. They face their sinful condition together, and they can say this in front of each other and pray for healing, which God can give. "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." In this way, they can experience the miracle of healing and deliverance from their own sin together. The individual and the community are, therefore, inseparable. And the benefits are also shared: individual healing and communal growth. Therefore, the church is the community where the role of the "elders", the strong in faith and the leaders is also a healing role, and individual healing is also the healing of the community.

6 The communal effect of prayer

In a paper on pastoral psychology, Crocker[20] draws our attention to the important characteristics of prayer. A different but consistent version of what is described above can be found in her writing. Sin has many effects on the community and on communication between people. Some examples of these are "(1) we talk about the other person when we should be talking about ourselves; (2) we talk about ourselves when we should be talking about the other; (3) we remain silent when we should be talking; and (4) we talk when we should be silent."[21]

Standing before God in prayer, we are inevitably confronted with our sins. At such a time, we cannot deny what we have done, we cannot blame God, and there

19 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich: *Ethics*, transl. Smith, Neville Horton, New York, Touchstone, 1995, 111–112.

20 Crocker, Sylvia Fleming: Prayer as a Model of Communication, *Pastoral Psychology,* Volume 33, 1984, 83–92.

21 Ibid., 84

is no room for blaming others. But the person praying can express his or her feelings about it, his or her relationship to what happened, and his or her experience of it. And from this, it follows that the subjectivity of the experience is emphasized rather than what is presumed to be objective statements of facts and accusations. This is the way in which the praying person can accept God's reconciliation and be reconciled himself/herself. Prayer is where one can say what one desires without having to experience shame for doing so, thus denying one's own inner processes. If we can confess these to ourselves in the presence of God in prayer, then these desires will not have to surface in a much more selfish and destructive form. This does not mean the fulfilment of desires, but that everything will fall into place. At this point, it is worth recalling James 4.

In praising God, in thanksgiving, one can experience positive emotions (which for many are more difficult to communicate and accept than negative ones); one can also see one's own giftedness and thus gain a more realistic view of oneself without swinging to the other extreme.

As many have done, the relationship between prayer and forgiveness can also be examined from a psychological perspective. Given the above, the following findings from research reports are perhaps not surprising:[22] according to those who pray in the community, prayer helped them to forgive and thereby heal their relationships. Reading the Bible and praying together contributed greatly to the process of being able to forgive.

7 Prayer and testimony

The Epistle of James focuses on Elijah as an example of prayer. At first glance, the example seems out of place when considering the community aspect, but it is not. It is also striking at first sight how it could be an example before us of what James calls Elijah's prayer: he prayed, and there was no rain. If we remain on the bare surface, we wouldn't even be able to necessarily agree on whether to pray for rain or sunshine. James, however, sets Elijah's mode of being as an example: he was in the service of God, he stood before God, he lived in a state of continuous prayer, and so his request is also a prophecy since he was voicing a part of an inner dialogue, not for his own sake but for the sake of the community. The characteristic feature of his prayer is its alignment with God's will, which also implies an inevitable confrontation, a distancing from the world around him – incidentally from the Ahabite era that worshiped idols, sacrificed children, and hoped for life-giving rain from Baal. He simply declares and confesses that it is God who is the Lord of life, who gives rain when God wills and closes the heavens when God chooses.[23] Elijah's sentence is prayer, prophecy, confession of faith and confrontation.

22 Vasiliauskas, Sarah L: The Effects of a Prayer Intervension on the Process of Forgiveness, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, Volume 5, 2013/1, 23–32, 25.

23 Keil, Carl Friedrich – Delitzsch, Franz Julius: *Commentary on 1 Kings,* Kindle Edition, 2014, 247–250.

James sets this as an example to the church. They should live in the presence of God in a state of continuous prayerful communion, seeking God, looking to God for the good of their lives, even for their healing. Turning away from the world and relying on God, on the one hand, is a form of individual and communal healing, and on the other hand, a witness and a confrontation, a contrast with the world.

Book reviews

Sára Tóth
Gyula Homoki

Corvin (Kisfaludy) köz, Corvin Cinema, 1957, Fortepan / FSZEK Budapest Collection / György Sándor

Marilynne Robinson's Worldly Gospel: A Philosophical Account of Her Christian Vision,
Bloomsbury Academic, 2023

Sára Tóth

REVIEW OF RYAN S. KEMP AND JORDAN RODGERS: MARILYNNE ROBINSON'S WORLDLY GOSPEL: A PHILOSOPHICAL ACCOUNT OF HER CHRISTIAN VISION

Marilynne Robinson's Worldly Gospel: A Philosophical Account of Her Christian Vision by Ryan S. Kemp and Jordan Rodgers joins the ranks of a growing number of monographs exploring the fiction of the internationally acclaimed North American novelist, and it might well be the first book-length study to include the novel *Jack* (2020) in its discussion. The volume contributes thoughtfully to explaining the stunning popularity of Robinson's explicitly Christian novels not only among religious readers, but also among secular atheists. Clearly uncomfortable with the kind of other worldly, moralizing, psychologically immature, and theologically reductive Christianity Friedrich Nietzsche rightfully critiqued as "life denying," Kemp and Rodgers propose Robinson's life affirming, joyous Christian vision as a refreshing antidote. "A vision of the world," they say, "that genuinely seeks to clarify the stakes of affirming life and embody that affirmation, rather than simply advance our culture wars to their next stage of escalation, is bound to speak to us" (6).

Friedrich Nietzsche derived what he saw the real and lasting problems of the disenchanted modern age from what he believed was the world weariness, even nihilism inherent in Christianity. According to the authors, even though Robinson never mentions Nietzsche, she joins him in "feeling acutely the psychological and ultimately existential threat posed by hatred, resentment, and life-denial" destined to swallow the modern world. However, her novels also challenge Nietzsche's critique of Christianity by calling attention to resources *within the Christian tradition* that can counter these life-denying forces.

Taking these insights as their starting point, Kemp and Rodgers discuss Robinson's five novels in the context of the Nietzschean accusation of life denial. As an important prelude to discussing Nietzsche, they also address the claims of his renowned predecessor, the 19th-century atheist philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, and with good reason, since Feuerbach is perhaps the most important theological conversation partner of John Ames in *Gilead*. As a matter of fact, there seems to be a parallel between Ames's treatment of Feuerbach, and the authors' treatment of Nietzsche: rather than adversaries to combat, they view them as conversational partners and potential allies for life-affirming Christians in imagining a better and more humane world. "[N]othing true can be said about God from a posture of defense", Reverend Ames in *Gilead* famously says. *Worldly Gospel* is not only the first monograph to include an illuminating analysis of Ames's theologically creative engagement with Feuerbach, but, more ambitiously, it offers a practical demonstration of the Robinsonian non-defensive apologetic model, a glimpse of which we can catch from Ames's theological thinking as well as from Robinson's essays. Hence, the term "worldly gospel" not only challenges the stark dichotomy between the present world and the next, but also transcends the believer-nonbeliever ("us and them") dichotomy, even within theological discourse.

After their eminently readable and lucid exposition of Feuerbach's and Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity, Kemp and Rodgers proceed to conduct an in-depth analysis of each of the five novels. They adeptly balance attention to detail with framing their analysis in terms of the overarching purpose of demonstrating how Christian faith, far from being an obstacle to love of life, can actively deepen it. They argue that in comparison with the life denying tendencies of the first novel *Housekeeping* which focuses on irreversible loss, Robinson's second novel, *Gilead* marks a major turn in outlook. In *Gilead*, the narrator-protagonist joins Feuerbach's celebration of the joy of life while disagreeing with his notions about the joy killing consequences of religion. "Where Feuerbach proposes to atheize joy in order to bring it into comformity with the everyday, Ames aspires to introduce divinity into ordinary life in order to bring it into conformity with moments of joy" (92). In Ames's understanding "[n]ot only is joy a fundamentally religious experience but a religious life is uniquely structured to put a person in the way of it" (83). According to the authors, this theoretical stance is affirmed practically in the Reverend's life; however, it is also tested by the arrival of ne'er-do-well Jack Boughton, his godson, apparently the only person in his life whom he has not yet succeeded in including in his life affirming vision, whose human beauty he has yet to recognize.

Jack, the "black sheep" in the family of Ames's best friend, Presbyterian minister Robert Boughton, is a constant reminder to joyful celebrants of life of the darkness and despair ever courting human existence. Once a moral failure, a thief, and a drunkard, he now endeavors to live an honourable life. However, due to his mixed-race marriage, he remains ostracized by society. Through their analysis of the novels *Jack*, and *Home*, Kemp and Rodgers take a close look at the challenge the depths of human sin and

despair pose for those who maintain a fundamental trust in the goodness and beauty of life, sustained by a loving God. In the case of Della, Jack's wife, the authors offer a nuanced refutation of an intriguing charge voiced by some critics who claim that Della's "blind loyalty" to Jack is life denying because it stems from pity, and fails to consider Jack's individual qualities. Instead, it seems to look through them, "grounding commitment in some nebulous feature …. in some imagined but usually religious phantom" (148). Finally, the last chapter of the book provides an in-depth analysis of the integration process of Ames' second wife, Lila, a one-time drifter, cleaning woman, and prostitute, into the Christian community. Kemp and Rodgers convincingly argue that "with Lila, we see a life that expands once it embraces a religious vocabulary. The sacredness of an individual soul, baptism, resurrection, eternity: these are ideas that open up the world as solemn wonder" (202).

A further merit of the book is the authors' nuanced textual analysis, which unpacks important passages, scenes, conversations to elucidate the Boughton family dynamic, the mysteries of Jack's psyche, or the underlying motivations of the characters. Indeed, they adopt Della's method of interpreting the complexities of Shakespeare's characters, whose "curious behavior … hints at the existence of a text-behind-the-text that gives the reader necessary, but missing, background information". Commenting on Della's approach, Kemp and Rodgers note that in Hamlet "the reader has to look closely for clues that indicate there is a larger story to tell" (161), and they are quite successful in finding and interpreting such clues in Robinson's novels.

A strong thesis, however, comes with blind spots. In *Worldly Gospel*, I believe, it is mainly *Housekeeping* that suffers from a somewhat biased reading. According to the authors, the two sisters who experience a series of traumatic losses (the early disappearance of their father, the death of their grandfather in a train accident, and the suicide of their mother, to name the worst of these) choose two very different ways of coping, but both are escapist. Lucille's path is ignorance "through participation in the settled world of middle-class convention" (53), whereas Ruth, the authors argue, escapes from pain through a retreat into her own dreamworld. Though in this way, she imaginatively resurrects her mother, the price is exile from the world of the living. "In turning away from the physical, her body and its crudities, she has become attuned to an interior music, the imminent presence of her mother, that she now plays on loop. She has made herself into a ghost (been 'unhoused') to live with ghosts" (73). This interpretation is acceptable as far as it goes. However, overlooking the expansion of Ruth's personal suffering into a universal tragic vision of loss, the authors come close to falling into the mistake of what George Steiner called Christianity's antitragic bias. Rather than "protecting herself from harm by removing herself from the world" as the authors put it (174), Ruth's exile from society is triggered by an insight into the "world's true workings." (Marilynne Robinson: *Housekeeping*. London: Faber & Faber, 2005, 116). "The force behind the movement of time," Ruth says, "is a mourning that will not be comforted" (ibid. 192). Having chosen to live in the universal tragic moment,

Ruth wishes to be "unhoused" (an unmistakable reference to the tempest scene in *King Lear*) not to escape from harm, as Kemp and Rodgers claim, but to identify with all sufferers everywhere. Her spiritual experience is kenotic, dominated by the awareness of the tragic depth of life as opposed to the smooth surface. In the philosophical-theological framework of *Worldly Gospel*, this attitude inevitably appears as life denying, but as Kathleen Sands has insightfully noted, tragedies are not worldviews, they shatter worldviews. The brokenness experienced in the tragic moment is such that no coherent view of it is possible (Kathleen Sands: "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time after Time", in *New Literary History*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2004, 43).

The other character the authors perhaps fail to do justice to is Ames's grandfather, and for related reasons. Under the impact of a vision of a slave-Jesus in chains, grandfather Ames joined the abolitionist movement and enlisted in the Civil War. In his old age, he stole money from his own family to give it to the poor. He makes us uneasy, just like fools, crazy Hebrew prophets, irregular saints like Simone Weil, or kings gone mad. To emphasize as the authors do, the narrowness of his vision or the ways he harmed his own family is acceptable *as far as it goes.* However, if this is all we can say, we miss the underlying deeper paradox. Why does narrator Ames respect his grandfather so much? Why does he appear as a saint in his grandson's eyes? Isn't it the case that the grandfather is a chink in the well-oiled wheels of middle-class life, an uncomfortable reminder that somewhere Jesus is always in chains, awaiting liberation, even if it means getting our hands dirty?

That said, *Worldly Gospel* is a valuable read, appealing not only to literary scholars, theologians, and philosophers, but to any reader interested in the life affirming potentials of Christianity and the work of one of America's and the world's best loved authors.

Cultural Christians in the Early Church. A Historical and Practical Introduction to Christians in the Greco-Roman World,
Grand Rapids, Zondervan Academic, 2023

Gyula Homoki

CULTURAL CHRISTIANS ON TRIAL? REVIEW OF NADYA WILLIAMS: CULTURAL CHRISTIANS IN THE EARLY CHURCH. A HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANS IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Military historian of the Greco-Roman world, Nadya Williams, in her latest book, dives into the first five centuries of Christianity in order to prove that the idealization of the early church as a body of believers who completely broke ties with their former cultural, religious and societal background, in fact cannot be maintained once we examine the inner struggles between different ecclesiastical factions of the era. The thorough reading of primary sources and the in-depth acquaintance with Greco-Roman cultural context help the author to argue that not all of the early followers of Christ seemed ready to abandon their "pagan" way of life and worldview for the rules of a "new" Christian morality. Williams refers to these believers as "cultural," by which she means those "individuals who self-identify as Christians but whose outward behavior and, to the extent we can tell, inward thoughts and motivations are largely influenced by the surrounding culture rather than by their Christian faith and the teachings of Jesus" (xiv). In order to exhibit some of the conflictual points between the mainstream cultural perceptions and "the" Christian ethical standards, the book presents six case-studies from the first to the fifth centuries.

In Part One of the book, we get a glimpse of the lives of the earliest Christians in the New Testament era. According to Williams, the story of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11) exemplifies the otherwise widespread practice of Greco-Roman euergetism by which the well-to-do patrons granted financial aid to communities in order to boost their public

recognition and glory. In contrast to Joseph the Levite, who sold his property to support the congregation out of sincere faith (Acts 4:36-37), Ananias and Saphira followed the "cultural path" and sacrificed *some* of their property to gain "a greater level of public respect and standing in the Christian community" (15). The issues of wealth and sharing bring the author to the conclusion that altruistic generosity as a core Christian value is always at odds with the broader cultural context, and the author proposes some practical modern examples by which Christians can practice this value. Chapter Two focuses on the problem of food and drinking within the Corinthian church. Williams believes that it becomes clear from the apostolic admonitions (1Cor 11) that the Corinthian Christians formulated their eucharistic assemblies in the patterns of the Greek *symposium* and Roman *convivium,* which were not only highly hedonistic and individualistic in character but also reflected – and represented – the socioeconomic reality of the time. The Corinthians, with their excessive drinking and eating and the negligence and humiliation of the poor, disgraced the body of Christ precisely because they chose to embrace the contemporary cultural standards rather than giving heed to the new Christian vision that proclaimed equality among all the members. The last section in Part One deals with the question of sexuality and marriage. Williams argues in detail that sexuality was a central driving force in Roman cultural life, and "it was rooted in the displays of power that enforced the social structure," especially evident in the exploitation of women (43). Christian understandings of sexuality, more closely those of Paul in 1Cor 7, seemed to be countercultural in many ways: the requirement of sexual purity, the high emphasis on singleness and virginity, and the equal status of husband and wife within marriage all challenged the contemporary sociocultural climate.

Part Two leads us into the second and third centuries – the "age of persecution," as the author puts it. Reading the correspondence between Pliny the Younger and Trajan, Williams intends to investigate why some Bithynian Christians might have turned their back on their faith during the local persecutions. Having convinced that 1Peter was a genuine letter of the apostle to the churches in question, the author believes that the apostatised Christians chose to return to their pagan beliefs for a number of reasons: the high moral standards might have seemed unfulfillable to some (1Pet 2:1,11), the social and political setbacks resulting from the harassment of local authorities (1Pet 2:21) or the poor ecclesiastical management (1Pet 5) might also have driven some away from the flock. Suffering for the cause of Christ strengthened the faith in some while leaving others with many questions. Williams thinks that those who did not pass the test of faithful response during the time of persecution did so because the "allure of culture … proved more enticing than the countercultural community of the gospel" to them (63). The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas is examined thoroughly in chapter five. These two heroines of faith questioned the Roman social and cultural misogyny, according to Williams, which restricted the roles of women merely to dutiful wives and mothers while leaving no space for any public engagement. Powerful women such as Perpetua and Felicitas,

who transgressed these convictions, might have been judged as potential threats to the social order. Perpetua opposed all the male authorities (her father, her husband – curiously missing from the narration of the *passio* – and the representative of the Roman state); thus, she emerged as an icon of resistance for women within Christian circles. While the author is at pains to highlight the fact that early Christianity valued women within the congregations and provided care for all regardless of their social standing (widow, virgin, married), in presenting the ways how the Christian church in North Africa – most notably, Tertullian – dealt with the women in the church, seems somewhat misrepresented. While for Williams, Tertullian's treatises that deal with "women-issues" (such as *De monogamia, De cultu feminarum, De virginibus velandis, Ad uxorem,* etc.) are examples of how the church sought to replace traditional Roman guardianship, they cannot be labelled misogynist for the simple reason that they "display consistently a language of provision and care" (101). It is hard to miss the point that the writers of treatises of this kind – more to come in the following decades and centuries – were *men*, and although they did admit the equal rights of women when it came to spiritual salvation, their public ministerial role was questioned or denied in the same manner as in society. Perpetua and other powerful women agents were suspected and regarded as threats not only in the broader cultural arena but also within the boundaries of the church. Just as Williams feels unease when it comes to modern dress codes set up by men for women in the church today (103-104), it is worth imagining the same sort of discomfort in early third-century Carthaginian women. The last chapter in the second section of the book deals with the issues brought up by the Decian persecution in the middle of the third century. The author puts on trial those Christians in Cyprian's days who, rather than giving up their material goods to subsidize those in need, in fact chose to give up themselves willingly to the authorities in times of persecution. By pursuing martyrdom, argues Williams, these enthusiastic Christians continued in a new setting the cultural race for glory and prestige familiar to us from the time of Homer. The voluntary or radical martyrs opted for execution for "the selfish reason of craving personal glory," which undoubtedly proves to be a "cultural sin" in the eyes of the author (122-123).

The third and last part of the book begins with a detailed introduction to the Donatist controversy. Williams focuses especially on the contextual and cultural background of the North African Donatists who, from her point of view, embody a "local culture of endemic violence" (147). Their militant spirit, violent martyrdom, and often aggressive behaviour seem to be a continuation of the so-called *caterva*-rituals: a peculiar African custom (also attested by Augustine in *De doctrina* 4.53) that entailed – and celebrated – legalized bloodshed between certain factions annually. In trying to formulate the main lesson of the Donatist controversy for modern readers, the author suggests we should contemplate the questions of what stories of martyrdom we tell ourselves and how this narrative affects the ways in which we relate to our neighbours. The issue of racism resulting in the lynching of black Christians by fellow Christians seems to be an apt modern illustration for the author of how sinful

violence can disguise itself in sheep's clothing (149-153). In chapter 8, Williams investigates how Christians (together with their pagan fellow citizens) responded to the sack of Rome and the obvious symptoms of the destabilized imperial order. The contemporary tragedies left many fifth-century citizens no choice but to question whether the concept of *pax deorum* that guaranteed the success of the empire was still valid. Christians, just like their pagan neighbours seemed to embrace the idea that the prosperity of the nation/state was somehow intertwined with divine favour and vice versa. The lack of it proved that the (now Christian) divine turned their back on their adherents. Williams presents the main arguments of Augustine's *De civitate* in order to prove that the cultural sin of "religious nationalism" can only be countered by a sound and robust theological understanding of history. Instead of glorifying Rome as the *urbs aeterna* or idealizing (and idolizing) the "good old days" of its past, Christians should look to and long for the eternal city above, thus running the main thread of Augustine. In light of the fact that "religious nationalism" or "national religiosity" is winning the minds (and the souls) of many Christians in our days, the author is right to remind us of the Augustinian way of seeing the past and present of our own *urbs* which has never been and never will be perfect and blameless or the final destination of pilgrim-like Christians. "If we truly look toward the 'glorious city of God', religious nationalism has no place in our worldview" – a powerful statement I can only agree with (175). In the last chapter of the book, the author leads us out to the wilderness and presents the rise of the "holy men and women" from the third century on. Examining some of the late antique descriptions of popular destinations written primarily for well-to-do citizens who could actually afford to visit these locations, Williams speculates that for many Christian pilgrims, the desert fathers and mothers might have embodied something like a spectacle of a similar sort. Being skeptical about the genuine piety of some pilgrims as they took the troublesome journey through the desert, the author believes we should find their motivation elsewhere: "While it was easy for Christian travelers to attribute profound spiritual motivations to such trips, the reality was that the Christians, just as the pagans, craved entertainment and enjoyed the experience of travel to exotic locales" (189). Williams is convinced that the "saints" – the objects of this carving – readily embraced their role as entertainers, especially evident in the figures such as Symeon and other stylite-saints. I remain unconvinced by the argument though, not only because the author constructs her categorically negative picture of ancient pilgrimage on selected reports (especially on the experiences of Mary of Egypt as told in her *vita*) but also because she sets up a false dichotomy between earliest "responsible" urban Christians who cared for their surrounding and served their community well, and those "irresponsible" ascetics – like the desert fathers and mothers in later centuries – who chose the solitary life from self-interest: "Ultimately, by choosing the desert, they chose themselves and their own desires, rather than striving to be a blessing to the world around them" (195). The age-old Protestant critique is detectable in this simplified evaluation, leaving little place for the "holy men and women" and their

adherents to speak in their own voice or deny the legitimacy and sincerity of their own faithful conviction to serving the world by following their own special vocation.

According to the conclusion of the book, it is always a temptation on the part of ordinary believers to regard former times and antecedents as perfect, thus formulating a myth in light of which modern average church-goers judge themselves less worthy of being called "Christians" compared to their heroic forerunners. "But as this book shows chapter by chapter, the 'typical' Christian in the early church was not a superhero of faith and was actually more negatively influenced by their culture than we might like to think" (199). While Williams succeeds in deconstructing such an idealization by proving that from its earliest times the Christian church was indeed a kind of *corpus permixtum,* yet frequently referring to "cultural" Christians as "sinful" or people who acted contrary to the supposedly clear-cut teachings of Christ and the apostles, she ends up with reinforcing the exact same myth. The author admits that no one – not even the modern reader – is without a "cultural baggage" (200). Yet, she constructs the ideal early Christian as a counter- or anticultural human being who lived consistently according to heavenly measures, which had nothing to do with generally accepted norms within contemporary Greco-Roman society. This characterization is often based on such apostolic or episcopal theological texts that we should regard rather as normative than descriptive in tone. Williams' stark contrast between the culture (the "world") and the counter-culture (the "church") is also in need of further revision since many of the "countercultural" voices of the "pagan" contemporaries that opposed cultural "sins" such as gluttony, wealth, sexual excesses, etc. are not represented in the book. Nonetheless, Williams' work is truly an enjoyment to read. Her writing style is admirable, and her arguments are clearly represented. At certain points, the work truly opens the possibility for creative dialogue between the early church and contemporary times, although, on many occasions, I saw the controversial issues overstretched. When it comes to the overarching theological theme of the work (the evergreen debate on "Christ" and/or "culture"), more critical and cautionary considerations are necessary lest we commit "cultural" Christians past or present too hastily to trial.

Participants of the 2023 Budapest Interfilm Seminar, photo by Tamás Vígh

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