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**CHRISTIAN AND BIBLICAL SYMBOLS IN MODERN MOVIES
EXEMPLIFIED BY “BABETTE’S FEAST” (1987), “THE RETURN” (2003)
AND “THE ISLAND” (2006)**

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The article deals with Christian and biblical symbols and values in modern movies. In the last decades, a wave of new movies with Christian and biblical symbols has washed over the international film industry. That despite of the very fact that state religions in as well West, as East Europe is under pressure by modern society, its values and changing culture. Nevertheless, Christian symbols, values and moral teachings are far from forgotten. On the contrary, biblical themes, which in the recent decades have been clarified and ridiculed by as well experts as of non-professionals, now play a very important role in the construction of the structure of modern movies. The theological-aesthetical analysis of the three movies: “Babette’s Feast” by the Danish film director Gabriel Axel, “The Return” by Andrey Zvyagintsev, “The Island” by Pavel Lungin, will not only show the reader different aspects of the importance of Christian and biblical symbols and values in modern movies, but also demonstrates the difference between Protestantism, Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Keywords: Biblical symbols, movies, atonement, Gabriel Axel, Andrey Zvyagintsev, Pavel Lungin, “Babette’s Feast”, “The Return”, “The Island”, fools for Christ, holy fool, divine madness, Jesus.

**ХРИСТИАНСКИЕ И БИБЛЕЙСКИЕ СИМВОЛЫ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ
КИНЕМАТОГРАФЕ НА ПРИМЕРЕ ФИЛЬМОВ «ПИР БАБЕТТЫ» (1987),
«ВОЗВРАЩЕНИЕ» (2003) И «ОСТРОВ» (2006)**

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В статье рассматриваются христианские и библейские символы и ценности современного кинематографа. В последние десятилетия международную киноиндустрию захлестнула волна новых кинолент,

отражающих христианские и библейские ценности, несмотря на то, что современное общество со своими ценностями и культурой, оказывает сильное влияние на государственную религию, как в Западной, так и в Восточной Европе. Тем не менее, нельзя говорить о том, что христианские символы, ценности и нравоучения забыты. С другой стороны, библейские темы, которые в последнее время объясняются и даже высмеиваются как экспертами, так и обывателями, сегодня играют важную роль в формировании структуры современного кинематографа. В статье проведен теолого-эстетический анализ трёх фильмов: «Пир Бабетты» датского режиссера Габриэля Акселя, «Возвращение» Андрея Звягинцева и «Остров» Павла Лунгина, которые показывают читателю не только различные аспекты христианских и библейских символов и ценностей в современном кино, но также и разницу между протестантизмом, католицизмом и православием.

Ключевые слова: библейские символы, кино, искупление, Габриэль Аксель, Андрей Звягинцев, Павел Лунгин, «Пир Бабетты», «Возвращение», «Остров», Христа ради юродивый, святая наивность, божественное безумие, Иисус.

In Scandinavia the state religion or Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, as it is called this country, is under pressure and for instance, the visit to the Danish churches is if not falling, so at least very stagnant. In Norway the state religion is not officially part of the Norwegian constitution anymore. Does that mean that we live in a culture that is no longer Christian? Not necessarily, but it may mean that nowadays we are not very able to see how Christian culture is in all part of the Western European society. We can simply have lost sight of what Christian culture is in our societies. A culture can be understood from its stories. What stories are common, which are valued? It is therefore very interesting to see that several of the past decades biggest box office movies are based on the core motives of the Christian faith.

We see it when someone comes to help other victims of their time, their money or their prestige. Christian morality does not focus on doing anything wrong, but I am not allowed to do something wrong, but to do well to others. It is not about me, but about my next of kin, my neighbours etc. Moreover, it does not mean that there has become more religion or Christian faith in these films. Here we are not talking about a religious revival or about exciting Christian role models that succeed in their endeavour, while atheists and pagans have to fight hard for their positions. Nevertheless, when religious symbols and crystal-clear Christian allusions are so central in modern movies, it emphasizes how deeply a need they cover and how much impact and influence the Bible has in our culture and society in year 2018.

At the same time, we must also note that Christian symbols, values and moral teachings are far from forgotten. However, it is rare to meet film reviewer who discover or, at all, choose to mention that biographers meet these central Christian motives on the big screen. Perhaps they have become so natural that they have become invisible. Therefore, important that we cannot cope with the structure of the film without them? For example, the resurrection theme, which is continuous in many modern films, and which is far from forgotten. In addition, even though many people perceive Jesus resurrection as an example of how strange or distinctive the Christian faith is. Does everyone not know that people do not arise from the dead? Or do they? No people cannot rise from the dead, at least not by themselves? Therefore, we should be careful about underestimating thoughts that can be central to developing and maintaining a sustainable culture. Fish cannot see water, but do not live long without. Thus, it is now more than ever necessary to know the Christian narrative of Jesus. It is in accordance with our highest ideals. It is central to our culture. Moreover, much speaks for the fact that the story about Jesus actually took place.

A wave of new and very concerned biblical and religious movies has washed over the film industry including Russia and Denmark. Common to the movies is the high quality and the fact that they do not preach Christianity, but more deals with general human and existential issues in life. Some of the world's best film directors direct many of these films. In addition, filmmakers are not as missionary in the same

way as in the past, but are somewhat embarrassed by the fact that they contain political messages and thereby create a blend of politics and Christianity. Christianity is challenged by secularization and modernity especially in Western Europe and the United States. A certain Christian-religious motive gives real meaning in a time when religion fills a lot, like plot about international politics. For example, if we look at the USA today, Americans' religiosity is still a key identity marker. Therefore, it is the right time nowadays to make movies with Christian content, as they thus contain clear humanistic messages in both Western and Eastern Europe. In other words, modern movies that use Christianity create the focus on modern wider living conditions.

For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, explicit religious horror, in a time of global crisis, cold war and cultural unrest, whereas it is now more existential films with profound moral and ethical messages. From the 1980s until now, as well Danish as Russian directors have dealt with religious movies.

In Denmark you will find the world's oldest continuously active film studio from 1906, Nordisk Film, and in Russia one of the fathers of modern cinema Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948). As well the studio as Sergei Eisenstein are the reasons why some Danish and Russian directors represent a certain kind of intellectual film directors that is missing totally in for instance Hollywood. The reason for this phenomenon in the two countries is the film environment that creates creative opportunities for filmmakers with those special skills. Gabriel Axel, Pavel Lungin and Andrey Zvyagintsev are three examples of such film directors. The movies of the two last mentioned film directors have been chosen, because they represent a contemporary transcendental reality in modern Russian cinema, whereas "Babette's Feast" has been chosen, because it represents a very important piece of the religious history as well in Denmark as in Scandinavia, not often described on the screen. Film reviewers rarely analyze the transcendental reality as a main plot of these chosen movies. However, it will be done in this article.

“Babette’s Feast” (1987)

“Babette’s Feast” is based on the short story of the same name by the famous Danish author, Karen Blixen (1885-1962), first published in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1950. With some exceptions, the film is a close rendering of the original story. Karen Blixen’s original story takes place in the Norwegian port town of Berlevåg, a setting of multicolored wood houses on a long fjord. However, when the Danish film director, Gabriel Axel, researched locations in Norway, he found the setting was too idyllic and resembled a beautiful tourist brochure. He shifted the location to the flat windswept coast of western Jutland near the manor of Nørre Vosborg. In 1988, the movie won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

The movie is about two sisters, Martina and Philippa (named after Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melanchthon), who live a very rigid life. Their father, the local minister, is the founder of a religious community in a small Danish coastal hamlet in a remote area in the 19th century Denmark. Both had opportunities to leave the village: one could have married a young army officer and the other, a French opera singer. Their father objected in each case, and they spent their lives caring for him. Many years later in 1871 the two sisters take in, the French refugee, Babette Hersant, who fled from the Paris Commune. Babette works as their maid and cook. Around 1885, Babette won 10.000 francs in a French lottery, and as a repay for the kindness of the two sisters, she offers to cook a French meal for them and their friends on the 100th anniversary of their father's birth.

“Babette’s Feast” is a rich and multidimensional film that has been interpreted from several frames of reference, sociocultural, psychoanalytic and religious. Here we will concentrate on the last frame. By changing the location, the film director Gabriel Axel, has specifically focused on the religious motives of the movie. This is also evident from the opening scene, where the camera is panned and shows a typical Danish moorland on the coast of western Jutland. A landscape that is rugged and poor, a bleak area of barren moorland. The humble religious atmosphere of the movie has been set. The chill mist that collects on the camera shots is not inviting. The cold,

forbidding sea; the heavy, gray clouds; the pale, icy green cliffs, translate to hardships that show on the faces over which director Gabriel Axel draws the curtain.

Karen Blixen was always very inspired by the world famous philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) from her native Denmark and his religious thoughts and thesis. The character, General Lorens Löwenhielm, is, in literary analysis, presumed to be Søren Kierkegaard. In the opinion of Kierkegaard, the heaths of all places in Denmark should be suited to develop the spirit powerfully, because everything here lies naked and uncovered before God and one's scattered thoughts had always running down here. There was no much distraction in the area and here consciousness must firmly and scrupulously closes itself around itself. The only real reason to stay in this landscape was to serve God [6, p. 2].

During the whole movie, the parishioners primarily serve God and live a humble and pure life in respect for the harsh climate and rugged landscape. They are so-called Pietists. Pietistic frugality, humility, restraint, sense of duty and order has been a strong cultural and religious influence in Scandinavia and especially in Denmark. Pietism, from the word piety, was an influential movement in Lutheranism that combined its emphasis on Biblical doctrine with reformed emphasis on individual piety and living a vigorous Christian Life. Although the movement was active exclusively within Lutheranism, it had a tremendous impact on Protestantism worldwide, particularly in North America and Europe. Pietism originated in modern Germany in the late 17th century with the work of Philipp Spener, a Lutheran theologian whose emphasis on personal transformation through spiritual rebirth and renewal, individual devotion and piety laid the foundations for the movement.

The film's main theme is the interaction between the religious life, particularly the puritanical traditions of Scandinavian Lutheranism, and the life of the senses. "Babette's Feast" could be interpreted about healing: mending the schism between spirit and body in orthodox Christianity. This puritanical community in remote Denmark is missing an adequate appreciation of all of God's gifts in creation. They have taken the dualism of St. Paul to an extreme, and stress the life of the "spirit", not the life of the "flesh". Both elderly sisters, in their youth, were frightened by the lure

of love and the temptations of life outside their simple village. They, and their parishioners, cling to the narrow biblical interpretation of their former leader, and the sisters' father. The aging congregation has become testy and quarrelsome, and the sisters do not know what to do.

The father of the two sisters was the hardliner of the small congregation, whereas the two sisters were significantly named after the two most important people that completed the Reformation in beginning of 16th century in Northern Europe, the Protestant reformers Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. There was a possibility of changes in the small society.

Babette comes from a very different world. In France, before she was forced by political violence to seek refuge in Denmark, she was head chef at the famous “Café Anglais” in Paris. A world that had the diametrically opposite ethic moral values of the small congregation. As mentioned with wonder of the two sisters in a scene, Babette was Papist that means a Catholic. The faith of the sisters, however, prompted them to integrate Babette in their small congregation. Enter Babette, a French stranger, and someone to whom they can show kindness. They have no way of knowing that she will ultimately return their kindness and give fertile soil to their dry, dusty theology. Babette will give everything she has, and in the process, will teach the sisters and their flock about grace, about sacrifice, about how sensual experience, as in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, can change lives, and about why true art moves us so deeply. When they can forgive each other, and themselves, they can focus on God's love that unfolds before them in a concrete way in the present.

On the symbolic level, Babette can be the representative of God or even Jesus in this movie. She is quite obviously the salvation of Martina and Philippa. However, Gabriel Axel associates not only Babette but also Martina and Philippa explicitly to Jesus. Axel plainly illustrates the sisters' Christ-like commitment to their father's mission in long-standing service to the community. They shelter the homeless, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty and visit the imprisoned [1, p. 12].

What depends Babette, many biblical symbols are associated with her person and becomes clearly a Christ-image, coming mysteriously and humbly to live the

community. The banquet for the parishioners is a kind of re-enactment of the Last supper with 12 guests and it provides all of the participants an opportunity not only to indulge their appetites but also to forgive each other and to live more joyously together [2, p. 6].

The banquet itself provides the answers of the most profound longings of the heart and hungers are filled. Wine is poured out in excess, something completely impossible before the arrival of Babette. Furthermore, bread quite literally mirrors manna in the desert. The dish is named 'quail in a sarcophagus', where quail being a form of manna and sarcophagus meaning 'flesh-eater'. Gabriel Axel here makes an allusion to Jesus' discourse in John 6:48-53, where he tells his congregation that 'I am the bread of life... this is the manna that comes down from heaven ... if you do not eat the flesh of the son of man you will not have life...' [7, p. 13].

In other words, Babette gave them another way to look at life, not a replacement, but an enhancement. She shared all that she had with those who gave what little they had to her. I see the story of God in here. He sent his only son to man. Man could not possibly give anything that would equal that. Therefore, for our small sacrifice, we are given an ultimate treasure and are transformed because of it. In this film, the bickering townspeople have so consumed themselves with a small interpretation of God. Babette showed them that life and God can indeed be beautiful in its fullest sense.

The film is not in any sense anti-religious. The idea of living life to the full is not presented as a hedonistic alternative to religion, but rather as opening the way to a fuller, more complete spirituality than the narrow, self-denying form practiced by the sect. There is a sense that Babette's meal has enriched the guests, not only physically but also spiritually as old wrongs are forgiven and old friendships reborn. In a sense, Babette's Feast can be seen as a Eucharistic meal, a literal meal rather than the symbolic ritual one, which is at the centre of the Christian Eucharist. The literal meaning of the term "Eucharist" in Greek is "thanksgiving", and Babette intends her meal to be an act of thanksgiving, to Martine and Philippa for the kindness they have shown her and to God for the talents, which He has given her.

However, another important theme in the movie is the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. “Babette’s Feast” is probably the first movie to be mentioned in a papal document, because it is the favorite movie of Pope Francis. So let us end with argumentations of the Holy Father to watch the movie. He said: 1) The most intense joys in life arise when we are able to elicit joy in others, as a foretaste of heaven; 2) he sees the film as a call to open ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit and 3) “Babette’s Feast” challenges us to rethink about how God may want us to reach out in mercy towards those we don’t agree with and not be afraid of engaging with them in dialogue. A very pertinent analysis of the points in “Babette’s Feast” [5].

“The Return” (2003)

“The Return” is directed by the Russian film director Andrey Zvyagintsev and written by the two Russian screenwriters – Aleksandr Novototskiy and Vladimir Moiseenko. Actually, the movie was the debut movie of the director Andrey Zvyagintsev. He is a dedicated Christian and member of the Eastern Orthodox Church and was therefore affected by the new transcendental style in Russian movies. The release of “The Return” in 2003 was very welcomed in Russia and the rest of the world. Spellbinding with poetry of grim scenery and characters' portraits the film dwells upon eternal issues of parents and children's relations, of growing up, of rebellion and surrender, of selfishness and love, of man and God. The film at once took two ‘Golden Lions’, best movie and best director, at the cinema festival in Venice and was bought for distribution in 32 countries of the world. Nominated for a Golden Globe and it was also proposed for Oscar as the best Russian film of the year. However, it was not nominated.

“The Return” tells the story of two Russian boys, Andrey and Ivan, whose father suddenly returns home after a 12-year absence. He takes the boys on a holiday trip to a remote island on a lake that turns into a test of manhood of almost mythic proportions. On “The Island” the father teaches the boys different aspects of life, but the younger one, Ivan, constantly doubts his love and intentions. For the last time, in one of the scenes of the movie, Ivan confronts his father by telling him that he would

jump from a tower. He jumps and the father saves him, but the father dies falling from the tower. The brothers go back to the mainland, but lose the father's body in the lake on their way home.

The filming location was near the city of Priozersk at the shore of the Lake Ladoga. We are not in a bleak Russian landscape that make you feel the desperation, but rather in a biblical landscape, where some scenes on "The Island" give you the thoughts of Jesus Christ at the shore of the Lake Gennesaret in Israel. Furthermore, the opening scenes of "The Return" is special – light is filtered in metallic nuances, and gray, blue and green seem to be the only colors in Andrei Zvyagintsev's universe. The landscape is the desolation of post-Communist Russia, with skeletons of industrial structures remained without goal and usage, swallowed back by non-exuberant natural wilderness. A landscape of exhaustion and moral decline, but not without hope.

It is in this universe that we meet the two brothers, reading an unhappy pre-teen age. At the end of a childhood that seems to be without too many joys, or even toys. Then the father returns, the father who was away for many years, we do not know why he left, or why he comes back. The father will take the two sons in what starts to be a fishing trip, but turns into a seven days making of their world trip.

The film seems to be about the uneasy relation between father and sons, and about the coming to age of the children, and it plays well in this space, with fine acting and a touch of mystery and tension that catches you while seeing the film, and does not live you long after screening is finished. It is, however, a much more complex movie, and it can be read into many layers. One is of the religious symbols, with a plethora of reversed symbols – it is the prodigal father who returns, it is the father who sacrifices himself, and not the sons, as in the biblical stories of Isaac and Jesus. Another possible level of reading this movie is of the renewing Russia. Renewing, but how, in obedience as the elder son is behaving, or in rebellion, as the path taken by the younger son.

The concept of the warrior father returned to his sons is supported by the fact that he is supposed to have done military service while he has been away, also, by his

sons' early remarking to each other. Moreover, the implicit allusion to the return of an Odysseus from the wars becomes transmogrified over the course of the film into something altogether more Oedipal. The severity of the father contains a subtext of jealousy for not only his sons' youth but also their intimacy with his wife, their mother, which he has missed for twelve years. On his being well built. Their mixed fear and awe is initially akin to of a son beholding his father Hector, but as lack of communication erodes trust and respect, so this awe degenerates into something altogether more sinister.

Now compare this to the movie. There is very little that allows us to accuse the father of being “cruel”, “mean” or “sinister”, how some other reviewers characterized him. Although he is strict, but overall well-meaning and just, he is definitely not repulsive. He gives more responsibility to the elder son and punishes him for disobedience, but also gives him rare praise when deserved. This son seems to adore his newfound father and he is quick to bend to his will. The younger brother is rebellious and unrepentant, but the father is also more forgiving towards him. The message is well hidden, but is not hard to decipher, the father loves both his sons equally, although manifestations of this love are different and may seem brutal. They actually look that way because the sons have no clue what is on their father's mind. Same as with the mysterious business he is up to. Mortals cannot fathom what is on God's mind or how he would reveal his love to them – all they have to do is say: “Yes, Father”, when they are told to. Where are they being taken? Why sometimes they are slapped for no obvious fault? The answer is silence.

According to Andrey Zvyagintsev, “The Return” presents a metaphorical intrusion of God into human life. The Father comes unexpectedly to challenge the world of his two sons. Using an older photo, the two brothers identify their father. When they tried to find the photo physically, they tried to find it in an illustrated Bible. They then have opened pages picturing creation and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. At the end of the movie, they both acknowledge him as their father. At first, they see him as dangerous but during their stay on the island; Andrey and Ivan have discovered the loving father. However, the overall vision of this feature is that it is a

retelling of the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. This parable in itself is, of course, an allegory: the father of the story is God, and repentant (and thus saved) sinners are shown to be more important to him than those who were faithful all along. I refer you to (Luke 15:11-32) if you want a refresher on the parable [4, p. 13].

Another Christ symbol you will find in the scene, where the boys meet their father for the first time in 12 years. They see him pose similar to Christ in Andrea Mantegna's painting 'Lamentation of the Christ' from around 1480. An omen of the father's death later in the movie. The film has many more obvious symbols dealing with the return of God. Divided in 7 days, the diary that they write an allusion to the bible, 12 years of absence, the 12 disciples, when it tells them that in 3 days it has to be in a place it's the 3 days when Jesus Christ was resurrected.

The children represent the different children of God, the firstborn who respects the Father and obeys (and when he does not obey he receives his punishment without asking) and the one who doubts his Father, who questions him. The father is unseen for the youngest brother, just as God could be for a skeptic. In the end we can see how he shouts that he does not need him, alluding to Nietzsche's superman and his famous "God is dead". In the end the question is what to do with a dead God, that is why the elder insists on carrying it even. They show a Father God who mocks the Biblical God, a Father who looks at the ass of women and has carnal desires [4, p. 13].

A purely sincere contemplation of an emotional reunion of a stern father and his two teenage sons. Father-Son relationship all of us can easily identify with or relate to relationship. "The Return" is a masterfully filmed, perfectly structured movie. On the surface, we have conflicting personalities of a trio clashing, as we witness their larger than life journey through a magnifying glass. As we broaden the horizons, haunting religious themes and images emerge. Single out a scene which depicts Ivan and Andrey gazing at their sleeping father, who does not just resemble Mantegna's "Dead Christ", what I initially presumed, but is in fact its vivid materialization on screen. Thus, a parallel with Jesus is drawn.

What makes the movie special is the slightly different spin that the director puts on the parable. This father is not the old man weeping from happiness that his son has finally returned, this one is worthy of fear and adoration. This one probably would not let the rebellious son to get away and wander without purpose. On the other hand, the movie extends and deepens the idea of the parable that the prodigal (defiant) son was loved all along during his rebellion, not just, because he returned or accepted his father.

Some analysts have also argued that perhaps the father was dead all along. Thus, making the entire movie a construction of the kids' imagination and memories. The Russian film director Andrey Tarkovsky has also explored this kind of narrative in his acclaimed movie "The Mirror". Thus, another parallel could be drawn here as to where Zvyagintsev found his inspiration while making "The Return".

The biblical aspects of the movie can far from being ignored and many times in "The Return" the director Andrey Zvyagintsev choose to keep bits of information from the viewers in order to keep the overall message of the movie open. Furthermore, Zvyagintsev's able artistry was effective in creating a beautiful final picture, without creating too much chaos, even though a few dots were left unconnected. Moreover, it is the artistic trademark of the director to show different transcendental themes through common life scenes, where he often uses visual or literal citations to create a double or even multiple meaning of the scene. That is often the case in "The Return", where the viewer, where the viewer often feels that there are several possible ways to interpret the scenes [4, p. 9-10].

As God saved the humanity by sacrificing his son Jesus, the father saves Ivan's life. The transcendence in the main character of the father can be seen in the very fact that he comes and goes unexpectedly, but also because he is absent from photos of the trip. However, the viewer is in doubt about the interpretation that the father's role in the film, because he acts both godlike and ordinary and moreover provocative towards his two sons on the island. On the other hand, is it not the way you can perceive God's actions in the world in 2018?

“The Island” (2006)

“The Island” is based on the manuscript of the Russian screenwriter Dmitry Sobolev and the director Pavel Lungin. In an online conference on “Patriarchia.ru” – the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate on 20 November 2006, the screenwriter describes, how he was inspired by old chronicles and about ascetics, monks and saints. Especially the stories about Saint Theophilius of the Kiev Caves and Sebastian (Osokin) of Karaganda were a big inspiration. However, there are also many references to the 19th century Russian literatures, ranging from characters from playwright Alexander Pushkin's play “Boris Godunov” to author Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel “The Idiot” that help the source material. This mysterious and mesmerizing mood of the movie is supported by the landscape and the colors in which the movie is recorded. The filming location was the city of Kem in Karelia on the shores of the White Sea. In a land of unacknowledged yet unsparing harshness and unquestioned faith, the one who is abjectly faithful, is the giant. A little, like the purgatory, beautiful but bleak Russian landscapes that make you feel the isolation and the overall depression of the main character [8].

The story opens in 1942 in Russia where Nazis come aboard a little Russian coal craft manned by Tikhon and his mate Anatoly: the Nazi officer threatens Anatoly and in the end has Anatoly shoot Tikhon and the shot Tikhon drops into the cold ocean. 30 years later somewhere in Northern Russia in a small Russian Orthodox monastery an older Anatoly confuses his fellow monks with his bizarre behaviour and his apparent ability to cast out demons, heal, and foretell the future to people who visit the island monastery particularly for Anatoly's gifts. However, Anatoly's mind is racked with guilt because he knows he killed his closest friend Tikhon. Father Filaret, the principal monk, falls under Anatoly's spell and because of Anatoly's simple life, Filaret gives up his possessions to be more like Anatoly. Father Iov attempts to bring sanity into Anatoly's life, but in the end, he is deeply moved by the crazy priest. One of the visitors brings his insane daughter to Anatoly, Anatoly frees her of demons, and the grateful visitor tells Anatoly that he did not indeed kill

Tikhon, that he survived and still lives. Moreover, it is in this peace that Anatoly allows himself to die.

The Opening scene when the old man, the main character Father Anatoly, pray his repentance to Jesus Christ with dramatic music in the background is very emotional and strong. Such a dramatic religious opening scene has not been seen in a long time in modern movies. The scene simply contains the film's main message, atonement and repenting of guilt. His guilt: he was tempted by the devil (the Nazis) to commit murder to save his own soul, during World War II. For this reason, he is atoning for his guilt of murder with a harsh monastic life. However, the special point of this movie is that his search for closeness with God made him special in the society and that this special way of feeling guilt served him and the community, in which he is living, for the better [4].

“The Island” gives the viewer a rare and deeper than ever before glimpse at a “starets” (elder) and “yurodivy” (fool for Christ), embodied by the main character Father Anatoly. These spiritual figures are unique to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, possess a prophetic spiritual insight, and in the case of the “yurodivy” use odd behaviour and humor to spiritually awaken those around them. Anatoly is tortured by his own sins, constantly in tears and full of inner pain, does not care about “the right procedures” and other earthly and useless stuff like his fellow monks, sees himself as the lowest of the low and spends most of his time praying to God and asking for forgiveness. The gifts of Anatoli are not exaggerated, you will not see God speaking to him, or light sparks coming from his hand. Anatoli is a humble man, a great lesson in Monastism.

The film is set in an isolated skete during Soviet times, when Russian society was forcibly steeped into atheism. Therefore, among others, the then Patriarch of Moscow Alexei II, praised, and with a very good reason, “The Island” for its profound depiction of faith and monastic life, calling it a vivid example of an effort to take a Christian approach to culture in the 21st century [3].

Foolishness for Christ refers normally to behaviour such as giving up all one's worldly possessions upon joining a monastic order, or to deliberate flouting of

society's conventions to serve a religious purpose-particularly of Christianity. Exactly what Father Anatoly did in "The Island"? Such individuals as the father were known as both holy fools and blessed fools. The term fool connotes what is perceived as feeble-mindedness and blessed or holy refers to innocence in the eyes of God. The Holy Fool is the Russian version of foolishness for Christ, a peculiar form of Eastern Orthodox asceticism. The yurodivy is a Holy Fool, one who acts intentionally foolish in the eyes of men. The term implies behaviour, which is caused neither by mistake nor by feeble-mindedness, but is deliberate, irritating, and even provocative. Exactly the behaviour of Father Anatoly in "The Island".

Foolishness of Christ and the Holy fool can lead its story back to Divine Madness also known as 'theia mania' or 'crazy wisdom'. These behaviours may seem to be symptoms of mental illness to mainstream society, but are a form of religious ecstasy. In the 7th century Early Christians with the help of the Platonic framework interpreted religious this ecstasy-type of madness as good. Yet, as Greek philosophy went out of favour in Christian theology, so did these ideas. In the age of Renaissance charismatic madness regained interest and popular imagination, as did the Socratic proposal of four types of good madness, where the two types of Father Anatoly, prophesy, the manic and mystical revelations and initiations were represented. In theological context, these were interpreted in part as divine rapture, an escape from the restraint of society, frenzy for freedom of the soul. Exactly the goal of Father Anatoly.

In the 8th and 9th centuries the holy fool was an important part of the Orthodox Christianity and the Eastern Orthodox Church. That meant that Orthodox Christians who have committed sins but repent of them, and who wish to reconcile themselves to God and renew the purity of their original baptisms, confess their sins to God before a spiritual guide, the holy fool, who offers advice and direction to assist the individual in overcoming their sin. Parish priests commonly function as spiritual guides, but such guides can be any person, male or female, who has been given a blessing to hear confessions. Spiritual guides are chosen very carefully as this is a mandate that once chosen must be obeyed. Having confessed, the penitent then has

his or her parish priest read the prayer of repentance over them. Sin is not viewed by the Orthodox as a stain on the soul that needs to be wiped out, or a legal transgression that must be set right by a punitive sentence, but rather as a mistake made by the individual with the opportunity for spiritual growth and development. An act of Penance, if the spiritual guide requires it, is never formulaic, but rather is directed toward the individual and their particular problem, as a means of establishing a deeper understanding of the mistake made, and how to effect its cure. Because full participatory membership is granted to infants, it is not unusual for even small children to confess; though the scope of their culpability is far less than an older child, still their opportunity for spiritual growth remains the same.

The Eastern Orthodox Church holds that holy fools voluntarily take up the guise of insanity in order to conceal their perfection from the world, and thus avoid praise. Some characteristics that were commonly seen in holy fools were going around half-naked, being homeless, speaking in riddles, being believed to be clairvoyant and a prophet, and occasionally being disruptive and challenging to the point of seeming immoral, though always to make a point. Fools for Christ are often given the title of Blessed, which does not necessarily mean that the individual is less than a saint, but rather points to the blessings from God that they are believed to have acquired.

The movie tries to bring into attention the essence of Orthodox Christian belief – the reunification of man with God, which is done through repentance and uncaused prayer, in humbleness and ascetic struggle. If only Anatoly himself could guide his soul out of the thin air that permeates throughout this desolate island. According to the same beliefs, God is the one who works this union in co-operation with the man. A testimony, for those interested, about the Russian soul, which is deeply religious and rooted in Orthodox Christianity. One of the targets of the movie were the Russian themselves, or maybe, by extension, those nations who are traditionally Orthodox Christian, but forgot their roots.

The main character, Father Anatoly, was inspired from the lives of some Russian “fools for Christ” – men, who tried to hide their sanctity and keep their

humbleness behind a mask of apparent insanity, especially from the life of Saint Theophilius of the Kiev Caves. However, Anatoly is a certain kind of saint specific to the Russian tradition, the holy fool. He does things that make no sense to his fellow monks, to the point, they think he is insane, but eventually everything he does is revealed to communicate some key spiritual point. Between ministering to the outsiders who visit him and dealing with his exasperated brethren, Anatoly gets no rest. Nevertheless, Father Anatoly is a popular fixture amongst the order of bishops as people come from miles away to seek out this uncompromising and gruff old man for guidance.

It is a movie full of religious advises and it illustrates the portrait of a saint, even compared with the orthodox priests. Father Anatoly could be seen as an ideal to reach in spiritual life. In addition, this is valid for all Christian humankind! Of course, this not means that all of us should follow this ascetic way in life but, as the main character says before he dies, try to make less sin in life. Moreover, this way our world would be a much better place.

God can pardon any sin, according to Father Filaret; God forgives, but Father Anatoly prays to a god that he customizes to his own specifications. During a communal praying session, Anatoly deliberately faces the wrong way because he believes that the bishops' God is a false one. He believes that penance from one's past transgressions cannot be attained while the sinner is still in corporeal form. Anatoly's reverence for God is so profound, the renegade bishop does not readily assume that he's forgiven in god's eyes, even when captain Tikhon forgives the bishop for his cowardice. Death, not mere words, is the only way Anatoly can come to terms with his inner demons.

This religious exchange of views between Father Anatoly and Father Filaret describes very well what atmosphere and relationship Father Anatoly has with his surroundings and his fellow monks. He does not compromise on anything. The rescue of his lost soul is something he has to do and there is no room for deviations at any point. In addition, at the end of the film, it turns out that Father Anatoly's way of life actually sheds his lost soul from the purgatory.

“The Island” is also a movie about the Orthodox belief and Pavel Lungin succeeded in describing the soul of Christian Orthodoxy. As a dedicated Christian, the film director is able to shoot different scenes with a real Christian soul and it is evident in many of the movie scenes. The play of the main character, Father Anatoly, played by the famous Russian musician Pyotr Mamonov, support strongly the mesmerizing atmosphere of “The Island”.

Pyotr Mamonov, also the real person, presents the pillars of his faith, and that fact gives the touching emotion. The images from a far land for who the life is different, the meetings as keys of old events, the humour, very strange for a large part of the public, are only pieces from a fascinating puzzle about the life's meaning. Today Pyotr Mamonov is living in an isolated village like Father Anatoly, as a reborn person. He admits that he more or less played himself and Pyotr Mamonov even got a blessing from his confessor for his convincing cinematic effort. Therefore, in one way, one can say that he personally experienced the meaning of “The Island”.

Postscript

The three films each represent different aspects when it comes to Christian and biblical symbols in modern movies. Gabriel Axel, Pavel Lungin and Andrey Zvyagintsev are all dedicated Christians, which is evident in the direction of their movies. Nevertheless, each of the directors describes different aspects of Christianity and different ways of interpreting characters and actions in the Bible. For instance, God and Jesus Christ play a different role in “The Return” and “The Island”. Whereas Gabriel Axel does not question God and God's actions. All three directors succeeded in the communicating of their religious message. One thing that falls the viewer right in the eyes is the way of Gabriel Axel, Pavel Lungin and Andrey Zvyagintsev to communicate the differences between the different Christian religious beliefs. The difference between pietistic Protestantism and Catholicism are clarified in “Babette’s Feast”, whereas the soul of the Eastern Orthodox Church are described in as well “The Return”, as “The Island”. Focus on the religious dimensions, especially in the last two films, makes for instance the political dimension of the movies about the Soviet Union of the past and its treatment of believers and people in general

disappearing in the fog that occurs in both films. Therefore, the author of the article must conclude that Christian values and morals are to the greatest extent living in modern movies.

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