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Some thoughts on film as a possible means in the mission of the church in the context of today's changing religiosity

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Introduction: The missionaries and the white chicken

One of the most important figures in film criticism and film theory, André Bazin (2002, p. 12), highlights a particular phenomenon for his readers from a 1940 issue of the film journal “Revue de Filmologie”. British missionaries wanted to test the didactic potential of film on black audiences in South Africa. After showing a film carefully selected by the missionaries, they asked the audience to tell what they had seen. To the amazement of the questioners, the unanimous answer was “a white chicken”. The missionaries did not remember the white chicken from the film, so they watched it again, in which, once again, they did not see the animal observed by the locals. It was only when they watched the film again in slow motion that they noticed a glimpse of a white chicken in the corner of a few frames, which had no relevance to the message of the film. Yet it seemed to the viewers to be the most important thing they saw.

This example from over 80 years ago illustrates the issues that lie behind the theme of film as a missionary tool. Thinking about film as a possible medium assisting the ministry of the church is almost as old as thinking about the motion picture and cinema itself¹. If, from the second half of the 20th century, film art – mass reception of which far surpasses that of other and older art

¹ Herbert A. Jump, a North American Congregationalist pastor, in his booklet printed in 1910 for private distribution, already saw great potential in the motion picture for the church and discussed how “motion picture parables” taken from contemporary life could be used to better illuminate the message of a sermon.

forms – can be seen as the dominant art form of our time², the question arises as to whether it can become a suitable means for the church to communicate and convey the Gospel, or not, and whether it can have an impact on people's attitude to religion and religiousness. In order to find answers to these questions and to related "how's", it is first necessary to examine the role of religion itself in the life of contemporary individual and the impact of changing social processes on the religiousness of the individual.

Subjective turn

Social processes and changes in religiosity are usually linked to the concept of secularisation described along various dimensions (e.g., Dobbelaere, 2004, pp. 29–43; Casanova, 1994, pp. 19–39). Secularisation, placing society at the centre of its definition, is the process in which the meaning-making function of religion is withdrawn, leading to the organisational transformation of the church and the phenomenon of what can be described, in simplified terms, as the loss of roots in the lives of individuals or the decline of religious practice, with the result that religion, which was once all-embracing, is relegated to the private sphere. From the point of view of the individual, secularisation is also a process that takes place in meaning-making, whereby the elements of meaning-making and the way in which they are related to each other can be chosen by the individual from among co-existing truths. In this process, the role of institutionalised religion is naturally diminished (Berger, 1969, pp. 16–18; Hervieu-Léger, 2000, pp. 33–34).

If we focus on the contexts of religiosity in defining secularisation, we come to the term "subjective turn" coined by Charles Taylor (2003, p. 26). This subjective turn can be described by the following tendencies: the monopoly of religious traditions is replaced by a pluralistic cultural context in which religious traditions become commodities; the individual's religious quest retracts to the personal sphere, there is no need for institutional mediation; the meaning making of the individual turns from the intellectual to the emotional; his/her need for referring to something in order to experience fullness turns from the transcendent to the immanent (Taylor, 2007, pp. 505–511); his/her religiosity turns from dogmatic to experiential (Tomka, 2001, p. 427). Furthermore, the religiosity of the subjective turn is characterized by "believing without belonging" that seeks sources of religious contexts and experiences without permanent commitment to institutionalized forms of religion (Davie, 1995), and the internal motivations of religiousness become stronger over against external ones; "prescribed religion" is replaced by "acquired religion" (Warner, 1993, pp. 1044–1093), which brings along a reflective character in opposition to the former *nadve* one (Taylor, 2007, p. 13). Along with this, the need for experiences seems to increase the role of mass media in the life of today's people.

² According to Bazin (2002, p. 8), film plays the same role in our time as chronicles and architecture in the Middle Ages, painting in the 16th century, or fiction in the 19th century.

A functional approach to religion and the religious functions of film

When speaking about Christian mission, it is always a question in what culture the church seeks to proclaim the message entrusted to it. The way in which a message is proclaimed is determined not only by the proclaimer, but also by the personality and culture of the recipients, the context in which the message is delivered, and the widespread and accessible methods of communication. Ideas about religion, attitudes towards religion and the role of religiosity are of paramount importance in this matter. Religion and religiosity are also decisive for the individual due to their meaning-making role, in which a significant change can be observed in what we call the subjective turn. All of this is influenced by the media that dominates the communication of our present time, including the film medium.

Definitions focusing on the phenomenon of religion can generally be divided into two broad categories: functional and substantive definitions. The substantive approach aims at describing the essential, substantive elements of religion, thus focusing on the beliefs of a particular religious culture, while the functional approach describes the tasks and functions of religion in the lives of individuals and societies.

By means of the functional definition of religion the religious functions of film can be described as well. Cultural-anthropological, sociological, psychological and theological approaches to religion make describing it partly as a human need to find and make meaning possible. Meaning making is the connecting point between media and religion, since it is in this process, among other things, that media and religion interact. In addition to or instead of institutional religion, people today have other sources that provide schemata to help them master the religious meaning-system³. With the expansion of the interpersonal communication space, special intermediaries and media have emerged in this process, which, in addition to the forms of communication, have also resulted in a change of content. As part of mediatization, the media have become a dominant factor as a channel, language and communication environment in individual religious practice, institutional religion and religious symbolic content⁴. As a result of the process of mediatization, religion and the media mix and clash in the cultural experience of the media audience, and there is an increasing emphasis on “media-generated” reflection, all of which tends to increase scepticism about institutional authority (Hoover, 2006, pp. 1–2, 11).

Those who study the process of meaning-making outside the traditional institutional religion, prefer to turn to Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion (2000, p. 90), according to which “[...] a religion is 1) a system of symbols which

³ The meaning-system in this sense is synonymous with concepts such as “worldview”, “frame of reference”, “value orientation”, etc. (Bainbridge and Stark, 1981, p. 1).

⁴ Joshua Meyrowitz’s triple media metaphor (mentioned in his article titled *Tre paradigmmer i medieforskningen*) is described by Hjarvard (2008, pp. 926).

act to 2) establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.

According to John Lyden (2003, pp. 44–48), the religious functions named by Geertz can also be fulfilled by film. Film can also be seen as a system of symbols, namely a system of visual and narrative symbols that convey world views and value systems. These mediated worldviews and value systems create moods (e.g., calmness, hope, etc.)⁵ and motivations (e.g., do good, be true to yourself, love your family, etc.). Cinematic narratives can also serve as models of reality and as models for reality: they describe the world as it is, but also show what it should be like. Just like religion, film is part of the complex relationship between the ideal and the real/actual, both offering a worldview and an ethos. In film the world is usually seen as one in which good triumphs over evil, and if a film deviates from this convention, it causes anxiety in the viewer. Many people escape from everyday life to the movies, because the world portrayed in films is usually more orderly, more beautiful, and films often end happily: sin is punished, virtue is rewarded, families are reunited, lovers find each other. Although cinematic narratives present many conflicts and tensions, they are usually resolved within the time frame set by the film, i.e., during the movie-watching experience. Even if not all films, or not for all characters, end with a happy ending, film can give the impression that justice and order exist, even if some things remain unexplained or seem unfair. Films that convey unacceptable norms present alternative ways of dealing with chaos. Film-watching as a rite can be recognized, among other things, in the involvement of the viewer, as he/she cries out in fear, laughs at a joke or weeps tears over a scene. In communal film watching, the presence and reactions of others can serve as a control or reinforcement of one’s reactions, which can also fill the viewer with a sense of reality. Even though the viewers know that it is not “reality”, the films take on a dimension of realism in the context of film watching.

Although in the subjective turn people break away from religious narratives, they still need guiding symbolic stories to help give meaning to life. At this point, the question is how watching or interpreting a film becomes meaningful, and what makes a film religious. All these, of course, do not answer the question what makes a film religious. To answer this, it seems useful to distinguish between understanding the plot of a film (*ars intelligendi*) and assigning abstract (e.g., religious, ideological, psychological) meaning to a film (*ars explicandi*), since meaning is revealed by combining these two compounds. Central to this process is the role of the recipient, who does not receive the

⁵ It is true not only of the film narrative but also of the encounter with the motion picture, that it affects the intellect as well as the emotions. Individuals respond to images collectively and separately on at least two levels: intuitive-affective and rational-effective. Through the intuitive dimension, the visual arts convey ideals and meaning through colours and proportions, while form and placement (composition) denote modes of visual communication that appeal to the rational (Apostolos-Cappadona, 2009, p. 442).

meaning ready-made, but creates it (Bordwell, 1991, pp. 2–3). Through the moments of understanding and interpreting, the viewer becomes, and through a complex process of meaning-making, the film becomes a peculiar work of art in the viewer. What also follows that it is often not the nature of the film plot itself or the author's/director's intention that determines the religious character of a film, but the interpretation of the recipient/viewer.

Theology and film: From illustration through dialogue to encounter

Setting out from the transcendent function of religion (Lynch, 2005, p. 28), theological approaches to film become possible. In linking theology and film, our inquiry (Can God be experienced through the film medium? What beliefs can the film medium convey? How do films and film viewers become part of the discourse on God?) cannot be confined exclusively to academic or church circles (Käßmann, 2006, p. 60), but should include the wider public, social spheres as well, in entirely or in less explicit ways, depending on what issues arise, whether they specifically relate to God (theology in a narrow sense), or to the big question of the human condition (questions of anthropology). Since the incarnation of the divine broke through the separation of the eternal and the finite, the divine and the human, it allows us not to set the two against each other (Brinkman, 2012, pp. 24–25).

In establishing the relationship between theology and film, there is an understandable demand that film can be an illustrative aid for theology. This can mean not only the movie adaptation of biblical stories, but also the illustration of theological propositions, subjectively experienced religious truths or ethical dilemmas. According to Steve Nolan (2003, pp. 169–78), in this case, theological film criticism is looking for “cinematic analogies”. This also typically includes theological film criticism that focuses on the director's intentions or the director's biography as a religious background. In this approach, that emphasizes the illustrative function and, according to Robert K. Johnston (2006, pp. 70–73), classifies cinematography as a maidservant, we encounter a static conception of theology. (According to Johnston, it also follows that a film can be religious without explicitly religious symbols and forms, as long as it gives an authentic representation of the human condition.) Theology exhibits a kind of heteronomous attitude (May, 1982, pp. 23–43), whereby the evaluation criteria for the relationship between theology and film are determined by theology. This approach tends to see connections between film and other texts that exist only in the mind of the interpreter (Wright, 2007, p. 20)⁶.

⁶ An example of this is the first part of the *Matrix* trilogy, some scenes of which were used as the basis for a Christian evangelisation campaign, with the conviction that they were covertly conveying Christian orthodox doctrines. Or it became the means of fearmongering with the conviction that it covertly communicated Christian Gnostic teachings. Or in the same way,

A more dynamic understanding of the relationship between theology and film is reflected when theology looks at film as a “text” that can be placed alongside other “texts”, allowing for a dialogue. This dialogue is conditional on respect for the differing languages of the “texts”. Starting from the connective capacity of theological discourse, the context of the relationship between theology and film seems to be a proper place for doing theology. Theological discourse in the case of films retelling biblical stories or depicting theological truths can link the biblical times and/or church tradition to cinematic adaptation, that is, the era of the film’s production (or of the director’s), by forming a kind of mutually illuminating interpretive arch or hermeneutical circle between the two. The linkage can be made by juxtaposing the context of the author of the biblical text with that of the filmmaker, so that a comparison of the two can shed more light on either the biblical text or the filmic production (e.g., Jewett, 1993, 1999; Kreitzer, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2002). The context of the viewer interpreting (his or her other experiences and the context of the film-watching itself) is also crucial in this linkage, as it seems unlikely that without prior biblical or religious paradigms, the viewer can attribute religious or theological meaning to a film. This meaning-making process in the viewer may be accompanied by experiences or expectations of being transformed. The interpreting task of theology in this case is not to tell the viewer what to find in the film, but to help place the constructed meaning, lived experience or formulated alternatives into a theological or religious framework.

Faith can also be understood along aesthetic categories. We can speak of an experience “of sensual conception and therefore of aesthetic” by nature in which “[...] what has been hidden in the depths of one’s likeness to God since birth and is now suddenly discovered, becomes evident and clear to the person; namely, God, who has left God’s mark on the person and is in contact with the person, becomes known” (Békési, 2010, p. 39). Such recognition-like experiences of God (*inventio*) may arise while watching a film, and “[...] may later become theoretical and practical knowledge” (*certa notitia*)⁷ (Békési, 2010, p. 40) in a reflective way, but these experiences of God are not sufficient in themselves to know God, even if experiencing God may arise from God’s being. In this case, watching a film does not raise hermeneutical questions, but focuses on the experience itself and its interpretation. Watching a film is also being engaged, being involved: the viewer becomes part of the cinematic narrative, coming into contact with the transcendent as he/she experiences or relives, either empathetically or by analogy, the existential questions of the characters (meaning of life, meaning-making, values). We can speak of several

it was often cited as a cinematic illustration of certain elements of Buddhism and Hinduism (cf. Blizek, 2009, pp. 19–28).

⁷ A reference to the 21st question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) on true faith, which names three elements: sure knowledge (*certa notitia*), holding as true (*assensus*) and wholehearted trust (*fiducia*).

types of transcendence⁸: on the one hand, when the self rises above and outside of oneself while reflecting on one's own existence, and on the other hand, when the self rises above and outside of oneself in order to meet the O/other. All this raises and necessitates the affirmation of experience and emotion as sources of theology in their rightful place, which does not mean giving up the order of the sources of theology (from special revelation to experience).

In the context of the subjective turn in religion, narrative theology seems to be the most suitable approach to the encounter of theology and film (Pope, 2007, pp. 29–32; Bergessen, 2003, pp. 25–26). Film has become the main storyteller by the beginning of the 21st century. Films tell stories by presenting human conditions and events, which, by means of aesthetic experience (the viewer's being drawn into the story), may become possible alternatives for the viewer: he/she may bring his/her own story into the film or place it alongside or even in opposition to it. The mission of the church in this situation is to help today's individual find the biblical creation-fall-redemption-consummation narrative as a framework for meaning making, that is, to help connect the subjective side of religion to the objective one. In other words, the mission of the church is to point to God's story, in which human life can find meaning, that is, to point to the question what the real story is, in which our life-stories are also included. This also means that theology can rightly claim to have understood this biblical narrative in its theological formulations, but at the same time it is to renounce its claim to have understood and expounded this truth in its fullness. All reality is interpreted reality. In view of this, we should be able to accept that interpreting the biblical narrative solely in confessional dogmatic frameworks also has its limitations. Contemporary cultural and cinematic interpretations of the biblical narrative should not necessarily be seen as empty relativism, but may help better understanding and thus enrich the biblical text and our contexts with their fresh insights. To do this we need the ability to hear and to listen to the stories of others, be it the story of the filmmaker or the viewer. Theology thus becomes a discourse on God as a reflection on the Word of God (special revelation), while reflecting on the various motivations (anthropology) of one's religious quest (search for God, desire for transcendence) and on those metaphors or analogies of redemption/salvation that seem to be the most useful in understanding the biblical narrative, and which are suitably presented and communicated by films.

In the encounter of theology and film, the interaction takes place at various levels. On the one hand, we may seek to answer the question to what extent film contributes to the way theology is seen and heard in contemporary society. On the other hand, we may examine what films and watching films do to people

⁸ The change in the concept of religion and religiosity has also brought with it a change in the concept of transcendence. Taking these changes into account, Wessel Stoker (2012, pp. 5–28) distinguishes four types of transcendence. Each type also reflects a particular concept of revelation and culture. His typology seems to be suitable for comparing the theological, artistic and cultural conceptions of transcendence. The types also show a shift from vertical transcendence towards horizontal transcendence.

(whether religious or not) concerning theological themes. Meanwhile, we may also observe what theological themes emerge as a fruit of this interaction. The exploration of the religious functions and theological significance of film takes place in the space between the religiosity (spirituality, implicit religion) of the subjective turn and specific religious and theological traditions. Exciting dialogues may develop about what beliefs, opinions or questions are surfacing about God, faith, humans, redemption, and hope in particular interactions.

Karl Barth and the true words of culture

From the point of view of our topic, rethinking the theological understanding of culture is inevitable. This is true even if we do not have the space to expand the countless theories that have been put forward. Although Paul Tillich is probably the most cited Protestant theologian in the discourse on theology/religion and film (e.g., Bird, 1982, pp. 3–22; May, 1982, pp. 23–43; Marsh, 2006, pp. 20–34; Graham, 2006, pp. 35–43; Lyden, 2003; Brant, 2012⁹), we choose to present the approach of Karl Barth, who is less frequently cited on this topic.

Barth (1976, p. 120) describes the world as a world of “mixed and relative secularism”. It is a world that knows Christianity, cannot help knowing it, but has learned how to live with it in a decent way without allowing Christianity to penetrate all that lies behind secularised ideas and desires – which Christianity could and should be able to do if it is to truly proclaim the message it is entrusted with. This is a world of “Christian” or “Christianised” culture, in which “godlessness” the call of God is also heard. In this, Barth (1976, p. 113) draws a parallel between Jesus’ parables of the kingdom of God and the signs and words of the secular sphere. Jesus spoke of God and the kingdom of God in stories about ordinary life, as if they were “photographs of everyday happenings”. But the stories are transformed in Jesus’ narration: “[...] these everyday happenings become what they were not before, and what they cannot be in and of themselves”. When Jesus tells these stories of “[...] labourers, householders, kings, fathers, sons, etc.”, at once they are about something else. According to Barth, Jesus’ parables are prototypes of an order in which “[...] there can be other true words alongside the one Word of God, created and determined by it, exactly corresponding to it, fully serving it, and therefore enjoying its power and authority”. We can and should be prepared to encounter parables of the kingdom outside the witness of Scripture and the church, that is, in the secular sphere (Barth, 1976, p. 117). Barth (1976, p. 125) also lists several signs and phenomena (in nature, in the human condition) that are strikingly often found *extra muros ecclesiae*, in circles that know little or nothing about Scripture

⁹ Brant (2012), who gives the most comprehensive analysis of Tillich’s theology of culture in relation to film and theology, makes Tillich outright a “theologian of film” because of his method of correlation.

or what the church preaches. No matter how alien these forms may be, their language is that of true words, the parables of the kingdom of heaven.

Barth (1976, pp. 96–99) sees culture as a human action and product that, if given the opportunity to be what it is (human), and not assumed to be what it cannot be (divine), can glorify God. The words found in the world, if they are guided by the Word of God, can become *analogia gratia*, unconscious, involuntary witnesses of Revelation. These words do not have to be “sacral”, since the Word of God has reconciled all things to God, and God’s rule has no limits. This point of view is the reason for Barth’s fascination with Mozart’s music, since he believed that the artist was interested in making music, not in conveying some powerful message. If it delights, music can remain music. By analogy, film can remain film, and ultimately art can remain art, and in this way, it can have theological significance, provided that it recognises its own function as a creature and wants nothing more or less than that (Pope, 2007, p. 17).

Relying on Barth, Gerard Loughlin (2004, pp. xiii–xiv) urges us not to ignore the other words of motion pictures that may seem alien to us. It may be that they merely echo the parables of Jesus, even only as background noise alongside the voices of other gospels and other redeemers, but it may also be that we encounter in them and through them, stories or images of the parables of the kingdom of God in the Barthian sense. In the words of the authors Craig Detweiler and Berry Taylor (2003, p. 17), they can become the “burning bushes” (cf. Exod 3), “talking donkeys” (cf. Num 22:21–39), or “seemingly silent stones” (cf. Lk 19:40) of our time.

Contextual theological approaches to culture

Since film as an intermediary means enables transcultural (and cross-cultural) communication and contextualization, it allows us to view the relationship between theology and film from the perspective of contextual theological approaches to culture. When theology looks at film merely as at an instrument for illustrating, it may correspond to the translational contextualization model¹⁰. For mission it means translating the Gospel into the language of the cinematic medium or contemporary popular culture in order to communicate the message more effectively. (Mostly formal equivalence can be found in the so-called Jesus movies.)¹¹ The transcultural contextualization model¹² takes into account the host culture, and seeks ways in which the

¹⁰ Perhaps the most widespread, popular and oldest model of contextualization is the translation model, which is mostly associated with Charles H. Kraft (1979).

¹¹ The Gospels themselves are interpretations and interpretative, or contextualizations and contextualizing (e.g., with their implicit Christology), consequently every film about Jesus is also an interpretation of interpretations, or contextualization of contextualizations. The Jesus of the films is not the canonized or dogmatized Jesus of the church’s faith.

¹² Kraft (1979, pp. 280–290, 297) also uses the concept of transculturation, that denotes in relation to cultures what translation means in relation to languages.

Gospel can be relevant in that particular culture. This approach takes into consideration that the receiver has his/her own culture and context, and recognizes that the needs of the context are important, and that the Gospel is to address these needs in relevant ways. In the relationship of theology and film it is still theology that sets the direction for interpretation; its own interpretation paradigms suggest implicit religious or theological content and significance for the receiver/viewer. (The hidden Christ-figures in film may be an example.)¹³ The transformational contextualization model¹⁴ recognizes that the receiver, due to his or her own cultural context, filters the message communicated to him/her in such a way that the Gospel comes to him or her in a different light. The Gospel as text enters interaction at several levels; it interacts with the contexts of the filmmaker (director, cinematographer, actor, etc.) and the viewer. Both text and context are transformed. New dimensions may be revealed in the Gospel that have not been revealed in other contexts. This does not mean that the (cinematic) representation of the Gospel becomes unfaithful to its original context or meaning, but it is transformed in such a way that the recipient finds the new level of meaning relevant to his/her situation. This model is about meaning-making, requires constant reflection, and nuances the meaning of the Gospel for particular contexts. In the course of reflection (reflective involvement) the viewer is also transformed, an alternate reality takes hold on him/her (*inventio*). At the same time, the transformational contextualization model allows the Gospel to take a critical approach to culture, including contemporary culture mediated by film, and to say “no” to its dehumanizing forms and contents. This, however, belongs to issues of communication or media ethics.

Conclusion

Theology cannot ignore contemporary culture, including film, in several respects. Wilhelm Gräb (2006, p. 16), among others, considers it essential to link biblical hermeneutics with hermeneutics of the present or of culture: the interpretation of biblical texts should be linked with the interpretation of the present:

¹³ The literature pertaining to the subject uniformly identifies a film as a Christ film in which the characters, plot or other details remind us of the story of Jesus in the Gospels, even though they do not tell it. Instead of biographical treatment, i.e., historical fidelity, the focus is on Christhood, i.e., the articulation of Jesus’ messianic mission in a historically unlimited context. We are thus dealing with a kind of contemporary cultural interpretation of the incarnation. The literature on Christ films has developed a variety of criteria to help the viewer recognise the implicit or hidden Christ figure in a film, understand when a character can be identified with Christ, and indeed what the purpose of this identification is.

¹⁴ Its essence is “renewal” and “transformation”. with an emphasis on both continuity and discontinuity. The former is the divine “yes” pronounced on the restoration of creation, the latter is the divine “no” pronounced on the corruption and distortion caused by sin (Goheen, 2000, p. 294).

Only [...] the perception and interpretation of contemporary culture can provide information, as it appears in everyday life and above all in the media, about the symbolic worlds and interpretations of existence that surround people, the rules of conduct that they regard as authoritative, the forms of life they develop, the values and norms they communicate. Only if we have information about these things can we draw conclusions from the biblical texts that are relevant to the present day and have religious significance.

Contemporary culture both reflects and shapes who we are as human beings; it has become a channel for social discourse (a forum for discussing values, ideas, moral convictions); the *lingua franca* of the postmodern world – today's young people are better informed in a rapidly changing culture of fragmented information through audio-visual texts rather than print-based culture; and finally, it gives voice to previously unheard voices, not from "above" but from "below" through the channels of popular culture. In popular culture, there is a dialogue going on about God in the vernacular of our times, a dialogue in which the church is often not involved and often not even aware of. In this sense, popular culture can be seen as a marketplace of our time, where the great questions of human existence can be heard and discussed (Detweiler and Taylor, 2003, pp. 19–27).

For today's individual, characterized by a subjective turn in his/her religiosity, there is a growing need for experience. In this context film as an audio-visual medium calls for a place in the mission of the church. This also means that film as a community medium can provide theology with source materials appropriate for the analysis of the human condition, thereby helping the church participating in God's mission gain a better understanding of the context receiving the Gospel.

According to a typical but simplistic understanding of the relationship between theology and film, film can only illustrate theological content, that is, it can be used as an aid or, at its best, as a dialogue partner of theology. Mission as interaction between the Gospel and culture allows for a more dynamic relationship between theology and film.

Film or cinema "Christologies", "soteriologies" and "anthropologies" can be understood as the true words of popular culture of our time, which are unconscious witnesses to the one True Word. But they can also be understood as legitimately inculturated or contextualized interpretations of the Gospel that tell God's story, the Christ-event, in a way (in a language) that can (also) be understood outside the church. Just as in the first case we should not forget the transitory nature of secular witnesses, so in the second case we should not forget the partial (i.e., not general but actual) nature of inculturated or contextualized interpretation.

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S u m m a r y

This paper seeks to present topics and themes that seem inevitable to be reviewed when looking for an answer to the question of whether the motion picture medium can become a suitable means for the church to communicate and convey the message entrusted to it. The essay first tries to describe what characterises the religiosity of the people of our time. This brings us to a phenomenon which is better described by the term “subjective turn” rather than “postmodern turn”. The functional definition of religion can be used to describe the religious functions of film. Starting from the transcendent function of religion, a theological approach to film also becomes necessary. In linking theology and film, our inquiry should not be confined exclusively to academic or church circles but should include the wider public and social spheres as well. A theological approach to culture helps us to place the topic in a more general, broader framework. Karl Barth’s interpretation of culture can be a warning that the self-revealing God can also provide, outside of Scripture and the church, true words and worldly parables that can become unconscious, involuntary witnesses of the One True Word. Since film as a mediating medium provides the possibility of transcultural communication and contextualization, it allows us to view the relationship between theology and film from the perspective of contextual theological approaches to culture.

Kilka refleksji na temat filmu jako elementu misji Kościoła w kontekście zmieniającej się obecnie religijności

Streszczenie

W artykule starano się przedstawić tematy i wątki niezbędne, gdy poszukuje się odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy medium filmowe może stać się dla Kościoła odpowiednim środkiem komunikacji i przekazywania powierzonego mu orędzia. W pierwszej kolejności opisano, czym charakteryzuje się religijność współczesnych ludzi – w ten sposób dochodzi się do zjawiska, które lepiej opisuje termin „zwrot subiektywny” niż „zwrot postmodernistyczny”. Do opisu religijnych funkcji filmu można zastosować funkcjonalną definicję religii. Wychodzenie od transcendentnej funkcji religii wymaga również teologicznego podejścia do filmu. Łączenie teologii i filmu nie powinno się ograniczać wyłącznie do środowisk akademickich czy kościelnych, ale obejmować także szersze sfery publiczne i społeczne. Teologiczne podejście do kultury pomaga umieścić ten temat w bardziej ogólnych ramach. Interpretacja kultury dokonana przez Karla Bartha wydaje się przestrożą, że objawiający się Bóg może również poza Pismem Świętym i Kościołem dostarczać prawdziwych słów i światowych przypowieści, które stają się nieświadomymi, mimowolnymi świadkami Jedynego Prawdziwego Słowa. Ponieważ film jako medium pośredniczące daje możliwość transkulturowej komunikacji i kontekstualizacji, możliwe jest spojrzenie na relację między teologią a filmem z perspektywy kontekstualnego, teologicznego podejścia do kultury.