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Christ Images in Contemporary Czech Film

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Abstract

An analysis of two important Czech films dealing, hesitantly, with Christological themes enables an engagement with contemporary Czech society. The two films, *Forgotten Light* and *Divided We Fall* occasion reflections on Christ's triple office of Priest, Prophet and King and the continuing power of the Christ story in popular Czech culture. This leads to an interpretation of the films and their messages, set against the backdrop of religious life in the Czech Republic as demonstrated in sociological research. Theologians can learn with the filmmakers how to address the new religiosity present in the society, post-ecclesial but not post-belief.

Keywords

Christology, film, secularization, post-communism, Czech Republic, new religiosity

In this article, we will trace two ways in which Christ images have—hesitantly—returned to popular Czech culture; in particular, in two major films that have appeared since the Velvet Revolution of 1989. First, in analysing Vladimír Michálek's *Forgotten Light* (1996), we will show how a story about a priest struggling during the Communist persecution to keep his church open and his faith alive also implicitly depicts the Christ, who is—in some complex and indirect sense—believed in. Second, through Jan Hřebejk's film, *Divided We Fall* (2000), we will show how in unexpected circumstances a more explicit 'Christ' symbolism offers a transformed reading of situations and, in some sense, rehabilitates the religious dimension of our lives. Both of the examples will confirm results of current sociological research; namely, that the Czech Republic has moved from being a secular society to being a post-secular society, except, perhaps, in terms of

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its relationship to religious institutions. This will lead us to concluding remarks on how Christian theology can adapt to this change, moving from a dialogue with secular culture to a dialogue with a 'neo-religious culture,' and one that has indeed a problematic relationship to the traditions of religious practice, but does not, as secular culture did, completely deny their contribution.

Forgotten Light

Vladimir Michálek's film, *Forgotten Light (Zapomenuté světlo)*, is one of the more surprisingly successful Czech films of the past ten years. It was first shown just before Christmas 1996 and was a success both with the cinema-going audience and with critics. It won three awards at the annual Czech Lion Film and TV award ceremony for films from 1996—for best actor, best supporting actress and sound—plus nominations in the categories of best film, best director, music and screenplay.[1] This was in a year in which Jan Svěrák's Oscar-winning film, *Kolja*, was also in contention, so the competition was not as slight as it sometimes can be.[2]

Here, though, we will concentrate on the film, not purely in terms of its undoubted cinematic qualities, but more as a striking example of the ways in which a largely post-Christian country struggles to portray Christ.[3] First of all, it will be necessary to give a brief synopsis of the film. Although ostensibly based on a motif from a novella by Jakub Deml,[4] the film, in fact, offers an almost

[1] A list of winners of the Czech Lion awards can be found at www.cfn.cz/ceskylev For 1996, see http://www.cfn.cz/ceskylev.php?rocnik=1996

[2] *Kolja* was only the third Czech film to win an Academy Award, after *The Shop on Main Street (Obchod na korze)* directed by Jan Kadar and Elmar Klos in 1965, and Jiří Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains (Ostře sledované vlaky)* in 1968. It is set a year or two later than *Forgotten Light*, in 1988-1989, and tells the story of a young Russian boy who is left with an older musician against the backdrop of the end of communism.

[3] According to the 2001 census, 32% of the population in the Czech Republic claim to be Christian. Of these 27% are Roman Catholic, 1.1% Czech Brethren Evangelical, 1% Czechoslovak Hussite, and 2.9% other churches and religious institutions. Practically, however, as will be shown later and is true elsewhere, there are many fewer people active in the churches, but—on the other hand—many more interested in religious values and spirituality. Thus it is possible to speak about a post-Christian country, but it is more problematic to say that it is a secular post-Christianity. See J. Hanuš (ed.), *Náboženství v době společenských změn.* [Religion in a time of social change] (Brno: Edice Masarykova Univerzita, 1999).

[4] Jakub Deml, *Zapomenuté světlo*, [Forgotten Light], (Brno: Nakladatelství Jota a Arca Jimfa, 1991). Jakub Deml (1878-1961) was a Catholic priest who was involved in the Czech Catholic Modernist movement. The book first came out in 1934.

completely new story that is set over fifty years after the events in Deml's story. The film concerns a priest, Father Holý (Bolek Polívka), who is responsible for a number of rural parishes. It is set in the autumn of 1987, when there were no obvious signs that within two years the Communist regime would be toppled, and the church free from external persecution. One of the lights which has been forgotten is that which can give color to the world, and the unnamed city[5] to which Father Holý travels is always depicted as grey and crumbling and hemmed in, a contrast to the light which bathes the village and the surrounding landscape, and which hints at a freedom which can never be wholly dominated.

Father Holý's church is in ruins, and the authorities decide to close it because they allege it is a danger to people. One of the strands of the story is Father Holý's attempts to keep the church open. To help him in this, he finds an ally in a local Jewish, atheist sculptor, Mr Klíma (Jiří Pecha), who carves a copy of the statue of St. Henry for him that is in the church, so that they can sell it to a German antiques dealer and use the money to repair the church roof. His efforts are opposed, for differing reasons, both by the relevant state officials and some corrupt representatives of the church authorities. Another part of the story relates to Father Holý's relationship with his parishioners—a mixture of old people, mainly mentally handicapped children from an orphanage and the local Count (played by Antonín Kinský, a real Count) now working as an ambulance driver, and his family. The final part of the story is about the friendship between Father Holý and Marjánka (Veronika Žilková), a mother of three, who is ill with cancer.

It may already be apparent that the film also owes something to George Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest*, a book which is quoted in the film.[6] It is not primarily about the search for faith or the struggle to maintain one's faith in a situation where faith seems to be completely meaningless. Rather, Father Holý's search concerns what it means to be a human being in this situation. For him this is inextricably linked with what it means to be a priest.

Images of Light

We can turn now to the specifically Christological reflection. In doing so, we have to be careful not to project aims and interests into the film that it does not

[5] These scenes were actually shot in the northern Czech town of Ústí nad Labem, but could really apply to any other Czechoslovak town of the time.

[6] Georges Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Paris: Pocket, 2002), originally published in 1936. Various English translations exist. For example, *The Diary of A Country Priest*, Pamela Morris, trans. (London: Fount, 1977).

have. Thus it is important to note two things. First, when we seek to draw out the implicit Christ-symbolism, we might be reading more theological subtlety into the film than, in fact, it contains. Second, the symbolism present in the film is open-ended, thus even if a Christological interpretation is plausible, it is not the only possible interpretation. Bolek Polívka, the actor playing Father Holý, has mentioned in several interviews that, for him, the film was mainly about someone who loves people and finds that this love takes him to unusual situations and challenges.[7]

In reference to the film's title, we can ask what light it is that is forgotten. We have already suggested that visually the film answers this in its contrast between the drabness of the city and the light of the countryside. In the town there is almost no bright color.[8] All is grey or black or metallic. In one scene Father Holý is waiting for Marjánka to come out from her chemotherapy session. He sits in a corridor somewhere in the bowels of the hospital. The paint is peeling off the walls, and the whole place seems hopelessly old and dying. It is not a place that one can imagine being life-giving or life-renewing. The only light here is artificial, bare, fluorescent strips that offer and reflect nothing. In this place of waiting, there are no other people, no sign of life.

In persona Christi

But it seems, at least, a plausible and certainly a rewarding reading to see the title of the film as being about forgottenness and light, and that these two come together in Christ, the Light of the World. One must be careful about too many glib references to Christ-figures in films.[9] However, it should be remembered that one of the understandings of the priest in the Roman Catholic tradition is that he acts *in persona Christi*.[10] Although they may not use the exact phrase, it is something that most Catholics would have imbibed from their earliest years, so

[7] See Luboš Mareček, *Filmové kralování Bolka Polívky*, [The Filmic Reign of Bolek Polívka], (Brno: Nakladatelství JOTA, 2004), 76-77.

[8] Interestingly, the only real striking primary color that is seen in the town is the red of the Communist banner for celebration of the October Revolution, and the Socialist Realist painting on the wall of one of the officials. Even color in the town marks a betrayal of a sort.

[9] See Paul Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 79-81.

[10] We do not propose to enter into the debate about this term and the problems it entails. See, for example, Dennis Michael Ferrara, "Representation or Self-Effacement? The Axiom *In Persona Christi* in St. Thomas and the Magisterium," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994), 195-224; and a continuation of the debate in Sara Butler / Dennis Michael Ferrara, "Quaestio Disputata: '*In persona Christi*'—Comment/reply," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 61-91, Dennis Michael Ferrara, "*In persona Christi*: Towards a second naivete," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), 65-88.

it is not entirely fanciful to suggest that Father Holý is meant to be read in this way. Thus it is that Father Holý serves to make present Christ to us.

Standing *in persona Christi*, however, also means that Christ is not here—someone else is in his place. And this can have painful connotations. For, in some sense, it is not only Father Holý, but also the collaborating priest, Kubišta, and the vicar-general who presides over the pro-regime priest's association *Pacem in Terris*,[11] who stand in the person of Christ. Here we can perhaps draw on the insights of the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Marion. One of the key distinctions Marion makes is between idols and icons.[12] Marion suggests that idols are those things or concepts which fill our vision, so that nothing can be seen beyond them, while icons are things or concepts which enable us to see the invisible, as invisible, as *invisable*, something we can never fully attain. In this sense, those who stand *in persona Christi* can prevent Christ from being seen or enable the absent Christ to be present in his absence. Even so, in the case of Father Holý as well as in their case, it seems that Christ is left to the mercy of his mediators. Here we can stop for a little longer. It is precisely in the presence/absence of Christ that the deepest theological meaning of the title is to be found. Christ is, at first sight, the most forgotten of all. There are, it being a church, a few crucifixes dotted around. But even these are much less central than the statues. Although he is a Catholic priest, we see Holý only preaching, so we do not even see him saying the words of consecration in the Eucharistic prayer, usually one of the defining shots of Catholic priests in film.

Father Holý does not cleanse the temple, but he gives one of the communist functionaries a particularly satisfying thump in the face, an experience he claims to be worthwhile, despite the risks. He follows in Christ's footsteps, and, in much

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[11] *Pacem in Terris* was established in 1971 as a Catholic alternative to the Christian Peace Conference. Even though this organization was condemned by both the Vatican and by Cardinal František Tomášek of Prague, until 1988 5% of priests in Bohemia and Slovakia, and 10% of priests in Moravia were members of it. See S.P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham—London: Duke University Press, 1998), 124.

[12] Major treatments of the theme can be found in Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, Thomas A. Carlson, trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), original *L'idole et la distance* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1977), ibid., *God Without Being*, Thomas A. Carlson, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), original *Dieu sans être. Hors-texte* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982), ibid., *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud, trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), original *De Surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001). For a helpful introduction to Marion, see Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A* Theo-*logical Introduction*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

of what he does, he witnesses to Christ's love, a love which seeks to transform and which is displayed in action. Christ eats with the sinners and tax-collectors. Father Holý drinks with the lads that go and repair his church afterwards because he has earned their respect by being willing to get drunk with them.[13]

Perhaps most of all, though, what Father Holý has to learn is that, in some sense, to be truly a representative of Christ—the God-Man—he must learn to be a human being. This is reminiscent of the position of the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae with his extension of the Athanasian interpretation of incarnation. As Kallistos Ware puts it, his book extends Athanasius' famous statement as follows: "the Logos became man, not only so that man might become god, but so that man might become man."[14]

Forgetting and Revealing

It seems that this process of becoming a man, 'a human revelation,' as the film will phrase it, is at the same time an open opportunity for encountering God, God's love incarnate in human love, or in the words of St Irenaeus: "The glory of God is a human person fully alive."[15] This is one moment where we encounter the forgotten light, but it is not the only one. The film engages with the concept of light more broadly. Near the beginning, we see Father Holý going into the church. There is torrential rain outside, and water is pouring in through holes in the roof. He turns the lights on but they immediately fuse. Light dies, a sign of the dying church. Later the church will be consumed by fire, probably caused by faulty wiring or a gas explosion. The fire at night is not a Paschal sign of hope, but rather symbolizes the destructive nature of the Communist regime. This is emphasized further in an earlier scene when Father Holý tries to get in contact with a local Communist leader, Vacek, the one whose face he will later slap. Father Holý and Mr Klíma first track him down as Vacek hunts deer from a

[13] This recalls the aphorism attributed to St. Ignatius Loyola, that we should seek to go in through the door of the person we encounter in order to be able to go out through God's door.

[14] Kallistos Ware, "Foreword," in Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology I, Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God*, (Brookline: Holy Cross, 1998), xii. We have to forgive both Stăniloae and Ware their exclusively masculine language because, as they fought different battles, the feminist critique did not enter into their vocabulary. Still, we can find inspiration in the emphasis that the Logos became human, so that we can both be reunited to God, "become God"—hence *theosis*—as well as become human ourselves. It is here that we can discover the non-secular foundations of Christian humanism.

[15] "*Gloria Dei vivens homo*," Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV, 20, 7.

truck, from which shine dazzling headlights in order to startle the deer and cause them to freeze. Again, artificial light is dangerous—here apocalyptic, destructive, life-taking, and life-negating. True light is forgotten, or destroyed.

This is a fact which the film draws attention to in one of the quotations from Bernanos:

> Don't say what others have said; speak as you have been taught, as if you say Earth for the first time and what is upon it. People yearn to hear a revelation and if you speak thus, they will see. For the Word is light, the Word is above us and if you can speak thus, they will see that the light is above them and they will lift their heads, say that each day and hour brings a great change on earth and above it.[16]

The true light is the light of the Word, which is a light for and above the world. Yet this light in the film is, visually, forgotten. As we will argue later, the images in this film of Christ are all implicit, iconic in the sense which Jean-Luc Marion uses the word, for they reveal precisely by not reducing. That Christ is truly present in his absence is seen most clearly when not seen.[17]

The religious element connected with forgetfulness in the film is one that can be taken further. One of the key scenes is a conversation between Father Holý and Marjánka. She has returned home from the hospital, but is lying very ill in bed—dying. He gets some lard to rub into her chest to help her breathe more easily. She is joking that it might be like the extreme unction from him, but does not have strength to rub the lard on herself. As he does so, she asks him to tell her one of his dreams. He recounts a dream he had.

> Not long ago I went into an abandoned church and I saw God there, praying. He was praying to humanity. He said: "Human being, if you exist, show yourself!" Then he saw me and said "Man! A human revelation" I said "But you created me, why are you surprised?" And he replied "No one's been in this church for such a long time. I began to doubt, but now I can with certainty. Man exists. I have seen him".

Marjánka, having heard this dream, asks Father Holý, "And is there a God?" Holý looks at her and answers, "I have met him in my dream."

This unusual twist, where the problematic becomes not the existence of God but the existence of humanity, is revealing. It is not God who has forgotten about

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[16] This quotation may be from Bernanos. In the film, Father Holý says it is from his favorite author. However, we have not been able to track down the precise source of the quotation.

[17] So, for example, Marion writes, "Whereas the idol results from the gaze that aims at it, the icon summons sight in letting the visible.… be saturated little by little with the invisible," Marion, *God Without Being*.

us, but we who have forgotten about God. And in forgetting about God, we have also lost sight of what it is to be truly human. The encounter with God in the dream is specifically not meant to reduce God to some sort of fairy-tale figure, for Father Holý's dreams have a tendency to come true. Rather, they indicate that in the kind of world in which he lives it is precisely the dream which is more real. The places where we find the light which enables us to see God are not always those we expect.

Kenosis

Part of the struggle which Father Holý faces is to learn to live with loneliness.[18] The opening scene of the film shows the baptism of a Roma child. Afterwards, the family depart, singing and dancing, while he remains alone, watching from afar, standing in the ruins of the church. He goes home, and we see him sitting at the table, watching the news and doing his ironing. He is always on his own, even though he knows and is well-liked by many people. There is a sense of distance that is only softened when he is with Marjánka, and, perhaps to a degree, when he is with Mr Klíma. Otherwise, he is in this way a forgotten man. Yet within this forgottenness the film also seems to suggest that God is to be re-encountered and understood.[19]

Perhaps most of all, though, what Father Holý has to learn is that in some sense to be truly a representative of Christ—the God-Man—he must learn not only to be a human being, but also to empty himself, to undergo his own *kenosis.* As the letter to Philippians reminds us:

> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not regard equality with God
> as something to be exploited,
> but emptied himself[20]
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross.[21]

[18] We draw here on Tim Noble, "Portrét kněze v současném filmu" (Portrait of the priest in contemporary film) in *Teologie a Společnost II (X)*, (6/2004), [Theology and Society], 38-40.

[19] This is highly suggestive of the fourth servant song in Deutero-Isaiah, Is 52:13-53:12. It is in the one whom we seek to cast out from our minds and thoughts that God is discovered to be most fully at work.

[20] In Greek, *alla heauton ekenōsen* (Phil 2:7).

[21] Phil 2: 6-8.

Father Holý is strong when it comes to being stripped of his dignity while dealing with the Communist state. It is more depressing for him when it involves a confrontation with the collaborating church officials. The most unpleasant character here is the Vicar-General, who is a collaborator, standing both "in the place of Christ" and in the place of a bishop.[22] As the Catholic Church was not allowed to ordain bishops, he assumes that role, and generally does what the communist officials ask of him. In this way, it seems that the church is dying, as one of the officials says, "by the process of natural selection." But Father Holý's bearing of the marks of Christ, who has emptied himself, goes still further. In conversation with his confidant, Mr Klíma, he remarks that he cannot prevent the church from being closed down, nor can he prevent anyone from pain or from dying, even if he would want to. At one point, he prays in the darkened empty church, telling God that he would want to suffer for Marjánka in her illness—to give her his blood, his life—but he cannot. He can give her only his love.[23]

Loneliness, separation from others, is the most painful mark of the *kenotic* Christ that he bears. Loneliness can lead to a refusal to enter into relationship with others, and—especially for the priest who can always hide behind a role—this is a real temptation. Near the beginning of the film, Father Holý is still overpreoccupied with saving the church, not for the sake so much of his parishioners, but for his own sake—for his own sense of well-being and to give purpose and meaning to his life. The church, he says at one point, is all that he has left. But the church on its own is not enough if there are no people to fill it. He, as much as God in his dream, needs to rediscover that human beings really exist.

Christ the Priest

There are two people who help him in the task of rediscovery. And theologically, both of them mediate other aspects of the kenotic Christ. One is Marjánka, and the other is Mr Klíma, the sculptor. She embodies the suffering and the death. She also must drink her chalice to the end—to undergo chemoterapy and to be anointed for her funeral.

Throughout the film we see beautiful and lively Marjánka suffering from some form of cancer. She is the mother of two boys and a slightly older teenage daugh-

[22] And also in the place of the State.

[23] At least in the Catholic context, this is interesting, in that, just as Marjánka reveals elements of Christ, Holý plays the role of Mary, standing at the foot of the cross as her son dies and unable to do anything but watch the suffering.

ter. Her husband, Franta (Petr Kavan), works at a logmill. Franta and the boys are an important, if easily ignored element, in the film because the film is also the story of their conversion. At the beginning none of them goes to church, and the boys only go there to throw stones at the window in order to attract the attention of two young girls. Franta is deeply resentful of Father Holý's closeness to his wife. However, he is not portrayed as a bad character, simply someone who is struggling to cope with the fact that his wife is dying. As time goes on, his relationship to Father Holý changes. He welcomes his presence, and, at the end of the film, we see him and the boys walking over the snow to the church.

Marjánka herself embodies many of the tensions which the film plays with. Like the world around her, she is dying. And yet she is also a person who gives life, who brings people together, and who offers friendship and love. Her relationship with Father Holý is entirely chaste (it is only after her death that Holý addresses her with the informal 'you' form, despite their closeness), yet it is a relationship of love. Father Holý knows that, as he drives her to and from hospital, she gives him more than he can give her. Here, at least, it is Marjánka who is more Christ-like. Father Holý, as we have noted, cannot be Christ for her, however much he may wish. On his final visit to her, Father Holý discovers Marjánka already dead in her bed. As he lays his head on her chest to check if she is breathing, there is a moment (captured on the sleeve of the DVD and video version of the film) when there is a kind of Pietà image, the head of the man lying on the breast of the woman. Here, though, it is the man who lives and rests his head on the dead woman. Both give and receive from each other; both, in this moment, are Christ for each other.

Christ the Prophet

And finally, there is Mr Klíma, the sculptor, who swears much and loves much. Mr Klíma is a Jewish atheist, or so he claims. He lost many relatives in the concentration camp, and he rejects a God who apparently could not be there. Father Holý does not attempt to persuade him, but finds in him a true friend—one who listens to him, and who gives him an ear. Precisely because he is neither one of the members of the parish, who have too much respect, nor one of the Communists, who have too much contempt, Mr Klíma is able to be there for Father Holý as a friend. At one point, Father Holý embraces Klíma, calling him "a man of God," and in his brusque and abrasive way, this is what he is. He is the Old Testament prophet, even down to his beard, having no truck with any forms of idolatry, Communism or false piety. In Father Holý, though, he finds a good man, and

because Mr Klíma recognizes him as such, Father Holý is enabled gradually to realize his own humanity. Mr Klíma announces to the policeman who wants to arrest someone for entering the empty church that there is only one God. He constantly strives to support Holý in hope, and after the episode with the copy of the statue of St Henry, which ended up with Father Holý in prison, he makes his own original version of the Pietà. It is unusual, modern, and different, but, he says, people will get used to it. It is his gift to the church, which as an institution he cannot belong to, but whose members he too has come to love.

The Power of the Weak

We see here the triple office of Christ, unusually distributed. There are two priestly mediations, one prophetic, and no kingly.[24] The power is reserved to those who refused the real light, the state and the church officials, or to people like Father Kubišta, who knew how to get on with them, and is repaid with money to restore a big church in Prague. His church, however—in contrast to the endangered churches Holý struggles for—is already dead.

The security, the visibility of light, as well as the clarity of one's faith journey are seen as misleading, as ways of missing the promise of the second part of our *kenotic* hymn from the Philippians:

> Therefore God also highly exalted him
> and gave him the name
> that is above every name,
> so that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bend,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue should confess
> that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father.[25]

[24] At least there is no kingly role in the sense that this has too often been understood in Christendom, and the effects of which are still felt and observed today in the behavior of much of the Czech hierarchy, for example. But both Father Holý and Marjánka are representatives of the kingly role of Christ too, of the power of weakness, the power of the cross to overcome the power of the state, and the power of the good life against the machinations of evil. The fact that this element is underplayed serves as further evidence of the extreme wariness vis-à-vis the institutional church.

[25] Phil 2: 9-11.

This moment of glorification is missing in the film. Instead, we get a gentle confirmation of faith, hope and love in the scene at the end of the film, already referred to when Marjánka's husband and sons cross the frozen snow-covered fields to church. In the final scene, they are together with the rest of the congregation in the church, which is being repaired by the authorities. Presumably, mass has just finished. One reading of the ending is that Father Holý feels he has no more strength to go on. After packing away his things, he comes out of the sacristy, ready to move on, only to discover everyone still sitting there. He asks what they are doing, and the Count says that the children do not want to go because they are afraid he will abandon them. Their love renews his love and gently changes his decision. He is not going to leave because his love for them is also his strength to stay. But his love for them is grounded now in both his experience of the God whom he has encountered in his dream and in the experiences of acceptance he receives from them. Thus we are left with Father Holý standing alone once again when they go, but differently alone than at the beginning of the film.[26]

Divided We Fall

One of the more successful partnerships in contemporary Czech film is that between director Jan Hřebejk and writer Petr Jarchovský. Their second film together, released in 2000, was *Musíme si pomáhat*, which for somewhat unfathomable reasons received the English title *Divided We Fall*.[27] All five of their films together[28] display a mixture of humor and seriousness, a very strong visual sense, good soundtracks, and hover on the edge of sentimentality, but somehow manage to avoid falling too deeply into it. Their films have also been successful at the box office and the recipients of various rewards at film festivals.[29] They can thus be ranked among the top Czech filmmakers of today.

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[26] Even the church has been repaired. At the beginning, he is alone in dark ruins, now he is left surrounded by the newly restored church bathed in natural light.

[27] The literal translation is "We must help each other." The German translation captures this better: "Wir muessen zusammenstehen."

[28] The others are *Pelíšky* (Cosy Dens) from 1999, *Pupendo* (2003), *Horem pádem* (Up and Down), from 2004 and most recently *Kráska v nesnázích* (Beauty in Trouble), released in September 2006.

[29] For a report on their success at the Czech Lion film awards, see Pavla Navrátilová, "Divided We Fall takes Czech Lev awards by Storm," 05/03/01 http://www.radio.cz/en/article/11771

Introducing the Film

Musíme si pomáhat is mainly set during the time of the Second World War. The two main characters are Josef Čížek (Bolek Polívka) and his wife Marie (Anna Šišková). Before the war Josef had worked for a Jewish family, and is asked to look after their property when they are forced to move by the Nazis. One night he discovers the family's son, David (Czongor Kassai), who has escaped from a concentration camp and returned to the town. He is desperate, and so Josef takes him home and they end up putting him in a small room they have for drying meat. At one level, the film is about the way in which ordinary people do heroic things, and the moral ambiguities involved in continuing to do good.

The complication comes from Josef and Marie's best friend (or at least he thinks he is their best friend), Horst (Jaroslav Dušek), a Czech who had been previously ridiculed for his German name and German roots, and has now joined the Nazis and works for them. Then, as the war goes on, Josef is first forced to take work as a driver for the Germans, and then is threatened with having a German forced on them as they have an extra room in their flat. This would, of course, be fatal for David, and they have to find a way to get around the problem.

It does not require a great deal of theological education to recognize that the names Josef, Marie and David are not without some sort of significance. The forgotten or despised images of the Incarnation, and of divine help, reappear through such simple things, and, even if imbued with a new human meaning, they ultimately cannot do without their religious roots. One of the earlier scenes in the film shows Marie dusting a painting of the Nativity, and there is a conversation between her and Josef concerning her belief and her prayers for a child. Josef mocks her beliefs, but he, like his biblical counterpart, is a just man. He is unwilling to shelter David, but is talked into it by Marie and gives in to her pleas.

When they are told that they will have to take in another person, Marie tells the German officer that she is pregnant, so they will need the extra room for themselves. This comes as a surprise to Josef, who has found out from the doctor that he is infertile. Now they have said she is pregnant, though, they must find a way for this to become true, and in the end Josef persuades Marie and David to have intercourse together. And so it comes to pass that the son of David is born of Mary.

As we mentioned earlier, there is always a very fine line between sentimentality and profundity in Hřebejk and Jarchovsky's films, and the outline of the plot should indicate that the danger of sentimentality is very present here—not least in the "nativity tableau" towards the end of the film. Yet, if there is sentimental-

ity, it is never all there is. The film can hint at a theology after, but also at the time of, Auschwitz.[30] Where is God in all that is going on around? Where is God in the killing of David's family, in the brutality and in the pettiness?

It is perhaps best to understand the film as a parable. "Those who have ears to hear, and eyes to see, let them listen and look!"[31] It would be possible to view this film with no idea of the Christian story, and it would still be an enjoyable story. Most of the reviews of the film that we have read,[32] in fact, largely ignore or are annoyed by the religious references. This may, however, say as much about the reviewers as it does about the film, and many of them show an unwillingness to engage with the film at all the levels it offers. In what follows, we will treat it as an attempt, among other things, to say something about the meaning of Jesus in a world where he is either not known or of no interest. This is not to say that this is the intention of the filmmakers, but to say that their film is sufficiently rich to allow for this interpretation.

Symbolic Mediation

In order to carry out our interpretation, we will employ other theological concepts, as we did with the kenotic Christ in our interpretation of *Forgotten Light*. This time we will need to explore possibilities available for referring to the symbolic Christ. Orthodox theology speaks about Christ's "real presence"[33] in all creation, as an eschatological fulfilment of the world created by God to be symbolic—i.e., to mirror God's love. The world as a symbol of God's love and Christ as a symbol of God's love do not stand against each other, but the latter heals the wounds caused by sin in the former.[34] And yet even here the 'presence' of

[30] This is the question which Gustavo Gutiérrez raises in his book *On Job: God Talk*, where he says that the problem for Latin American theology is not how to do theology after Auschwitz, but amidst the killings fields of, in his case, Peru. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente*, (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, ²1988), 184-5 (the Spanish title means "To Talk of God from the perspective of the suffering of the innocent person"). English translation: Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (trans. Matthew J. O'Connell,) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987).

[31] Cf. Matthew 13:16.

[32] See the links from the Internet Movie Database website, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0234288/externalreviews (downloaded 26/09/06)

[33] See Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: St. Vladimir's Theological Press, 1998), 138-139.

[34] See Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 139-140.

Christ involves an element of 'absence'—approached from our perspective, from where we receive and strive to understand God's revelation. There is a dynamic between what the Greek fathers called the apophatic and the kataphatic way.

The word *apophasis* has two basic meanings in Greek, 'revelation' and 'negation,' and both are included in the *apophatic* way. It comes from a tradition of contemplative thinking, and emphasizes not only what cannot be said, but also what kind of conversion is needed so that we will move from living in a lie to living in truth, from forgetting our roots to rediscovering them in our memory, from being separated from communion with God and with other people to being included.[35] It is interesting that Gregory of Nyssa developed this way of Christian contemplative apophaticism against the background of the anti-Arian controversies,[36] touching on issues related to the nature of Christ. For Gregory, who affirmed the Athanasian teaching on the full divinity of the Son,[37] this was combined with another affirmation; namely, that God is mystery, and we encounter God as mystery, even in Christ. This encounter causes, then, our need for conversion—the dynamic journey towards God that, according to Gregory, has no end.

The word *kataphasis* means affirmation, so the kataphatic way signifies an affirmative theology that is a complement to the apophatic way. But we should

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[35] Here we find the three Platonic principles, *katharsis, anamnesis*, and *methexis* implicitly present. For *anamnesis* see Plato, *Meno* 81; *Phaedrus* 92.A; for *katharsis* see *Sophist* 229.d; 231.e; for *methexis* see *Parmenides* 229.d. References are taken from *Plato: Collected Dialogues including Letters*. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, eds. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996). In terms of *Divided We Fall*, we refer back to our presentation of the reaction of David to Horst. Horst, who was excluded from the new world because of the lie he had lived, is welcomed back in, both in the birth of the baby, and in David's words of forgiveness. A similar process may be at work in the journey of Franta, Marjánka's husband, in *Forgotten Light*.

[36] Gregory opposed the heresies of both Arius and Eunomius. Arius's claim that there is an essential difference between the ungenerate nature of the Father and generate nature of the Son (refused in 321—and opposed by the Council of Nicea in 325) is radicalized by Eunomius's assertion that the 'ungenerate' is not only the fundamental characteristic of God, but also God's essence (*ousia*). Eunomius brought a form of negative theology, which claimed superiority to the affirmative theology because of its privileged knowledge of the negative name of God. For a more detailed argument for placing Gregory within the apophatic tradition, see Ivana Noble "The Apophatic Way in Gregory of Nyssa," given at the conference *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis* organized by the Centre for Biblical Studies in Prague, 31 October-3 November 2001, and published in the conference proceedings, Petr Pokorny and Jan Roskovec (eds.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 323-339. The analysis of Gregory's position in this article is partly taken from there.

[37] And together with his brother, Basil, and their friend, Gregory Nazianzen, contributed to the Trinitarian formulations of the Council of Constantinople.

not mistake affirmation for definition. Affirmation or recognition is something else. The kataphatic way is also rooted in our experience. First of all, in the experience that God is love. Stories of God's love and symbols of it are found primarily in the scriptures, and it is there that we learn the language of love. There are a multitude of images overflowing with meaning, and yet they need to be guarded by the apophatic emphasis that none of them 'is' God, and that, in order to encounter the God they signify, we need to purify our hearts and lives.[38]

The apophatic and the kataphatic ways are not two alternatives, but necessary complements. Similarly to the categories of the presence and the absence of Christ, they help us to understand Christ symbolism without turning it into Christ definitions, and thus theologically speaking, idols.[39]

Thus to talk about the symbolic Christ in *Divided We Fall* does not lead to a search for equations between our pre-conceived theological concepts and the actual figures employed in the film. This would be too simplistic and too one-sided. Thus we would rather direct our attention to the images that emerge from the film narrative, and that allow for a theological interpretation, while, as with the first film, recognizing that this is not the only interpretation, but claiming that it is a legitimate one.

The Background to the "Nativity"

As was said already, the film does not deal with passion symbols, but with nativity ones. Therefore, as in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, an immediate prehistory is needed. One way of framing the question which the film poses would be to ask, what does it take to be heroic, or, to use a more biblical term, just one filled with *hesed*? None of the characters in the film are naturally brave. Josef spends most of his time complaining about his bad leg and avoiding work. Marie is not above a certain amount of flirting. Horst collaborates with the Nazis and wants to have an affair with Marie. David remains largely hidden from us as he does from the world. This is, in part, to say that even improbable people can do amazingly good things and can be counted among "the righteous of the

[38] As Lenka Karfíková argues, "Gregory does not wish to develop a system of apophatic theology only in the sense of private or negative statements, as we can find with the Arians. Gregory explicitly rejects Eunomius's 'technology' of negative statements as meaningless and says that positive statements have generally a priority over the negative ones." Lenka Karfíková, *Řehořz Nyssy* [*Gregory of Nyssa*] (Praha: Oikúmené, 1999), 186.

[39] Compare to Marion, *God Without Being*, 17. See note 17.

nations"[40]—a message at the heart of *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993). It also reminds us that there are really no reasons for anyone not to do what is good. In his poem, *An die Nachgeborenen*, Bertolt Brecht refers to times when to talk of trees was a crime because it meant not denouncing the evil that was going on.[41] The film agrees. When it is possible to do good, good should be done. Josef acts justly because he should, and because he can. There is underlying this the tension of the kenotic Christ—the self-emptying, the self-giving of Christ is both the fully free decision and desire of Christ and, at the same time, a necessity for humankind, so that it is hard to understand how a loving God could ignore his people in their need.[42]

Here, of course, the parallels to the biblical Joseph are very strong. Joseph does not put Mary aside or abandon her, even though there are so many reasons for this. Following the angel may seem natural enough in the biblical story, but somehow one suspects that it is never quite that easy. To recognize God at work in our own lives is hard enough, but to accept that God is acting in inexplicable ways in someone else's life is even harder. We read the gospel from the end, but Joseph never had that luxury. As in *Forgotten Light*, God's presence in the world is mediated, often in strange and unexpected ways. It is only with some kind of faith that we can see this.

It has already been noted that Josef in our film is not someone who has any marked religious belief. But faith is something that is more complex than belonging to a church or adhering to the tenets of a particular denomination or religion. It may well include these elements; it may well be more complete when it does so, and yet faith is a relationship between a human being and God, and, as with any relationship, it can never be reduced to a simple formula.[43] Josef is, in the film, a fundamentally decent human being, one who is able to recognize the goodness in all, even in Horst, and even in some of the Nazis.

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[40] See on "the righteous among the nations," http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous/index_righteous.html

[41] Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist / Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt! In Bertolt Brecht, *Die Gedichte von Bertolt Brecht in einem Band* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 722-725, here 723.

[42] This debate goes back at least to the dispute between Anselm and later Duns Scotus on the necessity of the Incarnation.

[43] Hebrews 11:1 is not really a formula, and certainly not a simple one. It relies entirely on paradox, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." It is precisely this relationship of paradox that we are talking about.

A Kind of Nativity

The key explicit religious moment in the film is towards the end. The Russians have driven the Germans out. Marie is due to give birth. Josef goes in search of a doctor, and visits the Russian commander's headquarters. One of his neighbors, a man who refused to help David and, indeed, even tried to get him captured by the Nazis, is the leader of the Czech resistance, and accuses Josef of being a collaborator. Josef replies that he has been hiding a Jew, and the army commander agrees to let him bring a doctor from among the captured Nazi prisoners, and they will see if he is telling the truth. Instead of a doctor, however, he chooses Horst, who has been imprisoned.

When they return to the house, and go into the room where David was hidden, they discover he is not there, having fled when he heard the noise. Eventually, just before Josef is to be shot, he is found on the roof. In the meantime, Horst persuades Marie to let him help her with the delivery of the baby, so that he is not taken away by the Russians. The baby is born, and all gather round to admire the newborn baby. Questions are asked about Horst, but David says of him "He is a good man. He knew I was here and he didn't betray me." So, Horst is also spared. The film closes with Josef wheeling his newborn son in a pram through the ruined streets as people start rebuilding their houses, and the ghosts of the dead sit around, smiling and reunited. The child, son of Marie, son of David, son of Josef, brings new life and new hope to all.

Admittedly, none of this is particularly subtle, and, as we have already suggested, there is the permanent danger of sentimentality. Yet somehow it seems to work.[44] Clearly, part of this may say no more than that the story of Jesus, especially the story of the nativity, is a good model story. But we need not only to look for what the Christ nativity story brings to the film, but also to what the film brings to the nativity story. Here it is one particular episode from Czech history that, however, reveals something of the Czech character, and perhaps more generally about the conditions of people like us who are neither fully good nor fully bad, but who are caught in the machinery of events that make claims on their lives, and surprisingly bring out the best and enable us to express what we did not even know was there. This is probably the most upbeat ending of any of the films of Hřebejk and Jarchovsy—offering a real hope that things can improve. Perhaps the more ambiguous endings of their subsequent films reflect the reality

[44] Anecdotal evidence, which is backed up by the viewing figures for the film and its fairly frequent reshowing on television, suggest that many Czechs, even those who are not religious, relate to the film's themes, even if they do not immediately understand the references.

of Czech history over the past fifty years.[45] In these films, religious elements are still there, but more problematically. The absence of the institutional church in *Divided We Fall*, which, given Marie's piety is somewhat strange, has turned by the most recent film, *Beauty in Trouble*, into a jaundiced attack on certain forms of religious hypocrisy. The hope which was there after the war in this child has been replaced by, at best, survival, humor, and an unwillingness to give up completely. In this sense, *Divided We Fall* both presents us with an image of Christ for contemporary Czech society and with reasons why the relationship with Christ in that society is so complicated.

Christ in Post-Secular Society

Both of the films offer traces of Jesus Christ in our post-secular culture. *Forgotten Light* does this by taking on the image of Christ—and thus, in some sense, radicalizing the presence of an empty space in our culture. In theological terms, we spoke about a kenotic Christ. In *Divided We Fall*, Christ is symbolically mediated in names and images redolent of the Incarnation, even if the focus is never on the child.

The extremely indirect depiction of Jesus in both *Forgotten Light* and *Divided We Fall* has the advantage of avoiding the problem that the Iconoclasts were anathematized for at the Second Council of Nicea in 787, but that has never completely disappeared. Is it possible, and if so in what sense, to represent the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth? The true representation, making present, does so by means of inclusion of the absence, of otherness as well. Without the dimension of the other, of the empty space, of the Spirit that fulfils, but at the same time relativizes every image of Christ we have, our images would operate as idols do—not being the absolute themselves—but standing in the place of the absolute.[46] And yet representation is an inevitable part of our Christ-tradition. Without images, symbols and stories, we would not be able to pass the participative story of salvation on. Our filmmakers, Michálek, Hřebejk and Jarchovský, seem to understand, or perhaps better, intuit that. Therefore they have decided, however unconsciously, for a combination of the symbolic mediation of the presence of Christ in the absence of Christ, or at least in the vulnerability and the ambiguity of the figure of the child who was born to us all.

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[45] *Pelíšky* is set in 1967-68, *Pupendo* in the 1980s, while *Horem pádem* and *Krásna v neznásích* are more or less contemporary (the latter is set just after the Prague floods of 2002).

[46] Here again we refer to Jean-Luc Marion. See footnotes 12 and 17.

These films, and especially their acceptance by the public,[47] testify to an interesting shift in our cultural scene. This shift was documented by wide-scale sociological research in the 1990s[48] and led to an interesting conclusion: it is no longer adequate to speak of our society as secular, with one exception—the relationship to religious institutions. Even if more then two-thirds of the population have no religious affiliation, only about 8% claim to be convinced atheists. The 'lapsed atheists' embrace some form of belief that is based on a very fragmented tradition or, rather, fragments of different traditions. Belief that there is something above us—some form of spiritual power, issues of retribution, life after death, prayer or mediation—are back in circulation. But they do not usually come with a desire to know religious doctrine, to observe traditional rituals, to be bound by a code of moral principles, or least of all, to be incorporated into religious institutions.[49]

This shift also influences the role the figure of Jesus Christ can and/or does play in our culture. There is no predominant religious atmosphere comparable to the USA or even, at least until recently, Britain, where due to the respect for the

[47] As indicated by the prizes they won, and their frequent reairing on television. Moreover, the actor who plays the leading role in both films, Bolek Polivka, has received many plaudits for his participation in the films. In a book dedicated to his films, where various other actors were asked to comment on their relations to him, a majority praised his performance in *Forgotten Light* as his best ever role.

[48] The research under the heading of EVS 1999 was carried out by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Masaryk University in Brno as a part of a grant (GAČR 403/99/0326), while the research under the heading of ISSP 1999 was funded by another grant (GAČR 403/99/1129) and carried out by the Sociological Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. The SC&C agency was responsible for data collection and their results were published. See Jan Spousta, "České církve očima sociologických výzkumů," ["The Czech Church through the lens of sociological research"] in Hanuš, (ed.), *Náboženství*, 73-90. (See note 3). For a more detailed analysis, see M. Tomka, "Tendances de la religiosité et de l'orientation vers les Eglises en Europe de l'Est," *Social Compass* 49, n. 4, 540, 544-545: 547; Z. Nešpor, "Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society," *Czech Sociological Review* 3 (2004), 277-295; I. Noble, "Duchovní situace v ČR—výzvy, trendy a nová duchovní orientace," [The religious situation in the Czech Republic—Challenges, Trends and New Spiritual Orientation] *Křestanská Revue* 6 (2003), 151-158. We also rely on the results of a previous study by Ivana Noble: "Czech Churches in Transition," which will be published in the proceedings of the conference *Churches in Central Europe after 1989*, that took place in Sandbjerg in May 2005. Parts of this study are used in this paper.

[49] Compare Bogomilova, "Reflections on the Contemporary Religious 'Revival' Religion," 7. Yet she also recognizes: "Of course, contained in the sum total of people with increased religiousness, there is a percentage of people for whom the change in religious behaviour stems from a deep personal change, from spiritual growth, and is closely connected with a specific religious experience of the sacred. But such change and growth, which arrange the entire life world of a person around God and the sacred, are usually slow and painful; they are accessible only to a few." (6-7)

religious traditions, institutions, and even religious scrupulosity it was, for many years, forbidden to show the person of Jesus on the screen, even though what is probably the earliest film about Jesus, a filmed theatrical presentation ("misrepresentation" interestingly enough) of the famous Oberammergau Passion Play, was made over a hundred years ago.[50] In Communist Czechoslovakia it was also forbidden to portray Jesus on the screen, but for different reasons. However, it has to be said that even in the films from 1920s or 1930s we would rarely find direct religious symbolism, and almost never the figure of Jesus Christ. Yet, again, this was not simply to avoid hurting the religious feelings of believers. Cultural secularization was more advanced. Or to be more exact, the style of most films made about Jesus—choosing to play "safe", and thus presenting him as a blue-eyed blond, taking as their model the horrendously kitsch paintings of the Sacred Heart or illustrations in Bibles which abounded in the nineteenth century—would be attributed to popular country piety. This was despised by the urban culture, within which film was produced as well as 'consumed.'

As we indicated, Czech society from 1990s onwards has been less or differently secular to that of 1920s or 1930s. The unity between religion and culture has been broken, and this results in a form of wide-spread illiteracy concerning Christian *realia* and symbols. But this lack of knowledge is often treated with the same sort of disrespect as popular piety in the culture of the first republic. Moreover, a growing percentage of the population now expects that religion, however complexly understood that term undoubtedly is, can bring something important to their life. Usually, however, they do not expect it from traditional religious institutions.[51] This cultural shift, then, allows films like *Forgotten Light* or *Divided We Fall* to become so successful.

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[50] See, on this, Roy Kinnard and Tim Davis, *Divine Images: A History of Jesus on the Screen* (New York:Citadel Press, 1992), 19-21. The ban, needless to say, has long since disappeared, but the ability of films or programs referring to Jesus to raise opposition from Christian (often even more Muslim) groups remains.

[51] There is an interesting comparison of answers from the research done in 1991, just after the Velvet Revolution, and in 1999 to the following questions: "Do you think that (your) church gives adequate answers to: (a) moral problems and the needs of an individual; (b) problems of family life; (c) spiritual needs of people; (d) present social problems? In 1991 on average 21.4% of respondents did not know (with the exception of social issues, there it was 30,6%), in 1999 on average only about 18% did not know. There was a still bigger decline among those who responded positively; 45% in 1991 became 29.8% in 1999. Those who no longer did not know or no longer said "yes" in 1999 increased the negative answers from 31.3% in 1991 to 52.2% in 1999, a difference of close to 21%. The best result was in answers to spiritual needs, 63.3% of "yes" in 1991 decreased to 56.7%, while the worst result was in answers to present social problems, where an already low 25.9% of yes in 1991 decreased to 12.6% in 1999. See Spousta, "České církve očima sociologických výzkumù,", 84, table 11.

Conclusion

If a Christian theologian wants to lead a dialogue with a neo-religious culture, he or she has to take into account the problematic relationship to religious institutions, and, in case of Christology, also to certain forms of kingly or exaltation Christologies. Despite that, there is another aspect of this dialogue, as our film case studies revealed. Their 'hesitant' images of Christ avoided falling into the trap (perhaps abyss even) of religious propaganda and succeeded in communicating with much wider audiences. And this is where a theologian can learn. Good films employing Christ symbolism are capable of making connections between seemingly dissimilar objects and themes—and a theologian can be surprised once again that the rich living metaphors presented in good films can be found also in a theological tradition that was closer to art than to propaganda. In films, it is perhaps more visible, as Thom Parham puts it: "As long as people of faith are more concerned with messages than metaphors, they are doomed to make bad films."[52] This rule applies analogically also to theology. As Parham says of the theme of this article, Christology:

> Christian film makers seem to dislike mystery. Rather than using Jesus's construct, 'The kingdom of God is like…' their films often proclaim, 'The kingdom of God *is*.' Nothing is left to the imagination. Audiences are not allowed to make their own connections; they are told what to think.… This approach no matter how sincere, rings false to audiences and leaves them manipulated.[53]

Again, analogically this rule applies to theology. Here I do not mean to say that theology has no normative rules to follow, that an Arian Christology is as good as a Nicene one, that it does not matter whether one believes that Christ was truly human and truly God or the first and the best of God's creatures. The analogy, in our view, applies elsewhere; namely, that there is a difference between putting forward one's convictions and the search for truth. And as good, traditional Christology reminds us, the search for truth is as open-ended as the God whom we experience and profess—a God, who despite becoming human, also remains a mystery. Theology shares with film the fact that neither is a "proselytizing device"[54] to proclaim a ready-made set of ideas and values.

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[52] Thomas Parham, "Why do Heathens Make the Best Christian Films?" in *Beyond the Screen: Holywood Insiders on Faith, Film and Culture.* Spencer Lewrenz and Barbara Nicolosi, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 53-64, here 59.

[53] Parham, "Why do Heathens Make the Best Christian Films?", 58.

[54] See Parham, "Why do Heathens Make the Best Christian Films?", 58, n. 2.

Only under the condition that theologians deal with the mystery of God and not with the idol of God created by religious propaganda can they access their treasures and share them with others. This, among other things, re-opens the possibility of spelling out the otherness of Christ's kingdom and his kingly office passed on to his followers as based in *kenosis*, in generosity, in emptying oneself, in giving so that the needy might receive, and, in that activity, finding God.