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IX Film: Europe and Russia

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ever, has come from North American jazz musicians, bands, and song writers. To give just one example out of numerous popular individual artists and groups in various countries: a young Danish song writer, singer, and guitarist, Jonas Haahr Petersen (born 1987), and his band *Hymns from Nineveh* in two recent CDs, *Endurance in Christmas Time* and *Hymns from Nineveh* (both 2011), reflect on Christian and biblical topics, sometimes with a content of praise:

The Boy in the Manger
took form as our savior
in nothing but hay, there
Hey there!
Come on in
come on in
behold what is to begin!
("The Boy in the Manger," *Endurance*)

At other times the biblical allusion is less direct:

When I don't know who I am
then I think of the words that you told me
when I stepped out of the boat
tried to walk on the waves
but I sank
deeper into the grave of my thought...
("Eveningsong," *Hymns from Nineveh*)

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Nils Holger Petersen

IX. Film

The Bible has served as the basis for numerous screenplays in European cinema since the inception of the medium in the late 19th century, and as an equally prominent source of TV adaptations and video/DVD productions since the 1970s. Three overarching interests can be discerned in the production of Bible films in Europe. First, educational and catechetical interests exploit the genre to disseminate biblical teaching. Such films are principally aimed at existing believers and are frequently screened during religious festivals. Second, commercial interests exploit the popularity and familiarity of biblical narratives by means of spectacular visual representations in order to guarantee box-office success. Third, artistic interests engage critically with the theological and philosophical content of the biblical narratives. In many productions, there may be an intertwining of all three aspects to varying degrees.

In contrast, from its beginning, Russian cinema was controlled and restricted by national censorship, which had a significant impact on the portrayal of religious and biblical topics. Thus, the following survey will focus primarily on European cinema, sketching significant trends in succeeding eras while paying particular attention to the Jesus film sub-genre and to Bible films more generally. Because the chosen films are exemplary, individual biblical motifs – such as creation, paradise/Eden, and apocalypse – will not receive separate discussion here.

1. Silent Era. In the early silent era of filmmaking, the Bible served as a multifaceted source of inspiration. From the outset, the Passion Narrative was a prominent topic. Among the first to bring this tradition to screen were film pioneers the Lumière brothers in a French production entitled *La vie et la passion de Jésus-Christ* (dir. George Hatot, 1897, *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*), a cinematic interpretation of the Oberammergau Passion Play. Many other passion films followed – in Austria *The Passion Play* (dir. Henry C. Vincent, 1897); in France *La passion* (Gaum, 1898, *The Passion*), *La vie et la passion de Notre-Seigneur Jésus Christ* (dir. Ferdinand Zecca/Lucien Nonguet, 1905, *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*), *La vie du Christ* (dir. Alice Guy et al., 1906, *The Life of Christ*), *La passion de Jesus* (dir. Segundo de Chomon, 1907, *The Passion of Jesus*); and in Great Britain *The Passion Play* (Gaumont, 1909). These films all shared the pedagogical purpose of providing a practical theological education for the audience, as such films were often used during Passion Week. These screenings were banned in Catholic churches in 1912, however, by papal decree.

Despite the prominence of the Passion narrative, other NT topics were also selected, as seen in the French-produced silent film of director Georges Méliès, *Le Christ marchant sur les flots* (1899, *Christ*

Walks on Water). Silent films also focused on significant HB/OT plots and characters. Pathé films in France produced several short films on HB/OT topics (e.g., *Samson et Delila*, dir. Ferdinand Zecca, 1903; *Le festin de Balthazar*, dir. Lucien Nonguet, 1905, *The Feast of Belshazzar*; *Daniel dans la fosse aux lions*, dir. Louis Feuillade, 1905, *Daniel in the Lions' Den*). The early prominence of French Bible films was soon followed by a remarkable production output of biblical-themed films in Italy (e.g., *Giudetta e Oloferne*, Clines, 1906, *Judith and Holofernes*) and subsequently in Great Britain (e.g., *Noah's Ark*, dir. Arthur Melbourne Cooper, 1909; and *Adam and Eve*, dir. Phil Bruns, 1910). Many European silent films were also screened in the U.S., such as the Italian-produced *Quo Vadis?* (dir. Enrico Guazzoni, 1913), which subsequently inspired two U.S. remakes in 1925 (prod. A. Ambrosio) and in 1951 (dir. Mervyn Le Roy).

The few treatments of the Bible in Russian cinema during this era are characterized by the use of symbolism to evade censors. While it was permitted to portray the devil, it was forbidden to depict the character of Jesus, even by means of allusion. Consequently, there are a smaller number of more symbolic biblical films in Russian cinema of the silent era – e.g., *Satan triomphan* (dir. Iakov Protazonov, 1917, *Satan Triumphant*), *Ces qui mentent à Dieu* (dir. A. Chargonym, 1917, *Those Who Lie to God*), *Les colombes blanches* (dir. Nikolai Malikov, 1918, *The White Doves*).

2. 1920s–30s. More developed and expansive treatments of biblical subject matter began to emerge in this era. One significant director was the Dane, Carl Theodor Dreyer, who dealt with the subject of evil in the artistic horror film *Blade af Satans bog* (1921, *Leaves from Satan's Book*). In one of the four segments in this film, Satan is depicted as interfering in Jesus' life. The Austrian film *Sodom und Gomorra* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1922/23, *Sodom and Gomorrah*) opened up a new dimension in Bible films, with its extended length of 80 minutes and its marked popularity in Europe. Now more familiarly known by his original Hungarian name, Mikhaly Kertész, Curtiz created this film in two parts by telling parallel stories set in ancient and modern times. *Die Sklavenkönigin* (1924, *Queen of the Slaves*, released in the U.S. as *Moon of Israel*), Curtiz's last production before he moved to America, staged the story of Moses and the Exodus using special effects to recreate the parting of the Red Sea.

Another hugely significant aspect of this era was the transition from silent films to "talkies." Regarded as the first all-talking film focused on the Bible, *Ecce homo* (dir. Julien Duvivier, 1935) once again returns to the prominent theme of Passion Week, pervasive since the outset of the silent era. A shorter, dubbed version entitled *Golgotha* was screened in the U.S. in 1937.

3. 1940s–60s. Towards the end of 1930s and in the early 1940s few noteworthy Bible films were produced. One reason for this was most certainly World War II and the reaction against the Nazi regime, which manipulated the cinematic genre for its own ideological messages and propaganda.

In the 1950s and 1960s, however, with the advent of color, a new type of Bible film emerged, often referred to as the "Sword-and-Sandal" film, which portrayed epic biblical plots in a comic and musical style aimed at entertainment and mass-consumption. Such films used cutting-edge color technology (CinemaScope) to portray lavish, biblical epics in Technicolor.

In Europe this trend toward more entertaining biblical films was met in the newly-partitioned West Germany by films such as *Der Apfel ist ab* (dir. Helmut Käutner, 1948, *The Apple Is Eaten*, released in the U.S. as *The Original Sin*), a satirical musical-comedy based on the Adam and Eve story. The Italian producer Dino de Laurentiis, who later produced *La Bibbia* (dir. John Huston, 1966, released in the US as *The Bible: In the Beginning*), made another Adam and Eve satirical musical-comedy, *Adamo ed Eva* (dir. Mario Mattoli, 1950, *Adam and Eve*), focusing on the relationship between men and women through the ages. These two examples were typical of musical-based Bible films in this era of experimentation with sound in the cinema.

Towards the end of this period, the late 1950s and early 1960s, a wealth of more artistic productions arose in Italy, often co-productions with France, Spain, or the U.S., which aimed at more wide-ranging commercial success. Greater commercial prominence was achieved by subsequently distributing dubbed versions across Europe and the U.S. – e.g., *Giudetta e Oloferne* (dir. Fernando Cerchio, 1959, *Judith and Holofernes*), *David e Golia* (dir. Richard Pottier/Ferdinando Baldi, 1959, *David and Goliath*), *Il vecchio Testamento* (dir. Gianfranco Parolini, 1963, *The Old Testament*), *La spade e la croce* (dir. Ottavio Poggio, 1959, *The Sword and the Cross*), *Ultimi giorni di Pompeii* (dir. Mario Bonnard, 1959, *Last Days of Pompeii*).

Three films fall outside of the mainstream of Italian productions in this era. The first is the Nouvelle Vague episodic film *RoGoPaG*, of which the 40-minute episode *La ricotta* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962, *Curd Cheese*) is based upon Matthew's gospel. A film within a film, it contrasts the serious filming of the passion play with the misbehavior of the actors between takes. The second, Pasolini's *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*), tells the story of Jesus' life and resurrection by stressing socialist aspects. This black-and-white film is not widely distributed but is often critically discussed in an academic context. Thirdly, neorealist filmmaker Roberto Rossellini directed *Atti degli Apostoli* (1968, *Acts of the Apostles*), a TV production

about the first apostles of Jesus told in five parts, although the last part was never transmitted.

4. 1970s–80s. Bible films became less common in European cinema in the 1970s and 1980s but gained prominence in the increasingly significant TV production context as most households now owned televisions. Perhaps the longest Bible film ever made, *Jesus of Nazareth* (dir. Franco Zeffirelli), a four-part 370-minute TV epic that premiered on British TV, recounts the story of Jesus from birth to death and resurrection. Another significant TV miniseries focusing on Jesus' life is the Italian/French co-production *Il Messia* (dir. R. Rossellini, 1976, *The Messiah*). Rossellini's artistic background leaves neorealistic traces in the film's style. The Polish TV miniseries *Dekalog* (dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1989–90, *The Decalogue*) offered a series of modern-day meditations on the Ten Commandments.

This period was also characterized by some innovative, experimental, and critical screenings of biblical stories, with influential traces of the new wave of the 1950s, such as the French/Italian co-production *La voie lactée* (1970, *The Milky Way*) directed by the surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel. This film portrays a modern-day pilgrimage, which includes visions and religious experiences by the pilgrims of the Virgin Mary and Jesus' crucifixion. Equally innovative is the Neuer Deutscher Film based on Arnold Schoenberg's three-act opera *Moses und Aaron* (dir. Jean-Marie Straub/Danièle Straub-Huillet, 1975, *Moses and Aaron*).

Another significant production of the 1970s was Great Britain's *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (dir. Terry Jones, 1979), a commercially successful satire with obvious links to Jesus' life that provoked a controversial public debate. Members of diverse religious groups and denominations in Europe and the U.S. tried to prohibit the screening of this film and many countries banned it as a consequence. In the 1980s the Nouvelle Vague director Jean-Luc Godard obtained similar responses to *Je vous salut, Marie* (1983, *Hail Mary*) because of concerted opposition by religious organizations. Godard's film is an adaptation of the virgin birth that considers how Mary and Joseph may have dealt with their situation in a modern day setting.

In this era, too, the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovskii dealt with broader biblical resonances in more symbolic modes (e.g., *Offret*, 1986, *The Sacrifice*).

5. 1990s–Present. In recent decades, Bible films have been less common and principally concentrated on close adaptations produced for television. The German company Kirch-Group produced an extensive TV adaptation of the HB/OT in 16 parts (dir. Roger Young/Robert Markowitz, 1993–99) and the NT in five parts (1999–2002). Representative of this era, the series was conceptualized for TV exploitation and the DVD market. Two other TV pro-

ductions show Mary's life and her relationship to Jesus – the French film *Marie de Nazareth* (dir. Jean Delannoy, 1995, *Mary of Nazareth*) and the Italian film *Maria, figlia del suo figlio* (dir. Fabrizio Costa, 2000, *Mary, Daughter of Her Son*). Both films fill gaps and silences in the Bible with some creative inventions, aiming to present a coherent perspective on Mary's understanding of Jesus' life, with a contemporary emphasis. Contemporary screenings of Bible narratives distinguish themselves rather more by their overtly pedagogical purposes and much less by their artistic aspirations, echoing the function of some early silent-era screenings of the passion. The target audience of such films, which are interested in promoting an uncritical representation of the Bible, is mostly Christian believers and institutions – e.g., *Jésus* (dir. Serge Moati, 1999), *The Miracle Maker – The Story of Jesus* (dir. Derek W. Hayes, 2000), *The Gospel of John* (dir. Philip Saville, 2003).

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Marie-Therese Mäder

Europos, Dura-

→ Dura-Europos

Europus

→ Carchemish

Eusebius of Caesarea

Eusebius (born before 265), a disciple of Pamphilus and second-generation disciple of Origen, was the bishop of Caesarea Maritima from about 314 until his death in 339 or 340. He is noted as the author of the first account of church history (*Hist. eccl.*). His extensive opus, however, also includes many exegetical works. Eusebius' exegesis is characterized by an apologetic intention, which, in the face of opposition from pagans and Jews, aims to justify the truth of Christianity on the basis of Scripture and defend it from criticism.

Despite some uncertainties in determining composition dates, one can assume that Eusebius' exegetical works were written over the entire duration of his ministry. Among his writings on the OT, two large commentaries – one on Isaiah (*Comm. Isa.*), the