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**Herrmann, Jörg: *Warum ich? Hiob-Motive im Spielfilm*. Marburg: Schüren 2024. 248 S. (Religion, Film und Medien 11), kt. € 28,00 ISBN: 978-3-7410-0463-6**

Jörg Herrmann's book *Warum ich? Hiob-Motive im Spielfilm* draws the reader in from the very first page, thanks to the author's apt choice of the subject matter – Job is the most significant figure of the Old Testament in culture, including in film – and his manner of presentation. In this particular theodicy, the author examines films.

The structure of the book is clear and well thought out: the first chap. (19–36) provides a concise overview of the Book of Job and its reception in culture in general and in film culture in particular. The next chap. introduces the religious-hermeneutic discourse of film, thus explaining the method the author will use to discuss films. Here, the author points to the religious dimensions of cinema and film, the religious-theoretical perspective, the aesthetic dimension, and the methods of constructing analyses and interpretations of films.

These two chapters serve as a methodological and thematic introduction to the extensive central section (47–209), which contains discussions of selected films. The author has chosen eleven films with characters explicitly and implicitly referring to Job, which he discusses in chronological order of their production: this decision shows how, over four decades (between 1978 and 2017), the cinematic perception of the character of Job and the approach of filmmakers grappling with this theme have changed. The first three films are European war dramas: the Austrian television series *Hiob*, the Hungarian *Revolt of Job* and the Soviet *Come and See*. The next three are comedies: the Finnish *Drifting Clouds*, the American *Bruce Almighty* and the Danish *Adam's Apples*. The book concludes with a selection of five dramas: the American films *A Serious Man* and *The Tree of Life*, the Belgian-Dutch film *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, the Russian film *Leviathan*, and the American film *First Reformed*. The filmography (241–244) additionally includes nearly 80 other films mentioned in the book. The last two chap.s summarise the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the films.

The author's attitude is one of the book's strengths: he does not hide his long-standing passion and interest in the figure of Job, while at the same time combining the perspectives of a film scholar and a theologian. Without this interdisciplinary approach, it would be difficult to present this subject in a factual manner, as it centres on both the suffering of an innocent man and the question of God's silence, or perhaps even His guilt, and the role of Satan. It is therefore not surprising that in the introductory essay, the author refers to the experience of Auschwitz and the theological consequences of that fall of humanity, which, however, did not result from God's silence, but from the rejection of His voice by people. It was men, turned away from God, who committed unimaginable evil contrary to Him, which cannot be limited to the Holocaust and the crimes of the World War. It is worth noting

that motifs taken from the Book of Job appear in the film *Triumph of Heart* (dir. Anthony D'Ambrosio, 2025), which tells the story of the martyrdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe and his companions in the starvation bunker of Auschwitz.

This is, of course, not the first publication whose authors analyse the presence of the figure of Job in culture: among recent publications, it is worth mentioning, among others, the book *HIOB – transdisziplinär*<sup>1</sup> and Reinhold Zwick's comprehensive article<sup>2</sup>. Zwick's text presents a similar selection of films: *The Tree of Life*, *Drifting Clouds*, *Bruce Almighty*, *Adam's Apples*, *A Serious Man*, and *Leviathan*, also mentioning rare cases of films in which the character of Job is played by an actor: *Hiob* (dir. Kurt Matull, 1919) and *Mon cas* (1986) by the renowned director Manoel de Oliveira.

Of course, one may have reservations about the book, both in terms of the method of presenting the films and the selection of films, which was certainly limited by the planned volume of the publication. Jörg Herrmann explains the method of analysis of every selected film in a short methodological chapter: he starts with a summary, then discusses the content, followed by aesthetics and dramaturgy, before moving on to figures and constellations and indicating the religious dimension (44). However, this method results in a certain degree of repetitiveness in the discussions of the films. There are some shortcomings in the book: it is unfortunate that there is no index of films. A certain oversight is the names written in the Hebrew alphabet in the wrong (Latin) direction (127).

The chosen time results in the absence of several older and newer films. Among the analysed film figures of Job, there are no women as leading characters: indeed, the female characters in *The Mother of Król* (*Matka Królów*, dir. Janusz Zaorski, 1987), *Quo Vadis, Aida?* (dir. Jasmila Žbanić, 2020) and *Mother of Apostles* (*Maty apostoliv*, dir. Zaza Buadze, 2020) could be interpreted in this way. Also Chris Nielsen (Robin Williams), protagonist of *What Dreams May Come* (dir. Vincent Ward, 1998) can be considered a Job-figure: he loses his children, and when he dies in a car accident and enters Heaven, he discovers that his beloved wife Annie has killed herself out of grief over the loss (another Job-figure?). The dominant motifs come from the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and from Dante's vision of hell in *The Divine Comedy*, but the conclusion is quite optimistic: in a new reincarnation, Chris and Annie are reunited. Another example is the Iranian film *A Man of Integrity* (*Lerd*, dir. Mohammad Rasoulof, 2017), whose protagonist, an ordinary honest man, becomes the target of successive injustices committed by the local authorities, leading to the breakdown of his family and the loss of his property. Unlike in the biblical story, the ending of this film offers no hope. Although the film was made outside the context of Christian culture, the theme of Job is recognisable here.

Polish cinema, which I study as a theologian, has also taken up the theme of Job. One example is ambassador Wiktor from *Persona non grata* (dir. Krzysztof Zanussi, 2005). His wife dies, his friends and colleagues abuse his trust and friendship, and finally, as a result of unjust decisions, he is removed from his position. The film's ending does not show his triumph, but rather his regaining happiness in the afterlife, once again with his wife. Another Job-like character is Father Jan from the film *Who Never Lived* (*Kto nigdy nie żył*, dir. Andrzej Seweryn, 2005), who, after returning from a mission in Africa, is diagnosed with HIV. His previous faithfulness to God and devotion to his priestly ministry are put to the test. However, he manages to overcome the crisis he faces and return to his work with

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<sup>1</sup> Werner SCHÜßLER/Marc RÖBEL (Hg.) *HIOB – transdisziplinär*. Seine Bedeutung in Theologie und Philosophie, Kunst und Literatur, Lebenspraxis und Spiritualität. Münster 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Zwick: *The Book of Job in the Movies: On Cinema's Exploration of Theodicy and the Hiddenness of God*, in: Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch (Hg.): *The Bible in Motion. A Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception in Film*. Bd. I. Berlin/Boston 2016, 355–377.

young people. Another priest who undergoes a Job-like experience is the protagonist of the Czech film *Forgotten Light* (*Zapomenuté světlo*, dir. Vladimír Michálek, 1996).

The theme of Job, the character of the biblical book, which would be difficult to translate directly to the screen, is still relevant today due to the ever-renewing experiences of people. Recently, one of my colleagues, a widow, unexpectedly lost her daughter. This is a Job-like situation that happens every day. The question posed in the title of Herrmann's book, *Why me?*, is still relevant, so the book can be a good inspiration for viewers' further personal explorations, and perhaps also for creating an even broader perspective that will reveal numerous other Job-like characters appearing and recurring in cinema, such as in *Fiddler on the Roof* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1971), whose protagonist argues with God and, in intolerant Tsarist Russia, experiences the gradual loss of his family, home, and the world in which he lived.

I am convinced that the book can be of great value both to theologians, to whom it presents various ways of interpreting the presence of the character of Job on screen, and to cinema lovers, to whom it points to the possibility of a deeper reading of even apparently light-hearted films (comedies), which nevertheless contain serious questions drawn from „the great code” (Northrop Frye) that is the Bible.

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