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Touched by Grace? A Look at Grace in Bergman's *Winter Light* and Martin Luther's Writings

Abstract

Ingmar Bergman holds a prominent place in the lineup of directors who have used cinema to investigate the meaning of life in a godless world. The so-called “Trilogy of God’s Silence” is often identified as the place where Bergman struggled most profoundly with core themes from the Christian faith. In *Winter Light*, he explores the topic of doubt, devastatingly, through a minister’s religious and existential crisis. This article, however, proposes that Martin Luther’s theology may provide resources for reappraising Bergman’s canonical film.

Keywords

Bergman, Luther, grace, *Winter Light*, God's masks

Author Notes

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INTRODUCTION

Despite Ingmar Bergman's opposition to institutional religion, the word and the phenomenon of grace play an important role in several of his movies.¹ Catherine Wheatley argues that Bergman was an agnostic concerned with the loss of religion. She underscores that religion became the central theme of his films in the late 1950s and early 1960s, culminating in the faith trilogy with its explorations of God's silence.² Following this, Wheatley claims that "Grace isn't a word that fits easily into Bergman's vocabulary." Nonetheless, Wheatley maintains that something like grace "can be found in the moments of human communion dotted throughout these films."³

Winter Light is an ideal film for investigating grace, as Bergman's explorations of faith, doubt, and existential angst are fundamental and severe in this movie. Moreover, *Winter Light* is a significant film because it signals a shift towards a more openly critical depiction of religion.⁴ Despite a large number of studies on the existential dimensions of Bergman's films and the Lutheran milieu whose influence on him and his productions was formative, there is a lack of studies reading Bergman's films in light of Martin Luther's central concepts or works. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Martin Luther's understanding of grace may provide resources for reappraising *Winter Light*. Paying attention to Luther's theology may provide insights into the Lutheran context and its significance for understanding particular scenes in Bergman's film. Additionally, it may provide resources for interpreting the explicit

theological discourses in *Winter Light*. The premise of this article is *not* a claim that Bergman had read Luther's central reformatory works, but rather that concepts from Luther's theology may provide analytical resources for reappraising the film.

An additional motivation for this article is the lack of attention historically paid to cinematic style in the interpretations of Bergman's films. Maaret Koskinen emphasizes the significance of religious imagery in his movies, arguing that the director in certain scenes used visual and auditory means to create moments of grace.⁵ Koskinen explains that the cinematic style in *Winter Light* is particularly interesting to analyze because in this film Bergman managed to develop a distinctive, mature, and ascetic cinematic style unlike the baroque aesthetics that characterized his earlier movies.⁶ Interpretations disregarding Bergman's cinematic style not only run the risk of reducing his films to texts⁷ but also ignore a significant way that films convey meaning.

My research question then is: In what manner may Martin Luther's understanding of grace provide resources for interpreting *Winter Light*? Before exploring this question, it is essential to consider the best way to conduct a theological analysis of film, since such investigations are fraught with difficulties. Richard Blake warns that theological film interpretation can tempt the interpreter to work violence upon the film by imposing religious meaning and finding religious symbols where they are neither intended by the filmmakers nor congruent with the narrative or theme of the film.⁸ The first

section of the article briefly presents Gordon Lynch's model for conducting a dialogue between theology and popular culture. The merit of this model is firstly, that it focuses the interpretation on the voice of the film itself, and secondly, that it proposes a way to balance the contributions of theology and popular culture in a dialogue. The remaining structure of the article follows Lynch's model. The second section presents a close reading of *Winter Light* and establishes a foundation for the discussion. The third section turns to the understanding of grace in Luther's central reformatory works. Finally, I discuss the research question, combining insights from the close reading and the Lutheran context.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF FILM

Richard Blake warns that theological film interpretation is a "dangerous business, for theologian and film critic alike."⁹ He advises developing a methodology that permits investigating possible faith dimensions in a film while preserving the integrity of the artwork.¹⁰ Anita Cloete makes a similar case, stating that in addition to studying the form and content of a film, it may also be important to focus on the viewer and the viewer's interpretation.¹¹ But how can we do so successfully?

Gordon Lynch has developed a three-step model for conducting dialogues between theology and popular culture. His *Revised Correlational Model* balances respect for the integrity of the film with an emphasis on searching for interpretational keys in the investigator's religious context.¹²

Adapting Lynch's recommendations to the interpretation of film, the main steps will be:

1. *Close reading of the film.* The first analytical step entails investigating the meaning of the movie on the film's terms, establishing a horizon for a dialogue between film and theology. The main part of this article is a close reading of *Winter Light* with grace and God's silence as focal points.
2. *Investigation of the interpreter's religious context as a potential resource for understanding the film.* The second analytical step involves developing analytical tools for a dialogue between theology and film by clarifying Luther's view on grace. I will present two closely related understandings: first, grace as the justification by faith alone without acts, and second, grace as inferred by the concept of *larva Dei*, God's masks. This concept makes clear how Luther made sense of and explained God's acts in the world.
3. *Dialogue and discussion.* This part of the analysis aims to use the key results from steps 1 and 2 to investigate what insights a dialogue between film and theology may provide.

WINTER LIGHT – A CLOSE READING: STEP 1

Nattvardsgästerna, the Swedish title of *Winter Light*, means "The Communicants." Bergman thus makes the sacrament and the people taking part in the liturgy the focus of the film. Visually the film begins and ends almost identically. The first image is a close-up of the pastor as he reads from the

liturgy introducing the Holy Communion. The church is nearly empty. The plot plays out within just a few hours, between the pastor's two services with Eucharist that Sunday.

The main character in the film is the minister Tomas. His life fell apart after he lost his wife, and his faith has gradually become meaningless. His name is a reference to the disciple Thomas, known for his doubt in the risen Christ. During an early scene, the clergyman says he feels cut off from God. Bergman thereby introduces God's silence as the theme of the movie.

Winter Light is a character-driven drama. Märta is a teacher and a central character in the film. She tries to reach through Tomas's hard shell and sees it as her task in life to love him. Märta is critical for understanding Tomas, as his ruthless rejection of her is a key point in several of the film's scenes.

Jonas is a fisherman who seeks Tomas's guidance in pastoral care. Tomas, however, fails to provide Jonas with an answer to his urgent question about why he should continue living. The minister talks to the confidant about his own doubt and the *teodiceé* problem (the problem of evil). Shortly after talking to the clergyman, Jonas commits suicide.

Algot is the sexton. He does not appear in many scenes, but Bergman emphasizes his key role in the film's ending. Concluding the reflections on the characters of the film, it is worth suggesting that Bergman is close to making the empty church one of the main characters. His frequent use of close-ups highlights details in the interior, the altarpiece, and the crucifix. Bergman also

dwells on the silence, the emptiness, and the sharp light falling in from the windows.

The clergyman's doubt is a central theme of the movie. The minister appears indifferent to everything and everyone around him. He even reads the liturgy inexpressively. Bergman shows a transformation from a strong to a shattered faith. During pastoral care, the minister tells Jonas about his altered faith. When newly ordained, everything made perfect sense to Tomas. He believed in a private God who loved him more than anyone else, an echo-God who willingly gave answers and blessings. This comforting image of God, however, fell apart when Tomas's wife died. When he confronted God with the pain of his existence, God turned ugly, and faith lost its meaning. On several occasions, the pastor characterizes his faith, directly or indirectly. The most devastating examples accompany his conversations with Jonas. Following the first session, Tomas says of the altarpiece, "What a ridiculous image." Bergman underscores this statement with two close-ups, first of the altarpiece, and second of the minister's face. One possible interpretation connects this statement to the clergyman's crisis of faith and his suffering, indicating that a suffering God is no better than man. Tomas indicates that a suffering God is ridiculous and helpless and in no position to offer relief or salvation. Tomas himself fails twice to help his confidant. After the second consultation with Jonas, the minister exclaims "God, why have you abandoned me?" Bergman explores this moment by zooming in slowly to an extreme close-up, showing the clergyman's

uncertainty. Bergman highlights the significance of this scene by later quoting Jesus's parallel cry on the cross.

The conversation between Algot and the pastor in the sacristy offers some important clues for the argument in this article. In this scene, the sexton Algot demonstrates a unique capacity for saying what the pastor needs to hear at a fundamental level. Algot wishes to discuss the meaning of Christ's passion with the clergyman, telling Tomas that he perceives much greater suffering behind Jesus's bodily suffering. Algot argues that God abandoned Jesus when he really needed someone to trust:

When Christ was nailed to the cross, he cried: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He shouted as loud as he managed. He thought that his Heavenly Father had abandoned him... that everything he had preached had been a lie. A profound doubt struck Christ before he died. *That* must have been the most terrible form of suffering. I mean God's silence.¹³

The pastor whispers "Yes, yes," as an answer to Algot's interpretation of Christ's suffering. The closing events in the film, however, suggest that the sexton's reflections had made an impression on Tomas.

Director and scriptwriter Paul Schrader developed a theory of transcendental style in film based on the films of Dreyer, Ozu, and Bresson. Schrader's reflections are relevant to the present argument because *Winter Light* shares several similarities with the films of these directors.¹⁴ According to Schrader, Bresson attempts to create a cinematic style that may express that which is behind, or beyond, the action of the movie—the transcendent. He struggles to portray the everyday so accurately,¹⁵ concentratedly, and

unspectacularly, that the viewer may be able to perceive the transcendent as a force that operates *between* the frames, affecting the characters in the film. Bresson's style involves a celebration of the trivial, the use of diegetic sound and music, and a concentration on small visual details.¹⁶ The intention is to focus so sharply on the everyday that the audience may experience something greater. Bresson strongly emphasizes creating a *divergence* between the main character and the environment. Another important feature in his style is the culmination of a film in a *decisive action* that points toward something greater, a shocking act in the frame of a cold cinematic universe.¹⁷ Finally, Schrader argues that *stasis* is the crucial characteristic for transcendental style.¹⁸ He uses stasis as a concept for very calm and slow closing scenes that offer the audience a glimpse of another and greater reality—an experience that may shed new light on the understanding of the *everyday*.¹⁹

Bergman argued that directors through the medium of film should strive to access hitherto-unseen worlds.²⁰ When making *Winter Light*, he adopted Carl Theodor Dreyer's "theories about 'abstraction' as a means to reach beyond the surface of things, thereby amplifying the spiritual."²¹ Moreover, the movie displays an uncompromising simplicity and aesthetic strictness that bears strong similarities to Bresson's style. Bergman only uses diegetic music in *Winter Light*: the hymns of the service. He insisted on cutting out all artificial lighting and forced the cinematographer Sven Nykvist to be "one hundred percent realistic in [his] lighting."²² The clearest deviation from his similarities with Bresson is probably in the editing and Bergman's searching for the most

profound emotions through close-ups of the character's expressive faces. Bergman directs even the most dramatic scenes in the movie in an unspectacular and everyday manner. Like Bresson, he carefully avoids every excess in the storytelling. Following Jonas's suicide, when the minister and the police find his body, the camera observes the event from a remarkable distance. This choice leaves the impression that the characters are literally small pieces facing the destruction and pain of existence.

THE LUTHERAN CONTEXT AS A RESOURCE FOR INTERPRETATION: STEP 2

Following the model for the theological interpretation of film, the second analytical step moves the focus to the interpreter's context. The purpose of this article is to investigate whether Luther's view of grace may provide a fruitful starting point for analyzing *Winter Light*. The presentation of Luther will be limited to his interpretation of grace as a gift and his view on how God operates in the world today and grants man his grace.

Grace is a crucial concept for Luther, as he developed his main contribution to theology while striving to understand salvation. How could he find a gracious God? How could he trust that God would grant him grace and salvation? In the introduction to the first book in his collected works, Luther describes his theological breakthrough that led him to a new understanding of the important term "God's righteousness." The traditional Catholic teaching is that God's righteousness is what makes God just when he punishes sinners; it

is a property of God. By contrast, Luther argues that God's righteousness is a gift from God, by faith: "With this [gift], God shows mercy and makes us just by faith."²³ Luther named this insight *solo gratia* (grace alone). God saves man by grace alone. Man can do nothing to contribute to his own salvation. Even so, Luther insists that acts of faith are essential because our neighbor needs us. Good deeds should be the fruits of a life in faith, and man should strive to live virtuous lives. Nonetheless, grace is by its very nature a gift.

Luther's view of grace as a gift from God is closely connected to his understanding of how God acts in the world today. When interpreting the apostolic creed, Luther argues that God, on the one hand, is the origin and creator of the world and every living being. On the other hand, Luther maintains that God continues his acts of creation in the world today.²⁴ Luther uses the term *larva Dei* (God's masks) to explain this. In his commentary to Psalm 147:13, Luther writes, "These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things."²⁵ According to Luther, God is simultaneously present and hidden in the world today. This understanding has significant implications for Luther's view on grace. As a consequence of man's sinful nature, he cannot see the transcendent God and survive. Thus, Anthony Steinbronn argues that "since the fall of Man, there can be no unmediated relationship between God and Man. God must wear a 'mask' or a 'veil' in all of His dealings with man."²⁶

The most critical point for the present argument is that Luther argues that it is man's calling to be God's masks, to be his servants who make him

visible in the world.²⁷ God hides behind his masks to give man his grace. The mask metaphor is Luther's answer to theology's challenge of explaining the silence of God (cf. the close reading above), or, in Luther's terms, the distinction between the hiddenness and presence of God. Luther underscores that God continues his creation in the world today, through the acts of others. Behind the goodness that other people show us we may perceive glimpses of God. God's presence, however, may only be experienced through faith.²⁸

To conclude: Luther uses the term "grace" with two different meanings. Grace is a gift from God, the key to salvation. In this sense, it refers to the salvific death of Jesus on the cross. In the broader sense, however, grace also points to the gifts man receives from God as he operates in the world today, hiding behind his masks. These gifts, according to Luther, encompass all of man's needs and everything that enables life.

DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSION – REFLECTIONS ON GRACE IN BERGMAN AND LUTHER: STEP 3

The third step in the model for the theological interpretation of film involves using the insights from the previous stages in a dialogue. The close reading of *Winter Light* concluded that God's silence was a major theme of the film. The conversation between the minister and the sexton in the sacristy explored this topic in explicitly theological terms, thus providing a firm rationale for framing the last part of the article as a discussion of God's silence

and the meaning of grace in Luther and Bergman. What may Luther's understanding of grace and his mask metaphor offer for interpretations of *Winter Light*? This way of asking requires one to look for signs of grace, and possible providers of grace, in Bergman's film.

Doubt and despair are prominent motifs in Bergman's films. Despite this, there are several glimpses of grace in the director's works. His characters explicitly use the term, and when they do so, they occasionally use phrases that bears a resemblance to Luther's mask metaphor. In Bergman's films, grace may be present in family life and good relations. Grace manifests itself as a joy towards life and as freedom from whatever is limiting life. Gustaf Adolf's speech toward the end of *Fanny and Alexander* (Bergman 1982) fits this understanding.²⁹ Other Bergman movies indicate that grace can be interpreted as a state where interpersonal or existential solitude shrinks or disappears. Eva's letter toward the end of *Autumn Sonata* (Bergman 1978) exemplifies this. After a painful struggle with her mother, Eva writes:

I hope that my discovery shall not be in vain. There is some kind of grace. I mean, the vast opportunity we are given to take care of each other, to help each other, to show kindness. I will never let you out of my life. I will be stubborn. I will not give in even if it is too late. I don't think it's too late. It can't be too late (*Autumn Sonata*, my translation).

Bergman underscores this scene by letting Eva read the letter aloud, facing the camera. Jan Holmberg, chief executive officer of The Ingmar Bergman Foundation, argues that the director often used this narrative technique when he had important messages to convey.³⁰ Eva's declaration emphasizes

grace as a stubborn and enduring will to help and to show kindness. Grace is the opportunity to take care of others.

Two characters in *Winter Light* arguably embody different understandings of grace. Märta represents a persistent and self-giving kindness. She makes it her calling in life to help, love, and comfort the cold and bitter pastor, hoping that he will eventually open his heart to her. Like Eva in *Autumn Sonata*, she reveals her most profound emotions, thoughts, and desires in a letter to Tomas. Bergman emphasizes the importance of this letter by having Märta read it aloud in an eight-minute scene. The pastor responds that he is disgusted by her goodness and acts of love. Märta, however, endures his rejection and insults. She remains faithful to her mission of loving him throughout the film. Using Luther's mask metaphor as an interpretational key, one might argue that Märta serves as a mask of God in the movie, that the transcendent God performs His works through her acts of kindness. She acts like a suffering servant in the film, showing Tomas a strong or unconditional love. When writing the screenplay, Bergman made it explicit that her character has a biblical motivation.³¹ There are details in the film, however, that might warrant an immanent rather than transcendent interpretation of Märta's role. She presents an agnostic's life view and criticizes the pastor's primitive and neurotic faith in critical scenes in the film, especially his indifferent attitude towards Christ. These points make the interpretation of Märta as a mask of God less plausible. The grace that she offers is human communion (cf. Wheatley), and the restoration of Tomas's ability to love and care about others.

Märta's character, however, is too complex for simplistic interpretations. While she doesn't appear to believe in God, Bergman shows her praying twice in the film and indicates that her prayers are answered. Following the first prayer, Märta believes that God gave her the task of loving Tomas. The second prayer happens at a particularly significant moment in the film, at the time of the pastor's transformation (cf. below) during the final scene: "If we could find comfort so that we could dare to show tenderness. If we could believe in a truth. If we could believe." Märta's divine calling to love Tomas, her persistence, prayers, and role in the film's surprising ending substantiate the interpretation of her as a mask of God.

There are also grounds for considering the sexton Algot a mask of God. The name Algot means "all good." The sexton is the first character in the film who, for a short while, manages to connect with the pastor on a deep and personal level. Interpretational keys from Schrader's transcendental style may reveal new readings of Bergman's film. The conversation between Algot and the pastor toward the end of the film may be interpreted as a *decisive action*, a surprising act within the frame of a cold cinematic universe, a scene that points toward something greater. Algot explains Christ's suffering in a way that seems to transform Tomas's pain. Bergman has the minister first use phrases similar to Jesus's cry of abandonment and then reflect seriously on its meaning. Moreover, Bergman abandons his principles of reduction and natural light in this scene, instructing the cinematographer to create beautiful light to emphasize

Algot's moral character.³² This parallels his use of lighting to create a moment of grace in the closing scene of *Cries and Whispers*.³³

Bergman's closing scene fits well with Schrader's term *stasis*, as it is a calm and slow scene that may offer the audience a glimpse of another, greater reality. Bergman ends the movie with the liturgical call to worship, and a close-up of the clergyman exploring his facial expression as he reads the liturgy, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory." The minister's words seem utterly unlikely and almost meaningless against the backdrop of what the audience has witnessed from the pastor until then. The main point for the argument here, however, is not the Eucharist itself, but the transformation potentially indicated by the pastor's choice regarding the second service of the day. Several details in the plot strengthen the impression that a change occurs by the end of the film. Firstly, Bergman leaves no doubt throughout the film that the pastor is sick. The minister's cough and high fever are emphasized in several scenes. He seems to be on the verge of collapsing, and his poor physical health parallels his troubled faith. Secondly, the organist tries to convince Tomas to cancel the second service of the day. Thirdly, according to church regulations in Sweden, the pastor could have canceled the service because less than three attendants showed up for Mass.³⁴ These events would have justified Tomas in cancelling the second service of the day and make his choice, following his conversation with Algot, to celebrate it all the more surprising. One explanation for this may be that Algot has served as a mask of God for the pastor, giving him grace.

Algot arguably plays a role in the transformation of the pastor's image of God. As mentioned, several scenes in the film show Tomas referring to God and his faith in negative terms. Before becoming a widower, faith made perfect sense to the pastor. Following the death of his wife, Tomas mockingly refers to his belief in an Echo-God and calls the crucifix "a foolish image." The echo metaphor indicates his conviction that God's previous answers to his prayers had merely been reflections of his wishes. Algot's insight, however, seems to give Tomas the courage to live in the faith he had shortly before called a lie. When Tomas realizes that Christ's suffering parallels his own, the image of the crucified Jesus appears to become a source of hope and possibly of a new faith.³⁵ This interpretation corresponds to Märta's second prayer in the film. In the face of grace, Tomas realizes that God has not abandoned him after all. The God revealed through Jesus is a God who has experienced the worst forms of suffering and abandonment; therefore, God's silence only appears to be the final word. The closing *stasis* thus lets the audience glimpse another, greater reality, the transcendent hidden behind a mask.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Martin Luther's understanding of grace may provide resources for interpreting *Winter Light*. Based on a three-step analysis, the conclusion is that Luther's view of grace offers analytical tools for reappraising Bergman's film. This interpretation is

congruent with the narrative, theme, and style of the movie. Nonetheless, there is a darkness in *Winter Light* that should not be explained away too hastily by an eagerness for uplifting answers. Esma Kartal maintains that, while the minister struggles with his faith, he meets people who shape his belief; these secondary characters represent hope.³⁶ Her claim supports this article's argument. Kartal, however, draws firm conclusions about Tomas's salvation and his new conceptions of God.³⁷ Her inferences appear to be too optimistic and at odds with the voice of the film itself. *Winter Light* is too complex and disturbing to allow only reassuring conclusions. On the other hand, Leonard Quart's claim that "nothing grand is discovered, just a touch of meaning in the void,"³⁸ seems consistent with Bergman's dark cinematic vision.

The analytical steps adapted from the Revised Correlational Model provide resources for interpreting the ending of *Winter Light* in a critical and balanced way. The analysis concludes that Bergman struggles with core themes of the Christian faith in this film. There are reasonable grounds in the film's narrative (Tomas performs the second service), the cinematic style, and in the Lutheran context (Luther's view on grace and God's masks) to claim that something significant—at least temporarily so—happens to the pastor during his encounters with Märta and Algot. On the other hand, the ambiguous ending of the film must be acknowledged.

Aside from some glimpses of grace, *Winter Light* provides a strong case for reflecting on the silence of God. Gordon Lynch argues that a dialogue between theology and film should also be critical in the sense of directing the

analytical gaze on one's tradition. Used this way, *Winter Light* might be a resource for challenging a theologically interested audience to reflect on experiences of the absence of God. Based on his interpretation of Bergman's film, Earl Valdez recommends that theology should treat experiences of a distant God seriously and try to find concepts of God different from the ones framed in dualistic terms, like being/nonbeing.³⁹ Developing these reflections further, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

¹ Bergman biographer Maaret Koskinen mentions *Cries and Whispers* (Bergman 1972) and *Saraband* (Bergman 2003) as two examples, cf. *Vårt Land*, Bergman's "Moments of Grace."

² Wheatley refers to *Through a Glass Darkly* (Bergman 1961), *Winter Light* (Bergman 1963) and *The Silence* (Bergman 1963) as "The Faith Trilogy." Other commentators prefer "The Trilogy of God's Silence."

³ Catherine Wheatley, "Bergman Keeping the Faith," *Sight and Sound* 28, no. 2 (February 2018), 38.

⁴ Wheatley, "Bergman Keeping the Faith."

⁵ Koskinen refers to *Cries and Whispers* (Bergman 1972) and comments that when the character Agnes dies, an unexplainable light falls on her face. Koskinen claims that this is a "moment of grace, and it must be interpreted in divine terms." See *Vårt Land*, "Bergman's Moments of Grace," *Vårt Land* (28 April 2005).

⁶ Maaret Koskinen, "Spel och speglingar. En studie i Ingmar Bergmans filmiska estetik" ["Mirrors and reflections. A study in Ingmar Bergman's filmic aesthetics.'], PhD diss., Stockholm University, 1993.

⁷ Early research in theology and film tended towards an illustrative use of films. Steve Nolan claims that the interpreters' primary interest was using films as new ways to illustrate the Gospel. Many scholars treated movies as texts or themes and were not particularly attentive to film as a unique art form, cf. Steve Nolan "Towards a New Religious Film Criticism: Using Film to Understand Religious Identity Rather Than Locate Cinematic Analogue." (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006). In recent years, however, there has been a tendency among leading scholars to highlight the importance of a two-way dialogue between theology and film.

⁸ Richard A. Blake, "Looking for God. Profane & Sacred in the Film of Woody Allen," *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, 19, no. 2 (April 1991), 58.

⁹ Blake, "Looking for God," 58.

¹⁰ Blake, "Looking for God," 59.

¹¹ Anita L. Cloete, "Film as Medium for Meaning Making: A Practical Theological Reflection", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (April 2017).

¹² Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 105–109.

¹³ My translation from the Swedish original.

¹⁴ The Norwegian theologian Kjetil Hafstad argues that Robert Bresson's movies inspired Bergman. *Winter Light* shares several similarities with *Diary of a Country Priest* (Bresson 1951), cf. Hafstad, "Bergman and the Bible: Atonement and Liberation in Bergman's Movies." In [*Biblical Themes in Literature, Film and Theater.*], (Trondheim: Tapir), 1989.

¹⁵ Bresson argues that, "The supernatural in film is only the real rendered more precise. Real things seen close up.", Schrader, *Transcendental Style Film*, 62.

¹⁶ Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (New York: Da Capo, 1988), 63.

¹⁷ Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, 79–81. Schrader explains that "The decisive action forces the viewer into the confrontation with the Wholly Other he would normally avoid. He is faced with an explicable spiritual act within a cold environment, an act which now requests his participation and approval... It is a 'miracle' which must be accepted or rejected" (81).

¹⁸ Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, 82–86.

¹⁹ Astrid Söderbergh Widding criticizes Schrader for being too obsessed with the films' topics and aesthetics when theorizing about transcendental style. She argues that Schrader underestimates the viewers' active participation in meaning-making processes, cf. Astrid Söderbergh Widding, [*Borderline Images: The Hidden Room in Tarkovsky's Films.*] PhD diss., University of Stockholm, 1992.

²⁰ Birgitta Steene, *Ingmar Bergman: A Reference Guide* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 138.

²¹ The Ingmar Bergman Foundation, "Winter Light."

²² The Ingmar Bergman Foundation, "Winter Light."

²³ Martin Luther, *Verker i utvalg [Selected Works]*, Vol. 1, edited by Inge Lønning and Tarald Rasmussen (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1545/1979), 18.

²⁴ Luther writes: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from

all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.” Luther, *Small Catechism*.

²⁵ Martin Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 147,” *Luther’s Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Kindle edition (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1525/1958), 2161.

²⁶ Anthony J Steinbronn, “Luther’s Use of Larvae Dei,” *Concordia Journal* 19, no. 2 (April 1993), 136.

²⁷ Susanne Wigorts Yngevesson, “‘Like Sheep for the Slaughter’: An Investigation of Luther’s Concept of Larva Dei and the Vocation of the Soldier in Relation to Foucault’s Interpretation of the Pastorate,” *Studia Theologica* 70, no. 1 (May 2016).

²⁸ Yngevesson, “‘Like Sheep for the Slaughter,’” 42.

²⁹ “We Ekdahls were not born to see through this world we live in. We are not equipped to undertake such expeditions. We do best to avoid the larger aspects. We should stick to the smaller ones. We should live in a small world. We should be content with that. Cultivate it, and make the best of it.

The world is a den of thieves - and night is falling. Evil breaks free of its chains and runs wild like a mad dog. The taint affects us all, us Ekdahls and everyone else. No one escapes - not even Helena Viktoria, or little Aurora. So it shall be. Therefore, let us be happy while we are happy. Let us be kind, affectionate and good. It is necessary, and not in the least shameful - to take pleasure in the joys of the little world. Good food. Sweet smiles. Fruit trees in bloom. Waltzes.

And now, my dearest friends, I'm done talking and you can take it for what you like.” Ingmar Bergman, *Fanny and Alexander Moviescript*.

³⁰ J. Holmberg, *Författaran Ingmar Bergman* [The Writer Ingmar Bergman.] (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2018), 129–130.

³¹ In the screenplay, Bergman wrote a reference to Matthew 9:2. Indicating that the pastor “is the lame man of the New Testament, borne along by Märta and Algot,” The Ingmar Bergman Foundation, “Winter Light.”

³² The Ingmar Bergman Foundation, “Winter Light.”

³³ Cf. note 5.

³⁴ Bergman explains this detail in a conversation with his Assistant Director Vilgot Sjöman: “Have you ever heard of 'duplication'? On certain Sundays the parson has to hold two services: one in the main parish and then one in the chapelry, the sub-parish in the next district. Now it is custom in the Swedish church that if there are no more than three persons in the congregation, no service need be held. What I do is this: when Björnstrand comes to the district church, the church-warden comes up to him and says: 'There's only one churchgoer here.' Yet the parson holds the service all the same. That's all that is needed to indicate the new faith that is stirring inside the parson.” Cf. Vilgot Sjöman, “From L 136: A Diary of Ingmar Bergman’s Winter Light.” *Cinema Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 36.

³⁵ Bergman’s comment about the closing scene in his diary while making *Winter Light* supports my reading: “Nothing more is needed to indicate the new feeling which moves inside the pastor. ... The mirror is clean. There stands a newly sourced vessel that can be filled by

mercy. By a new image of God." Vilgot Sjoman, "From L 136: A Diary of Ingmar Bergman's *Winter Light*, *Cinema Journal* 13, no. 2 (1974), 40.

³⁶ Esma Kartal, "Seeking God in Early Bergman: The Cases of *The Seventh Seal* and *Winter Light*," *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 1, no. 2 (April 2012), 82.

³⁷ Kartal, "Seeking God in Early Bergman," 83.

³⁸ Leonard Quart, "Ingmar Bergman: The Maestro of Angst," *Cineaste* (Fall 2004), 32.

³⁹ Valdez argues that "The site for one to find the God who has withdrawn Himself is the exercise of charity, or to put it more plainly, in *love* alone." Based on this he concludes that "The withdrawal of God in Bergman's trilogy can be understood as a demand to love others, in which one can find God," Earl Valdez, "Silence as the Space for Love: Bergman's Trilogy and the Absence of God," *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* 4 (2013), 94.

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