

SILENCE AS THE SPACE FOR LOVE: BERGMAN'S TRILOGY AND THE ABSENCE OF GOD

Earl Allyson P. Valdez (Ateneo de Manila University)

I. INTRODUCTION

Belonging to an elite club of filmmakers who shaped cinema, Ingmar Bergman brought to the screen various themes and questions that were once found only in the pages of philosophy, religion, and history, eventually transforming film as a medium for one to explore the realities of human existence. Among his films that discuss the mundane realities of the human being, the so-called “trilogy” — consisting of *Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en spegel*, 1961), *Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*, 1962) and *Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) — became significant due to the seriousness of what he wants to deal with. These films tell different stories of people faced with mundane situations and crises, but what binds them together is the way they raised the question of God’s existence. Looking at these stories as a whole, Bergman illustrates seemingly dark yet striking experiences, moments that point to the absence of a God whom believers would be comfortable and secure with. And through these experiences, Bergman raises the question that has since challenged religion and faith when confronted with the absence of God: *Quo vadis?* If the God that one believes in has become absent, withdrawing Himself from the grasp of human beings, how should the human being proceed with living?

One possible answer to this question is that God’s absence, His own withdrawal from humanity, provides a space not only for the human being to rethink about the identity of this God, but also for him to experience and recognize God in a more genuine way, which stands as Bergman’s invitation throughout. The experience of this withdrawal would then be discussed, pointing out that such withdrawal does not immediately amount to mere absence and therefore nonexistence; instead, it is a form of God’s own revelation and self-giving, indicating that God goes beyond and surpasses Being, as elaborated by the philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. And granted that God is such, this work proceeds toward “finding” this hidden God, pointing out that He, as Love, reveals Himself in the love that exists between human

beings, which is the central theme that Bergman develops in the trilogy. Ultimately, this points out how Bergman not only raises questions concerning the existence of God, but above and beyond it, challenges the human being to think otherwise.

II. THE SILENCE OF GOD IN THE "TRILOGY"

Bergman's trilogy raised perhaps the most serious and thought-provoking question in the history of cinema, a question brought by the clash within him between his own religious upbringing and his experience.¹ The trilogy puts to question the existence of God in an array of significant human experiences which lead the human being to ask the meaning and purpose of existence when nothing is left but the freedom to decide how one should live in a world where God, identified as the meaning and purpose of human existence, seems to not exist at all. In fact, Bergman's subtitles to these films hint at the way he wants to show God's silence and, more importantly, break apart the images of God that religion knows and is used to, namely:

Through a Glass Darkly — certainty achieved;

Winter Light — certainty unmasked;

Silence — God's silence: the negative impression.²

These subtitles are nothing but Bergman's way of saying that, based on the data of human experience, people cannot just believe in God anymore, for these experiences "throw human beings back to themselves,"³ destroying all images of God that religion, specifically Christianity, has been used to. It seems that Bergman desires to establish a certainty that runs contrary to the certainty of faith, one that points to the complete absence of God. And he proceeds to show this not only through the varying plotlines that run in each of these three films, but also in the symbols he used in all of them.

Through a Glass Darkly tells the story of a vacation that changed the lives of a family of four: David, the father of Minus and the schizophrenic Karin, accompanied by her husband Martin. At first, it seems that they are a tightly bound family gathering together to celebrate each other's stories. However, as the film progresses, we see Bergman subtly bringing out the

tensions that exist between each of them, gradually making them more serious and explicit to the point that these tensions bear upon their own individual lives. And among these tensions, there stood two significant ones that have driven not just the film's plot, but more importantly Bergman's point: David's apathetic attitude toward his children and Karin's schizophrenia that brought her visions and illusions.

David's inability to be a father to his children is already evident from the beginning, as early as Minus' way of expressing it through the "morality play, intended only for poets and authors."⁴ It becomes more explicit when David and Martin went fishing, as the former told the latter about his failed suicide attempt which made him realize his desire to live in order to love his children.⁵ But then, this is only a foreshadowing of what is to come near the end of the film, in which David and Minus had a moment of reflection on the absent God, saying that he is "every sort of love."⁶

This brief dialogue serves as a provisional answer for Bergman, expressing that the God who vanished has "reappeared" as love, a basic element of faith proclaimed by Christianity but seems to have lost its meaning. However, even though it appears to be the final word, Bergman seems to break it apart again by the Minus' immediate dismissal of these words, saying that they are "terribly unreal,"⁷ as his family is torn apart with its members appearing alien to each other. Such negation of what seemed to be a profound affirmation is in view of what is to come in *Winter Light*, which raises the question of God's nature as love.

The second film of the trilogy tells the story of a Lutheran pastor, Tomas, who, ironically, is indifferent toward God and, more importantly, toward love. The problem with Tomas which Bergman makes explicit is that he has lost his "antenna for love," being indifferent to the people around him, not just to those who belong to the chapel congregation, but also and more importantly to Marta, the school teacher who is in love with him.⁸ This is evident in his dialogue with Marta, in which he, instead of appreciating Marta's concern, was "tired" of it, and he needs to get rid of "all this rubbish, this junkheap of idiotic circumstances."⁹ He then explained the reason for this, saying that after his wife died, he himself died as well, and this leads him to a "complete indifference" toward anything about his life, including that of the people who come close to him.¹⁰

Such indifference, however, is rooted in something even deeper and more profound, namely his loss of faith in God because He ceased to appear as one who "guaranteed him

every imaginable security.”¹¹ He was aware that in the absence of such God, there is nothing left but human beings alone, living their lives as “poverty-stricken, joyless, and full of fear.”¹² The irony of being a faithful servant of God who performs nothing but empty rituals and shuts out the door to intimacy, radically isolating himself from God and others, became the driving force of the film. This attitude kept Tomas at a distance from a world that reflects his own indifference and self-centeredness, which can also be seen in Marta, who sought to love him for her selfish intentions, wanting to keep him for herself,¹³ and in Jonas Parsson, who is preoccupied more with his own fantasies and thoughts which closed him from his wife and children.¹⁴ Thus, in *Winter Light*, we see not only the loss of faith in a God who provides security, but also its dire consequences in the life of a human being. In the case of Tomas, Marta, and Jonas, we see a radical loss of the sense of meaning and direction in one’s life, with no other way except remaining lost within their own selves and their preoccupations, blinding them from the reality of living which inevitably includes the nurturance of human relationships.

The film proceeds and ends quite beautifully, when it seems that Tomas’ disposition toward life changed when Jonas committed suicide. The final moments of the film bring us to the point where Tomas somehow accepts his role as a minister, presiding over Jonas’ funeral, with the faithful reciting the *Sanctus*: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. All the earth is full of his glory.”¹⁵ However, it is more of ironic than celebratory when seen from the point of view of the whole film and of Tomas’ view of God. The scene is in itself the greatest contradiction in the whole film, for (a) such praise celebrates a God known as almighty and present, one whom Tomas searches for and takes refuge in but to no avail, but (b) such praise does not refer or point to anything because for Tomas, there is no God that exists to begin with.

This scene serves as the culmination of all the religious symbolisms and imagery that Bergman has wonderfully crafted in the film. It was filled with so much liturgical symbols that it brought out more openly the contradictions through which Bergman questions God and religious faith, revealing the meaninglessness of religious ritual to people who have accepted the absence of God with much despair.¹⁶ From the figure of Christ hovering around scenes to the communion rite, everything that points to God and His love for humanity (which Christianity has identified as *kenosis*, a full giving of the self for the sake of all human beings) has been rendered useless and empty. Thus, Bergman puts his claim more strongly,

that the God we experience as the highest Being and therefore the most profound love, is no more, or has not been present after all.

The imagery that *Winter Light* provides leaves its audience with another area of human existence to explore, encouraging it to move from the love of and communication with a transcendent God to maintaining relationships with fellow human beings. The film invites its audience to observe how the most human of relationships affect people more profoundly than thinking about the existence of a transcendent God. The tension between Tomas' desire to love God which he has found absent, as well as Marta's desire to love in a highly exclusive relationship brings out this shift of focus, not to mention another quite unseen conflict between Jonas and his family. In a way, *Winter Light* is an explicit message that encourages the audience to accept God's withdrawal and move toward an "affirmation of humanism," wherein what matters after the refutation of God and the acceptance of his withdrawal is the reality of human relationships.¹⁷

However, Bergman remains unforgiving in his discussion on the absence of God when he tackles human communication and relationships in the last film of the trilogy, *Silence*. This time, Bergman puts emphasis not on the presence of a divine entity, which he already has rendered silent and absent, but on that which replaces God, namely the relationships that exist between people which are sustained by communication.¹⁸ This is foreshadowed in *Through a Glass Darkly*, specifically in the renewed sense of fatherhood that David had, and in *Winter Light*, in the tension that exists between Tomas and Marta. However, this is pushed to the brink in *Silence*, subjecting human relationships to reflection by presenting it as a challenge to be dealt with and overcome, given the difficulty to connect with people in a profound and intimate level. The last film in the series tells the story of two estranged sisters, Ester and Anna, together with Anna's child Johan, on a homebound journey which was interrupted when they stop in a war-torn town called Timoka. In that place, a series of events reveal the tension that exists between the sisters in terms of their relationships alongside each other's personal issues and struggles. On one hand, Ester struggles both with her disease as well as her connection with Anna and her son. On the other hand, Anna is herself in search of intimacy, which she compensates through various sexual encounters with different men. In the course of such struggles, issues between the siblings surfaced, which Ester viewed as a way of tormenting each other.¹⁹ Caught in the middle of this struggle is the

young Johan, who feels uncomfortable with Ester and yet ironically able to see through her difficulties, not just with his mother but also with her incurable disease.

This tension between siblings became the focus of the film, to the point that such tension was left unresolved even at the end, when a dramatic conversation between the siblings occurred. The last scene features Anna and Johan continuing their journey while the sickly Ester is left alone to deal with her disease. However, it seems to leave a trace of resolution when Ester gave Johan a letter, albeit written in “incomprehensible foreign words.”²⁰

It is fairly obvious from the films conflict that Bergman wanted to shift his attention to a different kind of silence more immanent and familiar to us: that which exists between human beings, a silence which marks the “breakdown of language.”²¹ On one hand, we see in Anna a common struggle of the human being to replace and fill the loss of deep, nurturing relationships with more superficial ones. On the other hand, we see in Ester the struggles that are symptomatic of problems that disturb her existence, especially her fear of death. Finally, we see the young Johan caught in the middle, and yet he does not stand as a heroic and mediatory figure as an innocent child. Instead, he remains indifferent and inattentive to everything that happens, leading him to not only find spaces to communicate with other people, like his encounter with old little men who amused and entertained him, but also become preoccupied with a world of his own characterized by “guns, books, and giant steps.”²² This makes the ending of the film all the more fitting, leaving all of them, like Ester’s letter, incomprehensible, and as such, left to their own selves.

As a whole, the trilogy stands as a radical portrayal of the absence of God in situations where He is needed by the characters to intervene. However, in each of these films, Bergman drastically takes the stories to different directions, ending them without any hint of consolation that restores confidence neither in God nor in the human being. And leaving it at that, Bergman points the question of God’s absence and withdrawal as a fact of life, yet encourages further rethinking in the level of the audience’s own individual lives. In bringing together and weaving these stories bound not by answers but more questions that the audience is challenged to confront and ask, we are brought to one important question that brings everything together: *What is there for one who believes and hopes in a God who has hidden Himself?*

III. THE GOD BEYOND BEING:

JEAN-LUC MARION AND THE SILENCE OF GOD

With the trilogy bringing out these particular experiences of God's withdrawal in the life of human beings and their possible consequences and implications, the question remains: *What now?* Two possible responses emerge, which could be seen as paths for the human being to take after experiencing God's withdrawal. On one hand, the human being can submit to God's absence, that is, as one who does not exist after all, and go on with life with whatever left for him, namely the freedom to do what he pleases. On the other hand, one can continue to believe in God, but such belief bears the burden of rethinking or reconsidering how God exists and how He makes His presence (or what seems to be the lack of it) felt within the realm of human experience. Whether to take one path or another would be a matter of personal decision and commitment; however, it would be worth discussing the possible implications and consequences of each choice.

One can take the first road and admit that there is no God, and what only happens in the experience of the supposed "withdrawal" of God is the collapse of idols and figures that the human being recognizes as God. In interpreting Bergman's trilogy in this manner, one can say that the whole trilogy is a radical proclamation that the God in whom the human being believes has never been there from the beginning, and what Bergman did is to bring humanity to the harsh reality that there is nothing left "out there" except itself and what is "in here." The whole trilogy is therefore a rejection of the "religious — as defined by any kind of 'leap of faith' or move to the 'transcendental' in some form," only to be replaced by the focus on the ethical aspect of human existence.²³ And in making the shift from the transcendental God towards an affirmation of humanism,²⁴ the challenge left for the human being is to focus on the relationships that are immediate, exercising care and concern for others.

But for the believer who is well aware that faith is not about adhering to seemingly convincing proofs but committing even to that which cannot be proven,²⁵ such is not the case. For him, there is a more pressing question that one has to grapple with: How does precisely one "see" or "experience" a God who, at such point, does not manifest Himself in the realm of human experience as presence? If God is nowhere to be found, then how does one think and experience Him?

This is one of the pressing questions that Jean-Luc Marion discusses and attempts to answer at length when he raises the question regarding the nature of God and how He is experienced by the believing subject. And regarding this inquiry, an important question about the silent God can be found in his work *God Without Being*, as he grapples with the question of speaking about God who is definitely greater than the limited human being, thus escaping speech, thought, and representation. In discussing the experience of falling silent before and about God, he asks:

Afforded by the concrete daily attitude and what it most rightly imposes is what one might call the theological attitude, which only bears what Origen names the “dogmas to be kept in silence,” [*ta siapomena dogmata*]. But what is this silence mean? To what silence are we summoned today?²⁶

Marion asks this question in the light of his assertion that the God who revealed Himself in Christian faith would always be greater than any metaphysical proof or explanation of His existence or any set of theological dogmas and doctrines. Given such, one can therefore be only silent because there would be no exact and definite means of speaking about Him. However, in the case of the trilogy, the question regarding God’s silence is posed on a more radical level, because one falls silent before that which has silenced himself first. Thus, one cannot say anything about God because this God has withdrawn Himself and made Himself silent. Therefore, He cannot be pointed out or referred to as a “someone” or a “something” in the strictest sense.

This makes the inquiry even more complicated, as it asks how it is possible to even speak of God in His own silence and withdrawal from presence. Regarding the latter, Marion provided an answer, pointing to God’s withdrawal and absence as indicative of his distance from the human being, a concept which, for Marion bears much significance in speaking about God.

Marion talks about distance in its various meanings and senses, claiming that such meanings can be taken simultaneously. He primarily refers to distance as “the absolute difference between God and humanity,” which implies the “non-coincidence of God with any concept of God.”²⁷ But because such understanding “does not always work to its best effect,” for it suggests that God and the human being lie at both ends of a lateral continuum,²⁸ he

supplemented it with another way of understanding it, namely as an “interruption of thought.”²⁹ What he means is that God will always escape any form of conceptual representation of the human being, even though such representation is derived from His revelation. However, such understanding of distance should not lead us back to the idols which distance rejects, for such return is nothing but an “‘impure’ and unworthy idolatry.”³⁰ It is such because in this instance, the human being decides according to his own standards what counts as “divine or non-divine, as if we could on our own ensure the suitability of any particular attribution with regard to unthinkable transcendence.”³¹ Nor should we resort to mere agnosticism or ignorance about God, which is a form of negation that inverts affirmation and is therefore a mere negative categorization of God, an *apophasis* that is a reversal of *kataphasis* but does not leave the realm of predication.³² In the end, both are nothing but forms of idolatry which misses the God who reveals Himself.

This can be even more understood when we see the background of such assertion when he problematized the notion of God developed by philosophy. In both of his works, Marion delivers a criticism of the images of God that has been constructed by philosophy, particularly in metaphysics. Coming from Friedrich Nietzsche’s twilight of the idols and Martin Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics as onto-theo-logy, he claims that the God of philosophy is nothing more than mere idols that replace the God of Divine Revelation,³³ for philosophy uses images and symbols used to speak of God as if they express everything about God. He claims that philosophy reduces God within the human being’s horizon of understanding, which is what Heidegger did when he limited God within the scope of the understanding of *Dasein*, in which God is subjected and reduced by the human gaze.³⁴ To understand God by resorting to a concept that belongs either to metaphysics or merely within the experience of the *Dasein* would throw the believer back to idolatry, whether cataphatic or apophatic, and should therefore be avoided. Both of these methods, then, would not help in thinking of God and should be avoided, for these disregard God’s radical distance from thought which no human effort or attempt can ever cross.

This understanding of God beyond the confines of Being and thus the limits of human thought poses a serious challenge for the believer. In some way, it is a source of consolation because this frees the discussion on the absence of God from the hasty conclusion that He does not exist and is thus irrelevant in the human being’s life; however, it is a challenge because one has to change one’s way of thinking about God, something that can be considered

as a “better” path because it accepts and considers the “unthinkability” of God which brings us to silence.

This is Marion’s point in his whole philosophical project as he provides an answer to this problem. For him, Being is not the ultimate grounds in which God reveals Himself, claiming it as an “un-theological” word,³⁵ despite the fact that the experience of God and his revelation “flashes in the dimension of Being.”³⁶ This prompts Marion to think outside Being, beyond the idols erected within and under it, to the different possibilities offered by divine Revelation, as the one which “determines the manner of manifestness.”³⁷ This is an important point to stress because when God is “placed” outside Being or the opposition between being/nonbeing, it allows one to think of God not having “to be,” that is, to be present as a “someone” or a “something,” a substance that differs itself from all the rest, or a definition in which all metaphysical proofs of God rest upon. And as we will see, such turning point in Marion’s thought allows us to think differently of the silence that Bergman speaks about.

Marion proceeds to the possibility of thinking God while considering the infinite and incommensurable distance that stands between Him and humanity. He first considered an alternative way of naming God that is more primary than *ens* or being, namely God as Goodness or *Bonum*. This name, which is explicit in Bonaventure and the mystical tradition, is more appropriate because it “does not offer any ‘most proper name’ and abolishes every conceptual idol of God.”³⁸ This way of naming God ought to be explored precisely because it allows us to think of God outside and beyond Being. He then showed how this is so by pointing out three instances in the Scriptures where God is seen to reveal Himself as beyond Being, thus as Goodness Himself.

The first, which can be found in the letter to the Romans,³⁹ indicates God’s indifference toward the difference between beings and nonbeings, pointing to Him as calling both beings and nonbeings to him “as if they were beings.”⁴⁰ The second indication similar to the first is found in St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians,⁴¹ where it is pointed out that God does not choose according to the categories of being, and, indifferent to it, he chooses nonbeings “to annul and abrogate beings.”⁴² This can therefore be understood as God’s own way of distracting Being and freeing beings from Being itself, as they are saved not by their own works or assertions of existence, but by God’s call upon them.⁴³ The third, perhaps the most significant, is Marion’s recalling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son,⁴⁴ where we see through the image of the loving father, God’s indifference to *ousia*, substance or being, which comes only

secondary to the act of giving everything to those who remain in Him and His love.⁴⁵ From these texts, we see that (a) God is not confined to Being and even has command over it, and (b) what stands over and above Being and the ontological difference is the *gift*, understood not only as what God gives to the believer, but more importantly His selfless act of totally giving Himself.

This *gift* (*donation* in French) must be understood not merely as a simple act of giving or handing over, but in such act of giving, the giver gives his very self to the given to. Thus, God does not just give to humanity. Simultaneously, He gives Himself to humanity. Moreover, such giving is so radical that God preserves the distance between him and the believer, withdrawing at once in such giving. He gives Himself as the “gap which separates definitively only inasmuch as it unifies.”⁴⁶ This gap does not only indicate God’s irreducibility to thought or presence, but also and more importantly grants the human being the freedom to be open to God’s Revelation, for in such giving, the human being is given himself and the freedom to give what is given to him.⁴⁷

And pushing this further, we see that the gap is a way for God to reveal Himself and be seen by the human being. In withdrawing, God allows the human being to think of Him beyond the categories of being, beyond positive and negative theology. The “spacing that ‘is’ God”⁴⁸ which He has established in His withdrawal allows and leads the believer to a radical openness, granting the human being access to Him not through predication but through “praise” which recognizes and requests God to traverse the distance but at the same time maintain it.⁴⁹ However, we shall see for Marion that such distance is an aspect of and paves way for a “more appropriate” name of God, in which He shows Himself as He is, outside the realm of idolatry and simplistic silence. This name stands to be the most relevant of all, allowing us to rethink Bergman’s way of emphasizing God’s silence in the trilogy, for it is a name that can be spoken of despite the absence of the God who stands above Being.

Agreeing with the Scriptures, Marion claims that ultimately, God reveals Himself as He is, precisely as Love or Charity. This is God’s “first name”⁵⁰ which is not a result of understanding or explanation, but only accepted through faith. Such Revelation and giving as Love is fully seen and experienced in and through the mystery of the Incarnation, in the “*agape* properly revealed in and as Christ,”⁵¹ who, through His Death and Resurrection which reveals both His Divinity and Humanity,⁵² reveals God’s great love for humanity.

From this, we can see that distance and gift radically lead to God's Revelation as Charity. As such, God gives himself totally to humanity, to the point that as the very gift giving Himself, he not only distracts and precedes Being/being, but also serves as one who grants and decides Being/being.⁵³ Moreover, in such giving, he also withdraws and maintains his distance from the human being. This distance is an infinite gap which separates Him from everything else, the unthinkability of which "constitutes the mark and seal of love."⁵⁴

How is this possible? Marion shows the possibility of thinking distance this way in his reflection on the poet Friedrich Holderlin, whose poem speaks of the withdrawal of the Father to pave way for the son to be as such.⁵⁵ This is the space that God leaves for the human being to believe and love Him freely, and this is the distance which is characteristic of relationships that live in love,⁵⁶ allowing the beloved to freely realize and recognize himself as loved. With such distance established, the son, the human being, is invited to "keep God pure"⁵⁷ by avoiding idolatry and respecting how God reveals Himself, that is, to "dance with God — at a good distance and in the right rhythm"⁵⁸ which He alone dictates and calls man to follow. Thus, God as charity is the gift that he gives and withdraws at the same time, His own way of maintaining a distance, a gap which presents and opens up the human being toward fully and freely knowing and loving Him.

Marion adds that because God reveals Himself as Charity, there is no other means for the human being to encounter Him except through his own exercise of charity.⁵⁹ In this regard, two important things must be pointed out.

First, charity is not a matter of knowing, understanding or comprehending, but of willing. It is a "movement of the heart, or will"⁶⁰ which aims not to comprehend the object of one's love, but to draw closer to such object without running the risk of objectifying it. This movement is the only means through which one fully receives the love of God which is first and foremost a gift, for as such, it can truly be received when it is given in the same way that God grants it.⁶¹ In receiving the gift, one is called to be its faithful interpreter by "performing it anew,"⁶² and this is possible only by heeding the call to "let charity pass through the body in order to transmit it,"⁶³ thus exercising it in an incarnate and corporeal way. This way of understanding charity prevents us from reducing the commandment to love as God loves us to an ethical command arising from rational argumentation; instead, it is a call to love the One who loved first by giving His love in the same way that He gives it.

Connected to this is the second important point, that love is also a way of understanding and seeing God and reality differently, as an epistemic condition that stands over and above reason.⁶⁴ As Marion sees it, charity is governed by a certain logic which separates it from mere understanding and comprehension, as it sees and thinks the object of love precisely as an irreducible other, a mystery to which one is drawn and attracted, which one can only gaze upon as an icon instead of an idol.⁶⁵ It is only through this path that charity takes where one fully understands God as an infinite self-giving (*kenosis*), understood as both a full disclosure and a radical withdrawal. Such disclosure and withdrawal is experienced not within the realm of presence, but only in the love that is given to others that is rooted in the God's love. This love then becomes a "sacrament" which one can fully receive by continuously giving it.⁶⁶ However, one should take note that charity, as a movement of the will, does not rest on any conditions of possibility or meaning that precedes action; rather, it starts with one's wager to love, a "complete investment in meaning" where one has to love first in order to see what it desires to see, or to be more precise, to see God in and through it.⁶⁷ Thus, the fundamental call for the believer is to not see and know in order to love, but actually its radical reversal: "to love in order to know."⁶⁸

From these two points, it is clear now 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. It is in love where one sees the God who is beyond being and nonbeing, beyond Being and beings, beyond mere presence and absence. Such love, as the giving of the gift which preserves and maintains distance and at the same time draws the lover and the beloved to one another, is the site where God "is," that is, experienced most fully by the human being.

Such understanding of God now leads to a different reading of the trilogy, making the films even more significant. We can see the whole story of *Through a Glass Darkly*, which culminates not just in David's words but in Karin's vision of the spider-God, as a challenge for us to keep love alive; however, in the same way that this God has become disturbing for Karin despite its gentle ways, the challenge to live a life of love would continually disturb us, pushing us to go outside of ourselves. In *Winter Light*, the appearance and disappearance of the figure of Christ as well as the disruption caused by Johan's suicide present themselves as a challenge to Tomas, numb of mind and heart, to once again find praise and consolation in God not in empty rituals, but in the call to open himself to love once again; however, such love is then given not just to Marta but also to other people entrusted to him. The challenge

to love in order to see God reaches its peak in *Silence*, which points to the significance of human communication that leads to ultimate concern for the Other, the kind which cannot remain superficial but should penetrate one's own being and that of the other. Moreover, *Silence* points to the challenge to love the Other in the midst of his or her own silence, which also reminds one of the irreducibility of the otherness of the other. Such silence beckons the human being not just to ethical responsibility, but more importantly, to love. In the moment of silence, one is then called to encounter the Other in and through love, which in turn goes beyond signification through words and concepts addressed to and about the Other.⁶⁹ In looking at the whole trilogy this way, we see that everything is all about love, because it is only through it that one can see God purely and truly, without the need for us to erect any form of idols that merely close us upon ourselves.

Simply put, the withdrawal of God in Bergman's trilogy can be understood as a demand to love others, in which one can find God. However, Bergman shows as well that it is a more difficult task than merely believing in a "God" which brings out a false sense of hope and consolation for the human being. Indeed, the only way the human being can find God in a world where He seems to have been absent is in His love which can only be properly received and experienced in the human being's own love, which serves as a response to Him who loved and gave first.

IV. CONCLUSION:

THE LOVE THAT IS GOD

Ingmar Bergman raised a problem relevant to the believer, as he presents a world where God is radically absent, a world which is perhaps all too familiar, where our daily human experience belongs. The trilogy somehow prompted us to rethink our understanding of God, opening up a possibility of genuinely experiencing Him otherwise, that is, beyond our common understanding of the Divine. Marion shows that God can be experienced beyond merely presence or being, and such experience is possible only in love, through and in which one can hear His voice which speaks loudly in His silence and feel His nearness in His very distance. Indeed, it is in the human being's love for one another through which one can see and experience Him as He is.

Through this understanding of God as love and how it is evident in the Trilogy, Bergman comes to a full circle, answering the question that he posed and eventually challenging the human being to be silent before the silent God, primarily because the only way to find Him is not through understanding or grasping a concept of Him, but through opening one's will to Him. This allows Him to reveal Himself in His own terms, in His mystery and greatness which surpasses all human capabilities. Bergman challenges us to see God in his films as Love pure and simple, drawing the human being to respond to this love by loving as well. In the end, we see how we are ultimately pushed to think God otherwise, which is only possible by taking upon ourselves the challenge and the responsibility to love in the same way that He loves us.

-
1. Jesse Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193.
 2. Laura Hubner, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman: Illusions of Light and Darkness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 53.
 3. Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman*, 193.
 4. Ingmar Bergman, *Three Films*, trans. Paul Britten Austin (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 25.
 5. *Ibid.*, 47.
 6. *Ibid.*, 60.
 7. *Ibid.*, 61.
 8. Martien E. Brinkman, "Transcendence in Bergman's *Winter Light* (1962): A Theological Analysis," *Currents of Encounter* 42 (2011): 309.
 9. Bergman, *Three Films*, 94.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. *Ibid.*, 85.
 12. *Ibid.*, 86.
 13. Brinkman, , "Transcendence in Bergman's *Winter Light*," 311.
 14. *Ibid.*, 310.
 15. Bergman, *Three Films*, 104.
 16. Hubner, *Illusions of Light and Darkness*, 55-56.
 17. *Ibid.*, 56.
 18. *Ibid.*, 59.
 19. Bergman, *Three Films*, 129.
 20. *Ibid.*, 143.
 21. Hubner, *Illusions of Light and Darkness*, 59.
 22. William Alexander, "Devils in the Cathedral: Bergman's Trilogy," *Cinema Journal* 13.2 (1974): 31.
 23. Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman*, 194.
 24. Hubner, *Illusions of Light and Darkness*, 55.
 25. One of the many philosophers that discusses the radical distance and independence of faith from reason and argumentation is Blaise Pascal, who said that faith is not brought about by an accumulation of proofs and evidence, but a movement of the will toward something that the heart desires. It is important to note that Marion draws much inspiration from Pascal especially in his discussion regarding charity. See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1966), §308/793.
 26. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 54.

27. Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 51.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 145.
31. Ibid., 146.
32. Ibid., 147-48.
33. Marion, *God Without Being*, 56. In here he speaks of the “idolatry of substitution” committed by metaphysics, in which philosophy “presupposes a concept exhausting the name of God.”
34. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 91.
35. Marion, *God Without Being*, 64. Marion uses this word to refer that Being is not the most proper way of speaking about God.
36. Ibid., 63.
37. Ibid., 64.
38. Ibid., 76.
39. Cf. *Rom* 4:17.
40. Marion, *God Without Being*, 86-87.
41. Cf. *1Cor* 1:18-24.
42. Marion, *God Without Being*, 89.
43. Ibid., 91
44. Cf. *Lk* 15:12-32.
45. Marion, *God Without Being*, 99-101.
46. Ibid., 104.
47. Ibid., 100.
48. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 59.
49. Ibid., 64.
50. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 66.
51. Ibid., 90.
52. Marion, *God Without Being*, 105.
53. Ibid., 101.
54. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 67.
55. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance*, 129.
56. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 59.
57. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance*, 136.
58. Ibid., 130.
59. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 68.
60. Ibid., 67.
61. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance*, 166.
62. Ibid., 167.
63. Ibid., 168.
64. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 67-68.
65. Ibid., 68.
66. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance*, 168.
67. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 101.
68. See Blaise Pascal, *Great Shorter Works of Pascal*, trans. Emile Cailliet and John C. Blankenagel (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 202–11.
69. Marion characterizes love as a “crossing of gazes” between the self and the Other, one which does not depend on one’s concept of the Other. Therefore, the call to love remains even in the midst of the silence of the Other who gazes. See Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).