

BERGMAN

New York — The films of Swedish director Ingmar Bergman have been strongly recommended by a theologian to those modern atheists who believe that God's "silence" is proof that God does not exist.

In an in-depth analysis of seven Bergman films — The Seventh Seal, Wild Strawberries, The Magician, Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light, The Silence and Persona — the Rev. Arthur Gibson contends that Bergman is trying to show that there is not greater proof of God's existence than God's silence.

The Rev. Mr. Gibson, professor of theology at the Graduate School of St. Michael's College in Toronto, writes in a book titled *The Silence of God — Creative Response to the Films of Ingmar Bergman* (Harper and Row):

"An initial absence (of God in Bergman's films) evolves into a disturbing and terrifying presence. . . . God is operative and communicative throughout these films. Their theme is truly the silence of God, not merely the silence that proves there is no God there."

Tracing the development of Bergman's statement about God's relationship with man, as illustrated in a series of Bergman films, Mr. Gibson summarized:

"Man has no meaningful contact with God, said *The Seventh Seal*; man is loveless," said *Wild Strawberries*; out of his lovelessness man makes contact with dark powers, said *The Magician*; the darkest of these powers surge up from man's inmost heart and issue in sterile narcissistic tragedy, said *Through a Glass Darkly*; man must break out of this dark circle and can do so only by some drastic affirmation of God, says *Winter Light*."

At the beginning of Bergman's series of "theological films," writes Mr. Gibson, "there is a silence that is held to be the proof of God's inexistence. At the end there is a still more awful silence which reveals itself as the true-silence of God."

"Not only man but also God proceeds through a dynamic evolution in the course of these films: from an initial serene intrasigence to a terminal agonizing involvement," Mr. Gibson continues. "This is what the Incarnation is really all about. . . . These films, taken as an integral whole, reveal the mystery of the Incarnation in an absolutely uncompromising way."

In each of the seven films, according to Mr. Gibson, "there is the artistic presence of God in a series of characters who 'play' God" in the sense that

they reveal some facet of God's relationship with man.

In *The Seventh Seal*, "a God-mouthpiece" is seen in the character who portrays Death in the story of a plague-infested land, and in the person of a juggler, who is "austere kind and beneficent."

In *Wild Strawberries*, "God articulates his problems" through an old mother who complains that hardly any of her grandchildren or great-grandchildren pay much attention to her: "I send letters and presents for fifty-three birthdays and anniversaries every year. I get kind thank-you notes, but no one visits me except by accident or when someone needs a loan."

In *Through a Glass Darkly*, the God figure is the adolescent brother of a girl who has hallucinations and believes she has seen God and that He is a spider.

Mr. Gibson contends that in *Winter Light*, "the accent is clearly on religion, the tragedy of a pastor who can no longer guide his flock because his own faith has wavered. . . . Yet, when all is said and done and suffered, (he) comes to the insight that the one positive contribution he can make is his unequivocal, if fear-ridden, yes to God."

"Here is the ultimate answer

to the silence of God," Mr. Gibson emphasizes, "the only answer that is redemptive and adequate to God's challenge. For that silence, in the mystery of freedom, impenetrable to mortal eyes, is itself a supreme act of willing trust in freedom, in free creatures; and those creatures must rise to justify the magnanimity of their Creator. As they abandoned Him in pride, so they must find him in humility with their freedom intact and their spurs won by pain."

Mr. Gibson believes that Bergman "interweaves the Christ motif into this series of films in most integral fashion, though Christ dominates only one film (*Winter Light*) and appears in the final film (*Persona*) in highly symbolic guise, as the boy bringing into focus the features of his parents.

"This reticence concerning Christ does not witness to any denigration of his key role within the Bergman film universe. It witnesses rather to two historical facts: modern man has demonstrably lost much of his capacity to see Christ as God-made-Man;

"And the very followers of that Christ have bowdlerized the stunning fact of the Incarnation. Against both these historical mistakes and confusions, Bergman's oblique technique is most powerfully concentrated."

Yes to The Silence Of God

COURIER / Entertainment

As I See It

Apologies And Challenges

By Pat Costa



Recently I was asked to comment on local religious television programming at a seminar sponsored by the Rochester Episcopal Diocese.

I replied that because the hours of such programming conflicted with my chosen profession (mother and housewife) I seldom watched anything that could be labeled as such.

But, then, who is free to watch during the early morning hours either weekdays or Sundays except perhaps the preschoolers or the bedridden or those who live alone and sustain themselves with the meager companionship of television?

Since I didn't feel I could comment on religious programming, how about my opinion on public service shows, asked Channel 21's Bill Haley, who ostensibly was in charge of garnering speakers.

As it turned out I failed to show to speak on either subject and I apologize for the inconvenience and any embarrassment I caused Mr. Haley. An imminent holiday weekend and shortage of babysitters who can handle three preschoolers at once combined to keep me at home.

Had I been able to keep the date, I probably would have alluded to religious programming in only one respect and that is, as it regards children.

Being child oriented as I am at this point in my life I am particularly conscious that our children are completely neglected in this area of television.

What the solution might be I am not sure. But, certainly there is no limit to the various attacks a program might take including the historical backgrounds, the relation of every day life to religion, the wonder of the universe.

As for public service programming, I believe that never before in our history have so many people been sincerely concerned about the state of the nation, the world, it's people.

In other words, no matter what the subject matter of the television service program, there will be a vast ready made audience. The only problem: the treatment. Any subject can be killed with inept handling, a pompous or ponderous moderator, and a sluggish showcase.

Some subjects of vital concern to most people in our klatches are ecology, birth control, plight of the minority groups, hunger in America, housing, abortion and the rest of the ills that make up the daily headlines.

There is one particular area in which Rochester television stations are missing the boat. Newspaper surveys have proven that the best read articles deal with health information. With the University of Rochester medical school a gold mine of specialized intelligence it is hard to understand why some station has not scheduled a weekly discussion program of various medical problems in prime time. With an effective and informed moderator, such a show would have to be a winner.

Police Close 'Naked Lady'

Windsor, Conn. — (NC) — Local police arrested the owner of the Plaza theater here following a showing of the film "What Do You Say to a Naked Lady?" Police charged the film was obscene.

The film narrates peoples' reactions when a nude woman approaches them to ask an innocuous question. It was produced



The Churchman doubts in Bergman's *Winter Light*

NCOMP Is in the Middle

By MARGARET M. CARLAN

St. Louis — (NC) — In attempting to rate today's films the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures (NCOMP) is caught in the middle between the needs of the new perceptive audience and those of the older casual movie-goers, Father Patrick Sullivan, S.J., NCOMP director said.

The ultimate solution to the balancing problem, Father Sullivan proposed here, is the abandonment of the rating system.

Questioned as to whether NCOMP ratings encourage uninformed judgments among Catholics Father Sullivan said: "We certainly feel that consulting ratings is hardly the way for people to make discriminating decisions as to what films their children should attend or they should attend themselves."

At the same time, he said,

NCOMP is "realistic" in recognizing that many people won't take the time and effort necessary to inform themselves. When a decision is needed, particularly in regard to children on Saturday afternoon, parents may be "quite harassed" by other things and turn to ratings for help.

Making the ratings presents a problem for NCOMP, he said, because of the new and old type audiences.

Were the present rating system abandoned, films could simply be categorized as suitable for children or adults with reviews such as NCOMP already

supplies giving more details, he said.

During the past 18 months, "more and more offensive material has appeared on the screen," he said, warning that unless there is improvement, the public may demand censorship. "And," he added, "that will be a sorry day indeed."

Father Sullivan stressed that he is not opposed to adult material or sensuality being treated in films. But, he said, "too many producers under the guise of art and meaningful statements about life are simply trying to assure their box office success through the short cuts of sex and violence."

Bob Hope Plans 'Biggest' July 4

Washington — (NC) — Bob Hope and the Rev. Billy Graham are planning a July 4th "Honor America Day," as the biggest celebration in America's history.

The comedian estimated as many as 500,000 persons might attend an all-day rally on the Washington Monument grounds, to be staged by Walt Disney Productions. Actors and singers, including Johnny Cash and Glen Campbell, will perform, he announced.

Among groups on the Honor America Day committee are the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, the Boy Scouts of

America, various veterans' groups, the Grange, the Washington Redskins Football and Senators Baseball Clubs.

Said Mr. Hope: "It's to be an old-fashioned American Fourth of July . . . a celebration to give Americans a chance to let go . . . after being downtrodden by the rough news from Vietnam . . . and countless demonstrations against one aspect or another of American life."

When asked how the festival would be financed, Hope quipped: "Do you have any ideas? So far we're using a pay phone."