

Struggling bodies and body struggles

Explorations of body and religion in contemporary Nordic film

Introduction

The body plays a major part in society and culture. Bodies are not just all around us—as real bodies or imagined ones, in advertisements and magazines articles, in films and on TV, encouraging us to focus on our own bodies in turn—the body is also nowadays considered to matter in a partially new way and constitute a valuable and central area of research. Many academics have realized the limitations of previous studies that denied or ignored the body, and have proclaimed the need to take bodies seriously (Shilling 2005). Although the focus on the body in culture and media is far from always something unproblematic, it is clear that the body cannot be ignored. This is true within the field of religion as well.

The question in the minds of more and more scholars of religion is; what we can learn from bodies about religion (Coakley 1997). Other questions that have inspired research are; how have religious attitudes to the body changed, what has caused the change and where do religious individuals today find inspiration for their views on the body (Griffith 2004)? In search of answers to these questions an increasing number of scholars are turning to popular culture and the media—two related areas that play an important part in shaping religion today (Hoover 2006) and attitudes to the body (Wykes & Gunter 2005)—with a growing number of studies focusing on film: a medium that has always been about bodies. This article wishes to add to this specific area of research.

In this study the focus will be on representations of the body and religion in Nordic film. The aim of the article is to illustrate the kinds of representations of religion and the body that can be found in contemporary Nordic films, demonstrate how these representations relate to religion, the body and film more generally, and explore what perceptions of and attitudes to the body and religion the representations suggest. I begin the analysis with an in-

roduction to religion and film studies, religion in Nordic film and the themes and films chosen for this study. After this I will present a short overview of earlier studies dealing with the body, film, and religion, before I delve into the issue of the body and religion in Nordic film. I conclude by reflecting on the more over-arching ideas and attitudes that the material can be argued to point to and the possible changes and challenges the films express.

Religion, film, and the Nordic context

Bodies are, as already stated, and as will be seen in more detail below, essential to film, but why study religion and film and why concentrate on Nordic film? Over the last 10–15 years religion and film have quickly developed into a many faceted area of research. While the editors of *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* in 1995 could rightly claim that ‘scholars engaged in . . . film criticism have almost nothing to say about religion . . . And scholars who study religion have almost nothing to say about Hollywood film’ (Martin & Ostwalt 1995: 2), today the circumstances are remarkably different. A growing number of scholars have recognized the need to look to popular culture for an understanding of religion. Popular cultural forms such as film can, for example, as Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan put it, help us to ‘learn more about widespread perceptions of religion and the role religion plays in the everyday lives of people’. An analysis of popular culture can furthermore ‘provide insights about how religions change and are changed by the cultures that surround them’ (Forbes & Mahan 2005: 2).

There are, however, many films that could be analyzed when discussing religion and the body. My motives for concentrating on contemporary Nordic film are multiple. Firstly, I am personally interested in religion in a Nordic context and Nordic film is therefore a natural area of research. Secondly, a lot has happened in Nordic film lately and the both national and international success of many Nordic films makes these films worthy of attention from a more international perspective as well (Nestingen & Elkington 2005). Thirdly, although religion is perhaps not a major theme in Nordic film, it is a subject that has been central in many successful films of late. As Arní Svanur Danielsson has shown we can find many and varying pastors in very different kinds of Nordic films (Danielsson 2009). We can also, as I have illustrated elsewhere, see how the interest in saviours and salvation that is so common in

American film and often connected to religious themes can be argued to be alive and well in many Nordic productions as well (Sjö 2010).

In one short article there is naturally not room to explore every contemporary Nordic film and their possible representations and conceptions of religion and the body. Instead I have chosen to focus on six films that I think well illustrate how religion and the body is often treated in contemporary Nordic film. These films are: *To verdener* (Worlds Apart, 2008), *Kielletty hedelmä* (Forbidden Fruit, 2009), *Adams æbler* (Adam's Apples, 2005), *Sauna* (Sauna, 2008), *Riisuttu mies* (Man Exposed, 2006) and *Så som i himmelen* (As It is in Heaven, 2004). In these films I have, using content analysis, identified three recurring ways of representing religion and the body. I have called these *body dilemmas*, *body salvation/redemption* and *body and spirit*. I shall look more closely at the films and these themes shortly, but first let me explore some previous studies on film, religion, and the body that can better help frame the themes and films dealt with here.

Religion, the body, and film—an overview

The body in film

Films are in many ways about bodies. In other words, films very often deal with subjects in a bodily way and tell their stories with and through bodies. However, some genres are more obviously about bodies than others. Pornography, obviously, puts both the body on screen and the body of the viewer at the centre. But bodies are also important in, for example, horror. In *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) Carol J. Clover has discussed the (usually female) bodies that we see being tortured and maimed in horror films and the complex needs these bodies fulfil for the viewers and the gender structures in our society that they are connected to. Of the films we are analyzing here, one, *Sauna*, is a horror film. This makes Clover's and other studies on horror film of interest. Will we find the same need to torture female bodies or present the feminine and the *other* as monstrous in this film?

Several feminist film studies have fairly naturally explored the female body on film. Female characters on film often become their bodies. Yvonne Tasker has pointed to the need to sexualize women and focus on their bodies. 'Hollywood representation is,' as she puts it 'characterized by an insistent equation between working women, women's work and some form of sexual(ised) performance' (Tasker 1998: 2). The recent trend of strong women reveals a

possibly changing attitude to women's bodies. Women's bodies are now being more often represented as active and not just something to be looked at (Inness 1999: 103–13). Male bodies have changed as well and have occasionally become more of a spectacle (Tasker 1993: 111–27). Contemporary male heroes in film are furthermore often allowed to express their emotions more, which also connects them to their bodies (Sjö 2009). With this in mind we can expect to see an equation between women and their bodies in Nordic films. Nordic films do differ from Hollywood films, but here too certain gender structures are common (Gustafsson 2006). However, male bodies will be of interest as well.

Religion and the body

That the body is central to religion is not a new insight, but it is a circumstance that has lately received renewed interest. The body plays an important part in most religions, but the comprehension of the body has of course changed over time and is different in different traditions, also reflecting changes in culture generally (Mellor & Shilling 1997). Though religious ideas are often expressed through the body, the body as such is a far from unproblematic area. In many religions we find the belief that some bodies are better than others (Griffith 2004). In the Christian tradition, as in many other religious traditions, it is women's bodies that have often been found to be especially problematic (Becher 1990). This is also something that is perhaps likely to come across in the material chosen for this study.

The problem with the woman's body in religion has naturally led to women often being in focus in studies concerning religion and the body (Cooey 1994). Lately, however, more and more studies are also focusing on male and lesbian, gay or queer bodies. In her study, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in ancient Greece and India*, Wendy Doniger explores women and their bodies, but she also looks at, for example, androgynous bodies. Her study points to the problems with both female bodies and in other ways different bodies in certain religious traditions (Doniger 1999). In *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* the contributors take a fresh look at the body in the Christian tradition and the many queer bodies that can be found here (Loughlin 2007). Both these studies illustrate the complex attitudes to the body that can exist in one and the same tradition, a complexity that is far from always made explicit, or explored. Will such complexity possibly come across in Nordic film?

Religion, film, and the body

The importance of the body in both religion and film has naturally inspired studies that combine these two areas. When, for example, discussing the often occurring saviour character in film (Baugh 1997), questions of the body have seldom been easy to ignore. Not the least films such as *The Passion of the Christ*, with its brutal and bloody depictions of the last hours of the life of Christ, have sparked some interesting debates (Denton-Borhaug 2005). The centrality of the body in films such as *Breaking the Waves* has also been argued to bring the body, sexuality and salvation into close and interesting proximity (Solano 2004). In this and other studies gender issues have naturally come up. Some films are considered to challenge traditional religious ideas of the body, but many underline not least the problematic female body (Rushing 1995).

Representations of the body in film have in several studies been related to contemporary ideas about the body and religion, and religious change. In her study of the body in American apocalyptic film, Katherine Low illustrates how these films, in the same way as the biblical apocalypse (Pippin 1999), centre on the body and how the female body is the problem, also reflecting anxieties in the real world (Low 2009). Maria Beatrice Bittarello has looked at how changing ideas of the body in science fiction film can be related to changing concepts of religion and the body in neo-paganism. What has inspired what can be hard to determine, but that a change has taken place in both areas is apparent (Bittarello 2008). Film, then, can express change and is therefore worthy of notice when dealing with change. The religious landscape in the Nordic countries is clearly changing, just as it is in the West in general. This is also likely to come across in the material.

The possibility for film to express a new bodily theology has been explored further by, among others, Gerard Loughlin in his *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology* (Loughlin 2004). Stefanie Knauss in several studies has also explored the body and sexuality in film, pointing to what we can learn from film when discussing sexuality and religion (Knauss 2007). This study is not a theological study *per se*, but studies such as Loughlin's and Knauss's underline the many different voices in theology today and the complex ways films can be of use here. They also point to the many different films that may be of interest. The direct focus on religion and the body in some Nordic films makes these films a natural starting point when working in a Nordic context. With these and the above discussed studies and insights in mind we will now turn to the material for this study.

The body and religion in Nordic film

Body dilemmas

In 2008 and 2009 two films with an obvious focus on the body and religion were made in the Nordic countries. *To verdener*, a film that is based on a true story, is a Danish film directed by Nils Arden Oplev. This film is the story of a young Jehovah's Witness named Sara and the circumstances that lead to her leaving the religious group she has grown up in and which has been her life. *Kielletty hedelmä*, an award-winning Finnish film directed by Dome Karukoski, tells the story of Maria and Raakel, two young women who have grown up in a conservative Laestadian community, and the conditions that in the end lead to one of the women leaving the community. Though there are differences between *To verdener* and *Kielletty hedelmä* and the religious groups presented in the films, the parallels are noteworthy and interesting when discussing religion and the body. Both films deal with the problems of combining conservative religious ideas with more secular views and though they both seem to aim to give a varied view of the religious groups they are portraying, the themes that are brought to the forefront in each of the films relate to the body and sexuality.

In *Kielletty hedelmä* one of the first scenes in the film takes place in a church. Here we are allowed to hear a sermon about the sinfulness of the flesh at the same time as we can see the main characters checking out the young men in the congregation. In *To verdener* similar issues relating to pre-marital sex are early on brought up by the religious leaders. In the scenes that follow, Sara meets a young man, Teis, and falls in love. A conservative religious view of sexuality and the body—according to which, for example, the flesh is seen as weak and sexual activity before marriage as a great sin—are then from the very start contrasted with the young women's feelings and interests and this is represented as the driving conflict of the films.

For Sara what follows is a struggle to combine her beliefs with her love for Teis. This turns out to be difficult. She is forced to break up with Teis, but when Teis shows interest in the group they are reunited and have sex. Sara tries to hide their sexual relationship, but is thrown out of the community. In the end she leaves Teis, but does not return to the Jehovah's Witnesses, since she says she has lost her faith. For Maria and Raakel life is not that much easier. It is Maria who first decides to leave the community and go to Helsinki in order to experience everything that is forbidden at home. While Maria throws herself into this new life, Raakel tries to hold true to her beliefs. In the end it is Maria however that cannot break free from her upbringing. When

she has intercourse for the first time she is overcome by guilt. For Raakel the first sexual experience is more positive and in the end she is the one who chooses to leave permanently.

The conclusion of the stories is not exactly the same for the three women, but the logic of the narratives is similar: a sane person will leave the conservative ideas about body and sexuality behind and choose to live according to more secular views. Those that do not leave are either incapable of dealing with the loneliness that breaking with the community will lead to, or are unable to break free from the beliefs of the community. That we are in this case dealing with three young women is not surprising, but notable. As we have seen, it is especially women's bodies that have been found to be problematic in many religions, an issue that the films clearly explore. The focus on the sexuality of women is furthermore typical for the film medium. The films might then deal with real issues, but the issues can also, if one wants to perhaps simplify the films, be seen as an excuse to focus on female sexuality. In addition, coming of age stories about women tend to focus on sexuality (Franck 2009: 274–5), which also can be seen as an explanation and frame for the film. The slightly new issue that the films bring to the traditional stories of young women growing up is, however, religion, and this can be argued to give a partly new and somewhat more complex perspective to the films.

However one chooses to read the films—as a reflection of conservative religious groups, as two more films about female sexuality, or as coming of age stories with some non-traditional levels—the fact that religion and the body/sexuality is portrayed as being in conflict in the films is significant. The way this conflict is used as a driving force in the films suggests that this is really seen as a problem in contemporary Nordic society today. It can also be argued to be pointing to suspicious attitudes towards conservative religious groups together with a wish perhaps to understand them better. But it might also point to some changes taking place. Religious ideas, or some religious ideas, are challenged in a fairly unsurprising way, but religion as such is completely removed only from Sara's life. For Raakel and Maria faith remains important. As we shall see, this is the case in some of the other films analyzed here as well.

Bodily salvation/redemption

While the body in *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener* is presented as a site of religious struggles, the body is allowed a perhaps slightly more complex but no less problematic role in the following two Nordic films to be analyzed: *Adams æbler* and *Sauna*. *Adams æbler* is a Danish drama-comedy directed

by Anders Thomas Jensen. The film contains religious references on many levels. The main character is Adam, a neo-Nazi who is allowed to serve a community service sentence at a church run by Ivan, a devout pastor. Adam is from the beginning determined to break Ivan and make him question God, but Ivan does not see the world as others do. He has had a horrible life, but he comprehends nothing of this. Towards the end we find out that Ivan has a brain tumor that will kill him, but as before in the film, nothing goes according to expectations.

There are many ways of understanding *Adams æbler*. It is clearly a film about the struggle between good and evil, but also a comedic story about faith. However, when we look to the structure of the film and the story arches of the main characters, redemption/salvation seems to be a key issue. In the film several characters are both saved and redeemed and this process is clearly connected to the body. Ivan's body in particular plays a fundamental part here. His body is at regular intervals beaten and broken. Adam quickly takes to violence in his doings with Ivan. When physical violence does not seem to have an effect, he uses mental abuse. Ivan's body responds to this by breaking down. In the end Ivan is shot through the head, but this is not the conclusion, instead this is the beginning of a new life for both Adam and Ivan. It forces Adam to make a choice and changes him, but it also confirms Ivan's beliefs.

In the Finnish film *Sauna*, redemption/salvation is also a major theme, though the conclusion is here not as positive. *Sauna* is a horror film, or a horror-drama and it is the director AJ Annila's second feature film. As in his previous film, *Jadesoturi* (2006), religious themes and struggling heroes are central to *Sauna*. As the title suggests the film is about a sauna. The story takes place in the sixteenth century. In the middle of nowhere, Swedish and Russian representatives who are drawing a new border between the nations come across a strange village. The people in the village are frightened and their fears are connected to a sauna. No one knows who built the sauna but once there was a monastery there. The sauna is, however, believed to be older than that.

Sin and punishment are central to *Sauna* and are both connected to the body. Sins can be traced on the body and it is through the body that a person can be saved or redeemed, or save someone else (or at least try to). The film begins with a murder. Eerik, one of the main characters, stabs a man repeatedly and when the man is dead Eerik declares that he was number 74. He has counted every man he has killed, not out of pride, but to know what lies on his conscience. Earlier in the timeline, Eerik and his brother Knut have washed themselves in a sauna exposing their naked and, as it would seem, innocent

bodies. From that point on, however, the crimes begin piling up. Knut locks a young woman in a cellar on Eerik's orders and is later haunted by images of her. When they reach the village Knut is immediately drawn to the strange sauna that is said to be able to wash sins away.

Driven by guilt Knut enters the sauna. When he returns he is no longer himself Eerik, a little later, finds a piece of skin, bearing a birthmark, pressed between the pages in a book. We know from the scene with Eerik and Knut in the sauna earlier that the piece of skin is Knut's. When Eerik looks closer at the piece he realizes that it is the number 75, the number of people he has by now killed. At this stage everyone except for Eerik and a young girl have followed Knut into the sauna. To try to save the girl Eerik sacrifices himself. After sending the girl away he undresses and enters the sauna where Knut awaits. Again Eerik's body is washed, but this time, as it would seem, in blood.

The focus on the body in *Sauna* can be considered something typical of the horror genre, equally so the religious references in the narrative (films such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976) come to mind). The centrality of redemption/salvation in both *Adams æbler* and *Sauna*, however, also open up for comparisons with Jesus and Christ-like characters in film. Ivan can be read as a Christ-like character: he suffers, almost dies and changes the people around him. Eerik, too has some saviour characteristics. Just as with many other saviour characters on film or characters working for redemption, both of the characters suffer in a bodily way and underline the centrality of the body in the Christian salvation/redemption story—or at least in the filmic versions of these stories.

It is furthermore interesting to note, if one wants to do a theological reading of the films, the way the body is given power over the word in the narratives. No prayers or religious texts can save people, only bodily suffering. Thus the films could be argued to challenge traditional protestant ideas that deny the religious power of the body and proclaim the power of the word (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 99–128). However, the focus on the body can again be argued to simply be the way films handle ideas. That we are in both films dealing with suffering male bodies is not that surprising if we read them as saviour characters—male saviours often, as has been suggested, suffer bodily in film. From a gender perspective the suffering male bodies are interesting and shift attention onto the male body in a partly novel way that reflects some changes in how men are represented on film in general. Male bodies are also focused on in an interesting way in the two last films we shall analyze here; *Riisuttu mies* and *Så som i himmelen*.

Body and spirit

In *Riisuttu mies* and *Så som i himmelen*, similarly as in *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener*, some traditional religious ideas and hierarchies are challenged and as in *Adams æbler* and *Sauna*, the challenge relates to the body. Here the goal however is not just salvation or redemption; rather, a different form of spiritual or religious view of the body seems to be sought.

Riisuttu mies is a Finnish comedy directed by Aku Louhimies. Since this film is a comedy, the ideas expressed should perhaps not be taken too seriously, but they are, just as in *Adams æbler*, still noteworthy. The film is about a pastor, Antti Pitkänen, who has been asked to run for bishop. While Antti tries his best to live up to the expectations of his wife, in-laws, friends and congregation, his life is really a mess. He is overweight and impotent. His best friend thinks he has sold out, his father-in-law that he is a loser and he himself that he is a fraud. Things do not become any better when he meets Vilma, a woman who seems to be in touch with herself and her life in a way Antti is clearly not, and whom Antti is almost immediately drawn to.

That the body is central to *Riisuttu mies* is clear from the start. In the opening scenes of the film we hear Antti in voiceover talk about his weight and next his impotence is revealed. This focus on the body continues throughout the film, often to comedic effect, but sometimes also in a more serious way. When Antti begins running for bishop his image becomes central. He is dressed in clothes that will present him as a modern pastor and expose his background as a musician, but this is just a question of representation. It is made clear that Antti will have to leave his music behind, since it does not fit with the image of a bishop. At the same time we see the current bishop leading a debauched lifestyle with lots of drinking and possible illicit affairs. Antti is no better; he too drinks and cheats on his wife, but he feels guilty and he prays for a miracle.

The many twists and turns of this film make the body an issue in complex ways. What I find especially interesting, however, are the positive views of the body that are a part of the story, though not always in a very obvious way. The film clearly criticizes some religious ideas about the body, such as negative attitudes to homosexuality and hypocritical attitudes to sex, but there are also views that are encouraged. Antti often has issues with his body, but there are scenes where he seems to enjoy it, for example, when he is allowed to sing and dance. These scenes take place in the church, or with people of the church and are thereby given a religious or spiritual reference. This positive attitude to the body reaches its height in the final scenes of the film, where Antti undresses before his congregation, declaring that he will not accept the symbols he carries if he is not wanted as the person and sinner he is.

The key message in *Riisuttu mies* is then that one cannot be good if one does not accept oneself and one's body. This idea of accepting the body is even more evident in *Så som i himmelen*. This film, directed by Kay Pollak, is one of the most watched and discussed Nordic films of late. The main character in the film is the conductor Daniel, who after a breakdown returns to his home village and takes the job as cantor and leader of the church choir. His arrival brings new life to the village, but also challenges traditional power structures. As the Christ figure he clearly is, Daniel brings hope to people, but he also suffers and dies. Every step of the way his body is focused upon. He is, like Ivan in *Adams æbler*, beaten up and he suffers from a bodily illness. Most interestingly though, I find, is the way the body is celebrated in this film in a religious/spiritual way.

The main idea in Daniel's 'teachings' is that everyone has a unique voice. This voice is not however something that can be found just through singing. Community, acceptance and a celebration of the body are needed as well. The unique voice is then given a spiritual and bodily dimension. We see the choir members exploring their bodies and an important part of the choir practices are also the coffee breaks, where the bodies are given nourishment in many ways. The enjoyment of the body is something that the choir members bring home with them too. The pastor's wife, for example, challenges her husband's beliefs in the sinfulness of the flesh and makes him open up for at least one night and the woman Gabriella, who lives with an abusive husband, receives the strength to leave him.

The great success of *Så som i himmelen* has naturally led to many studies and discussions of the film. Lars Johansson (2005) for example has compared the film with religious change that is taking place in the real world, explored in studies such as Paul Heelas's and Linda Woodhead's *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (2005). From this perspective as well the focus on the body becomes interesting. A lot of the new spiritualities point to the need to look to both body and spirit, something that Pollak has clearly expressed in his film. In *Så som i himmelen* these ideas are furthermore combined with a rather traditional filmic Christ character with a beaten up and broken body. The film also deals with traditional conservative ideas about sexuality, but contrasts these with more spiritual ones. The focus on men and their bodies in both *Så som i himmelen* and *Riisuttu mies* points to the reworking of some traditional gender structures in film. Female bodies are not however ignored here and though women would seem to very obviously and traditionally be connected to their bodies, they too are challenging. They are given the power to both teach and lead throughout both films.

Bodies in transformation

Contemporary Nordic film then, as the analysis above has shown, deals with religion and the body in complex ways that reflect trends in both film and religion. To summarize, the body can be an entity over which struggles over values and norms are fought, and, not that surprisingly, the female body is here the specific area of struggle. The body can also be connected to certain religious or Christian ideas as well as being an area through which religious goals are reached, in this case salvation or redemption, following in the footsteps of many Hollywood productions about saviour characters. The body can finally be given a clear, positive value and a religious/spiritual dimension. In this case the bodies and the religious themes in the films can be related to certain modern trends in religion. The films and the themes presented do not, of course, expose every aspect of how religion and the body are treated in Nordic film today. They also clearly deal with ideas about the body and religion on different levels: some more directly than others. However, taken together they do, I would argue, suggest some possible recurring perceptions of and attitudes to religion and the body in at least the Nordic countries today that are worthy of some further notice.

A first attitude to religion and the body that unmistakably comes across in the material is a negative view of what are seen as traditionally religious or conservative religious views on the body. This is not unanticipated. Conservative religious views that, for example, criticize sex before marriage, lust and physical enjoyment, do not fit well with ideas in society in general. Most people today, it would seem, are in support of sex before marriage and do not see the body as sinful. Consequently, it is to be expected that conflicts will appear and be built on when these ideas are expressed by certain characters in a film. Something that is worth noticing however is that the religious attitudes to the body in the films often become a bit one sided. Less traditional religious voices are not presented, at least not in the films that directly deal with these issues, *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener*. Instead the conservative voice is often the only religious voice, something that far from reflects the reality in theology today, but perhaps suggests something about the general public understanding or religious attitudes to the body. In short, the films possibly mirror a perception that religious people have problems with sexuality and the body.

However, despite this negative attitude to what is represented as traditional religious views of the body, religion is as such seldom written off completely in the films. Instead some religious, or perhaps rather, spiritual, views are

even represented in a positive light. These are views that, as we saw in *Riisuttumies* and *Så som i himmelen*, accept the body and combines bodily wellbeing with spiritual wellbeing. Though these views are characterized as a threat to religious institutions and hierarchies, they are nonetheless seldom completely separated from traditional religion. Rather, we can see in the films some representatives of the church or people connected to the church opening up to these ideas. As we have seen, we can relate the ideas to the changes that are taking place in the real world as well, specifically the turn from religion to spirituality. The films underline the challenges this turn represents for traditional religious institutions, but would also seem to wish to incorporate them into, in most of the films, the Lutheran Church. The perception of religion that we find in the films, then, is that religion is changing, but the place for religion can still be argued to be in the church—though not only there.

The films do suggest, then, as have several studies of religion in the real world, that a transformation is taking place and that this is a good thing. When discussing change, the question of gender also becomes central. In *Kielletty hedelmä* and *To verdener* we can see a not very surprising focus on female sexuality and female bodies, but the often recurring focus on men's sexual problems and suffering male bodies in the material, points to a change in traditional views of masculinity. Men's wishes to control women's sexuality is furthermore clearly expressed as wrong in the material, giving women back at least some power over their bodies, but male pastors' problems with their own sexuality in an interesting way also challenge pre-existent notions of the traditional male hero. Men, too, are their bodies, but this is not represented as a bad thing. Instead, being in contact with your body is seen as something good. The way women in the films play an important part in leading the men onto the right path also offers women a form of power. The values that are proclaimed in several of the films are in short values that can be read as traditionally feminine. However, one can argue that the absolute power in the films remains in the hands of men, since the films are often mostly about men. Despite this the attitude that the films suggest is that equality between the sexes when it comes to religion is a good thing and that being different is okay.

The bodily representation of salvation/redemption is also noteworthy from a gender perspective. The films dealing with this issue can be seen to borrow from the Christian tradition, but the Christian version of redemption is at the same time partly challenged and restructured. The films show that Christian ideas of salvation/redemption still work as structures for film narratives today, but for the stories to function, some changes need to be

made. The fact that it is mostly male bodies that are seen to be punished here is interesting, since it seems to question the power of the male and point to another form of challenge of male dominance. The focus on the body in the films can perhaps best be argued to underline the way the film medium traditionally handles religious (and other) ideas, but it can also be seen as something that makes sense for a viewer in a culture and a religious world where the body is in focus. A final perception that the films suggest, then, is that it is natural to deal with things in a bodily manner and that bodies are important—something that films might of course also be argued to have taught us in the first place.

Conclusion—from imagined bodies to real bodies?

In this article I started off by discussing the importance of religion and film research and the place of religion in Nordic film. I then looked more closely at some studies related to religion, film and the body, and analyzed six contemporary Nordic films expressing three recurring body and religion related themes, to see what they could contribute to the discussion of the body and religion today. The three themes, it was illustrated, point to a complex views on the body and religion in Nordic film that can be related to trends in both religion and film, but the themes were also argued to suggest some more general prevailing attitudes. A critique of traditional religious ideas was obvious in the material, but also an interest in a more spiritual view on the body. A prevailing dominance of Christian thoughts was clear, but also transformations of this tradition. Though some of the representations can be understood to be a result of the visual side of the film medium and the way that films often deal with ideas, they also clearly pointed to an interest in the body today in general, together with a changing religious landscape. The gender structures that could be identified in the material illustrated changes and challenges at this level as well, though male power was still seen to partly prevail. All in all then, the study points to many-faceted ideas about and ways of understanding religion and the body today.

A question that remains, however, is what this can possibly tell us about the body and the religion of the viewer. What is the connection between the body on film and the body of the viewer? This study has taken the form of a content-analysis and to go from representations of bodies and religion to saying anything for certain about real bodies is not possible. Still, when dealing with films the body of the viewer cannot be ignored and to claim that films

never have an effect on real bodies would be incorrect. In the same way that studies in aesthetics in general have come to focus on the body (Meyer & Verrips 2008), studies of how we view film have shown that watching a film is a bodily experience (Barker 2009). From this we can draw the possible conclusion that films about bodies and religion can, at least for some people, also have a clear effect on their own understandings of these issues and entities. For many the effect might be nothing more than a confirmation of certain ideas, but for others the right kind of film that speaks to that person in his/her situation, a more bodily transformation might take place. For this to happen the film does not necessarily have to deal with obvious religious issues, but religious themes of some kind might make a religious reading or experience more likely. Future studies will hopefully delve further into this question and be able to give clearer answers. But for now it can in any case be argued that Nordic films too, with their complex representations of body and religion, are a worthwhile area of study, whether one's interest lies with bodies on screen or bodies in front of screens.

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