

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **MASS CULTURE: CATHOLIC
AMERICANISM AT THE MOVIES, 1930-
1947**

Ann Mairín Hanlon, Master of Arts, 2007

Directed By: Professor James B. Gilbert, Department of
History

Between 1930 and 1947 (and ultimately, to 1967), the Hollywood film industry adhered to a set of rules, known as the Production Code, that set boundaries on the content of movies produced and distributed by the major studios. Influenced by Catholic theology, and written by a Catholic lay person and a Catholic priest, the Production Code and the films of the Production Code-era have been mined by historians for evidence of Catholic censorship in Hollywood. This thesis explores another side the relationship between Hollywood and the Church, exploring the productive relationship between these major twentieth-century institutions, and the cultural negotiations that resulted in the representation of Catholicism as the American religion of the silver screen.

MASS CULTURE: CATHOLIC AMERICANISM AT THE MOVIES, 1930-1947

By

Ann Mairín Hanlon.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2007

Advisory Committee:
Professor James B. Gilbert, Chair
Professor Saverio Giovacchini
Professor Arthur M. Eckstein

© Copyright by
Ann Mairín Hanlon
2007

Dedication

To my Mother and my Grandmother. Another county heard from.

Acknowledgements

I could not have written this thesis without the patience, insight, encouragement, and enthusiasm of my advisor, James Gilbert. Saverio Giovacchini tried to steer me clear of some of my unexamined assumptions about the Hollywood of the Production Code era, and provided encouragement when the going was slow. Art Eckstein graciously joined my committee at the last minute. I hope I was able to persuade him to reconsider the artistic merits of Barry Fitzgerald.

Most of all, I thank my husband, Ryan Jerving. Every writer should have such an insightful and delightful in-house editor/sounding-board/theorist. I could not have written this without him.

Finally, I thank my daughter, Irene. It took longer, but I could not have written this without her, either.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1: Hollywood Censer-ed	1
Chapter 2: The Legion of Decency: Catholicism is 20th Century Americanism .	25
Chapter 3: Silver Screen Catholicism	60
Bibliography	100

Chapter 1: Hollywood Censer-ed

A major boycott of Hollywood films jolted the movie industry in 1934. Instigated by a Catholic organization known as the National Legion of Decency, the boycotts claimed to protest what they called the country's "greatest menace—the salacious motion picture." Thousands of Catholics signed pledges stating they would refuse to attend their local picture shows, with the expressed goal of hitting the industry where it hurt most, "at their Source of Support —their Achillean heel—their Box Office receipts."¹ Ten years later, a sympathetic film about a Catholic priest played by top box office star Bing Crosby, *Going My Way*, swept the Academy Awards, winning the Oscars for best actor, best supporting actor, best screenplay, and best motion picture of the year. The box office receipts weren't bad either.

During the interim, and for a few short years beyond the release of *Going My Way*, Hollywood religiously adhered to a Production Code that shaped the content of motion pictures. Thomas Doherty has described the Code's "amalgam of Irish-Catholic Victorianism" as responsible not just for "the warm hearted padres played by Spencer Tracy, Pat O'Brien, and Bing Crosby, but the deeper lessons of the Baltimore catechism—deference to civil and religious authorities, insistence on personal responsibility, belief in the salvific worth of suffering, and resistance to pleasures of the flesh in thought, word, and deed."² While the Code also provided Hollywood with a shield against more disastrous boycotts or government intervention, it undoubtedly

¹ Legion of Decency Manual of Handy Reference, 1934, Martin J. Quigley Papers (hereafter MJQ), Georgetown University Archives.

² Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 6.

grounded the images and values of Hollywood motion pictures in a decidedly Catholic moral universe, including a veritable genre of “warm hearted padres,” and it did so less than a decade after anti-Catholicism had reached its public apex in the backlash produced by the Presidential campaign of New York’s Catholic governor, Al Smith.

The Catholic boycotts, the Production Code, and the success of a Catholic movie like *Going My Way* illustrate the depth of mutual involvement between two highly organized 20th century institutions: the American Catholic Church and the Hollywood movie industry in the years of the studio system and vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition. Francis Couvares has suggested something of the relationship I hope to illuminate when he wrote, “the encounter of Church and movie industry was in some degree less a struggle than a mutual embrace, motivated by an urge on the part of both movie moguls and Catholic clerical and lay leaders to defend their institutional interest and achieve respectability and cultural authority in twentieth-century America.”³ The “mutual embrace” that Hollywood and the Catholic Church affected during this period, through both organizations’ uses of images and rhetoric helped one another to “achieve respectability and cultural authority” by giving each other the means to define mainstream America, in the process defining away the America that was historically suspicious of both institutions.

Neither the Production Code Administration or its parent organization, The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, nor the Catholic-led Legion

³ Francis G. Couvares, “Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies Before the Production Code,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1992): 584.

of Decency have been seen in those terms by the historians who have documented their relationship, though. There is an understandable tendency to frame the period following the boycotts until the 1950s, when the Code began to break down, as one in which the “the movies were encased in a chastity belt that the studios attempted to loosen only at their peril.”⁴ Perhaps the most egregious example of this interpretation can be found in Gregory Black’s two-volume study, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies* (1994), and *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (1997). Black paints a picture of the Legion of Decency as a puritanical and out of touch pressure group, led by “a Catholic hierarchy that longed for a return to Victorian constraints.” In Black’s formulation, the Legion, with the help of industry insiders like Martin Quigley and especially Joe Breen (who Black sees as largely motivated by anti-Semitism), forced its agenda on a fairly spineless motion picture industry and in the process deprived Hollywood of the opportunity to become “a new center of human expression.”⁵ Black’s un-provable contention that Hollywood might have soared to greater artistic heights without the constraint of the Production Code is representative of what is problematic about his thesis. His argument, that the Church and Hollywood colluded over the creation of the Production Code, resulting in movie content acceptable to the Catholic Church, is accurate so far as it goes. The trouble is it doesn’t go very far: it presents an almost absurdly narrow view of what the Legion of Decency and Catholic industry executives hoped to accomplish in Hollywood. Moreover, Black ignores the broader

⁴ James Skinner, review of *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies* by Gregory D. Black, *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (1996): 252.

⁵ Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5, 35.

cultural significance of Hollywood's embrace of a Catholic-friendly agenda, let alone the Catholic Church's embrace of the power of Hollywood productions.

A not dissimilar view of the Legion and the Production Code Office is taken by James Skinner in his history of the Legion of Decency, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (1993). Skinner provides a detailed account of the early history of movie censorship in the United States and shows how the Legion of Decency and the Catholic Church came to wield such formidable influence over such matters after 1934. Skinner's topic is narrower than Black's, focusing on the Legion of Decency's relationships in Hollywood, and ultimately, how that affected the movies produced during the enforcement period. But his representation of the relationship between the Church and movie industry deals almost solely with the conflicts perceived to be inherent in the antagonistic relationship between the two, while it ignores the significance of each organization's need for the other. His analysis suffers from caricatures like the one he uses to introduce his topic:

It was a permanent duel of the wits between Hollywood producers and the guardians of morality. The most formidable of the latter was to be found in the heart of New York City, its hierarchy dressed in black, its membership huge, its powers of retribution against transgressors of decency merciless, its agenda – to mold the content of American motion picture entertainment to its will.⁶

⁶ James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993): xiv-xv.

Like Black, Skinner is interested in how the Catholic Church shaped movie content, but also like Black, he emphasizes what the Church took out, rather than what they put in. While his account takes a broader view than his introduction suggests, Skinner, like others writing about censorship and its effect on the Hollywood product, resorts to his own sins of oversimplification of his subjects' goals and ideals. He caricatures and dumbs down the Catholic Church's perceptions and expectations of Hollywood, while yet recognizing the ambiguities inherent in the confluence of business and morality.

Frank Walsh's *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (1996), written three years later, covers much of the same path already beaten by Skinner, particularly regarding the period from 1930-1960. But Walsh also documents the Church's interest in motion pictures prior to 1930, characterizing the Legion of Decency as the logical end point of a process that began as far back as World War I, when the Church waged a national campaign to prevent the release of government sponsored films designed to check the spread of venereal disease among the military. Walsh is also interested in the ways that the Church embraced the motion picture quite early on, citing for instance an effort in 1919 to use film to tell the story of the Church in America in order to help quell a trend of anti-Catholic sentiment. Like Black and Skinner, though, when it comes to the films that were produced during the period of Production Code enforcement, Walsh puts the emphasis on those that ran into the most trouble with censors – all three authors discuss *Duel in the Sun* and *The Moon is Blue*, for example – and ignore the films,

such as *Boys Town* or *The Song of Bernadette*, that may have been made not only with the censors in mind, but with their constituency in mind as well.

Not all historians have been as preoccupied with the deleterious effect of the Church on Hollywood as these three tomes – which represent the most thorough book-length treatments of Hollywood and the Catholic Church to date – suggest. A more nuanced reading of the relationship can be found in several essays devoted to the topic. Richard Maltby calls into question traditional readings of the pre-code and code eras in several essays, most overtly in his 2003 article, “More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of ‘Pre-Code Cinema’.” Maltby argues that there are two prevalent myths associated with pre-Code Hollywood: the first, now largely defunct, held that “Hollywood was established by immigrants untutored in the finer manners of corporate capitalism, who occasionally had to be reminded to their civic responsibilities.” This first myth cited the scandal that led to the establishment of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922 and the Production Code in 1930. But, in this scenario, the economic impact of the Depression forced producers to market harder stuff to an audience in decline, and an unprecedented crop of sexually explicit and gangster ridden movies filled the theaters until 1934, when the Catholic Legion of Decency forced the industry to enforce its own Code. Maltby attributes the genesis of second myth to film historian Robert Sklar’s claim, in his 1975 history, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, that, “In the first half decade of the Great Depression, Hollywood's movie-makers perpetrated one of the most remarkable challenges to traditional values in the history of mass commercial entertainment. The movies called into question

sexual propriety, social decorum and the institutions of law and order.” Maltby rightly questions the motivation for Hollywood to perpetuate such a challenge, particularly during a period of economic instability. But in both cases, he suggests the problem lay not only in the interpretation (and motivation) for such claims, but in the lack of documentary evidence to prove otherwise. With the opening of the records of the Production Code Administration in the 1980s, it became clear that the PCA was, in fact, enforcing the Code before 1934, including the censorship of offending material. Maltby suggests that the continued endurance of the second myth, with its dramatic interpretation of a forbidden and subversive Hollywood is perhaps too strong a marketing device and storyline to overcome, despite evidence to the contrary.⁷ Although Maltby argues that the notion of The Legion of Decency saving the unassimilated producers from themselves is defunct, I would argue that its main premises are still in some evidence, particularly with regard to interpretations of the Hollywood-Catholic connection. Writers such as Black and Skinner invert the notion that the Legion and Joe Breen were saviors to the industry and make them instead pariahs, and combine that with elements of Maltby’s second myth, particularly the idea that a genre of daring, adult-themed films were prematurely stifled, to produce a confused reading of Hollywood as both subversive and submissive.

A more expansive reading of the relationship that developed between these two cultural behemoths can be found in Francis Couvares’s article, “Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies before the Production Code.” Taking the real pre-code era as his subject, Couvares investigates efforts by

⁷ Richard Maltby, “More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of ‘Pre-Code Cinema,’” *Senses of Cinema* no. 29 (2003), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/29/pre_code_cinema.html , Accessed April 11, 2006.

largely Protestant groups to control the movie industry, and why their failure opened the door to Catholic influence. Couvares's article avoids the temptation to lapse into stereotype that Black and Skinner found difficult to resist, largely because he asks a different question. Black and Skinner have set out to tell a cautionary tale about censorship. Though admirably researched and indisputably useful as histories of the Hollywood-Church relationship, their observations are necessarily shaped by the project of defining censorious activity. Couvares is interested less in the mechanics of censorship than in the negotiation of cultural authority. The two issues are most certainly related, but the approach yields different results because Couvares is interested not only in what was considered subversive, but also in what was defined and promoted as mainstream, "Main Street," American values.

The stage being set for the definition of mainstream American values, my thesis will look at how the Catholic Church was able to step into a breach opened up by Protestant in-fighting and use Hollywood to successfully define Main Street American values as their own, with Hollywood and the Church emerging as equal gainers in the matter. A movie like *Going My Way* is noteworthy during this period, not only for the revealing minutiae of its own travails with the Production Code and Church spokesmen, but for the fidelity with which its plot, characters, and even marketing appealed to the self-image the Church had gone about creating for itself over the prior two decades. If *Going My Way* were unique in its subject matter, it might be an interesting aberration, but it seems to have been part of a trend during that period, preceded as it was by the even more overtly religious (and Catholic) film, *The Song of Bernadette*, one of the top grossing movies of 1943, and followed by its

own sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary's* in 1945. Rather than a purely antagonistic relationship, with the Church determined to bind and gag the industry, and the industry determined to subvert the Production Code in the name of profit, the Church and Hollywood entered into a mutual, though fraught, embrace during that period, and in the end, though fitfully and at times problematically, both had succeeded in making the other over in its own image.

Early Protestant Interventions

Concern over what the audience saw on the big screen was initially the province of Protestant organizations, but it was also a non-denominational preoccupation that came fast on the heels of the birth of the medium itself. As early as 1909, New York's mayor closed all movie theaters in response to a growing concern over inappropriate content. In response to proliferating criticism of motion picture fare, Protestant reformers established the National Board of Censorship to keep the movie industry apprised of the standards acceptable to mainstream America. Though as Francis Couvares notes, by 1915, when "the National Board of Censorship became the National Board of Review, it acknowledged the central difficulty for those hoping to define mainstream morality and translate it into rules for censoring movies: even Protestant, middle class Americans could not agree on the proper limits to the representation of sexuality and other controversial matters." The Board itself had grown out of touch with a significant portion of its constituency. Made up of the more liberal Protestant leadership in America, the Board's decisions, as well as its tendency

to go soft on Hollywood, more often than not alienated the growing fundamentalist factions.⁸

In addition to the lack of clarity regarding mainstream Protestant morality, the National Board of Censorship/Review was merely an advisory body with no legally or institutionally binding authority. However, a number of city and state censorship boards, which had been in place since 1907 when Chicago began denying permits to films the Board deemed obscene or immoral, did have the authority to ban a particular title from playing in its jurisdiction. Pennsylvania created the first state censorship board in 1911, followed by Ohio in 1913, Kansas in 1914, and Maryland in 1916. The Supreme Court's decision in 1915 in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* essentially denied the film industry First Amendment rights until the decision was reversed in the 1952 *Miracle* decision. Until then, however, the industry was vulnerable, and throughout the teens and 1920s, censorship bills were introduced in 37 states.

Adding fuel to the fire was a series of well-publicized Hollywood scandals, the most famous of which was the Fatty Arbuckle debacle of 1921. The scandals, along with increasing public frustration over control of movie content, led to the formation of an industry-created self-monitoring association, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), in 1922. The major studios formed the MPPDA in part to combat growing calls for government intervention, and appointed Will Hays its first president. Hays was a lawyer by training, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, campaign manager for Warren Harding's successful bid for President, and Postmaster General of the United States.

⁸ Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 586-587.

He was also a prominent elder in the Presbyterian Church, lending the beleaguered film industry an air of moral authority that some hoped would convince critics that self-regulation was a practical and superior alternative to government intervention.

Hays's religious pedigree could only take him so far, though. The conservative fundamentalist factions within the Protestant faith were likely to suspect anyone working within the industry as sympathizing with a more liberal notion of morality. Protestant reformers – liberal and fundamentalist alike – had long preferred government regulation as the best way to tame the industry, but Hays ultimately frustrated them.

Among the changes the predominantly Protestant reformers sought was the dismantling of the industry practice known as “block-booking.” Block-booking required theater owners to purchase movies in packages (“blocks”) rather than by individual title. Exhibitors adopted the reformers' argument against the practice, protesting that it financially obligated theater owners to purchase and show films to which they objected morally. However, the practice helped the studios maintain control over exhibition while technically keeping the two operations distinct, thus forestalling charges that it was engaged in monopolistic practices. It was a profitable practice for the industry, and one they intended to keep in operation. Hays, who served at the pleasure of the industry, was therefore obligated to protect it, too. Rhetorically, Hollywood was at an advantage while the main objection to the practice was expressed as a moral problem, rather than a legal one. By 1927, the industry had adopted a self-regulatory code of sorts, called “The Don'ts and Be Carefuls,” which it duly trotted out in such circumstances. If there was no objection to the content of the

movies, then certainly there was no reason for exhibitors to fear block-booking.⁹ That same year, Smith Wildman Brookhart, a Republican Senator from Iowa, introduced a bill in the Senate to end the practice. While the measure ultimately failed, the issue remained in play well into the Depression years as the legislative trends of the New Deal era posed a significant threat to the Hollywood system of vertical integration. As Protestant reform groups began to demand regulation of film content via legislation, Hays found he needed to develop a new constituency with a stronger aversion to government control.

Experimenting with Control

By almost any standard, the Hollywood studios weathered the economic crisis of the Depression better than others. Considered Depression-proof at first, by 1931 three of the major studios -- Fox, RKO, and Warner Brothers -- had suffered major financial losses. That same year, theater attendance had plummeted 40% compared to 1929. The studios were largely financed through debt during this period, making a small number of banking firms responsible for the financial solvency of the major Hollywood studios. The conventional wisdom holds that Hollywood had to increase the provocative power of films in order to keep their audience intact and finance mounting debts. And in fact, between 1930 and 1932, some of the most notorious titles associated with “pre-code” Hollywood were released, including the gangster epics *Little Caesar* (1930) and *Public Enemy* (1931), the adultery-themed Jean Harlow vehicle *Red Headed Woman*, which was banned in Great Britain, and Mae

⁹ Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood: 1918-1939* (Madison, WI : University of Wisconsin Press, 1997): 48.

West's sex comedy *She Done Him Wrong* (both 1932). *She Done Him Wrong* did so well at the box office that *Variety* named Mae West its entertainer of the year for 1932.

That same year, Joseph Breen, then public relations advisor to Will Hays and future head of the Production Code Administration, wrote a long and anxious letter to Martin Quigley, editor of the *Motion Picture Herald*, one of the largest papers in the motion picture trade. He was concerned with "general industry conditions," including salary freezes at most studios, as well as an offer to take an entirely new position on the Fox lot working for one of their top executives, Winfield Sheehan (Breen ultimately declined). Moreover, he felt that the image and moral standing of the studios was being treated too cavalierly by motion picture personnel. With the country in the midst of one of the worst years of the Depression, Breen was nervous about the potential for public outrage if Hollywood continued to flaunt its opulence:

Pettijohn [Hays's chief counsel] and directors in N.Y. insist that we soft pedal all talk of high costs and big salaries. I sow the seed among the press people, pointing out to them the sinister effect of all this talk about extravagant indulgences and then they agree to pass up all such discussion. Then, just when we have that sort of stuff pretty well softened, M.G.M. puts on the premier of *Grand Hotel* which is the most flagrant flaunting of reckless spending that my eyes have ever set upon. And the streets for blocks about the theatre are thronged with a mob that makes no bones about its ugly mood.¹⁰

¹⁰ Letter, Breen to Quigley, May 1, 1932, Box 1, Folder 3, MJQ

For Breen, the opulence and publicity of *Grand Hotel's* opening night festivities provided a succinct illustration of the degree to which Hollywood had fallen out of touch with its audience. The New York opening of the film seems to have been greeted by some degree of “furor” according to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*. But that newspaper indicated the controversy may simply have stirred up more interest in the West Coast premiere, which was slated to be as extravagant.¹¹ Breen’s frustration that such displays might backfire, especially as the salaries of regular studio workers were being frozen, was understandable. But the same letter also named a grievance Breen felt might prove even more damaging to the studios’ image: what he saw as the flagrant dismissal of the moral guidelines to movie content outlined in the Production Code. Adopted in 1930, just two years earlier, by the MPPDA, the Production Code was one of the latest attempts to clean up the screen through self-regulation and fend off state or federal oversight of the industry.

The Code was a detailed guide to what was morally acceptable and unacceptable in a film produced and distributed by the major Hollywood studios. But as Breen made clear in his letter to Quigley, its enforcement was slow to take hold in a manner that pleased either one of them. The Code itself had been co-written by Breen’s correspondent, Martin Quigley, who in addition to his editorship of the *Motion Picture Herald*, was a devout Catholic layman. Quigley’s co-writer was a Catholic priest with an interest in performance and cinema, Father Daniel Lord. Lord was a Jesuit priest based in St. Louis who taught drama, and who had served as a consultant on Cecil B. DeMille’s 1927 Bible epic *King of Kings*. Theirs was not the

¹¹ *Los Angeles Times*, “Premiere at Chinese Prepared: Grauman Makes Plans for Spectacular Presentation of ‘Grand Hotel’,” April 17, 1932.

first attempt to corral the movies through self-regulation, but the Code *was* the first serious attempt at prior censorship. The “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” were issued by Hays’s Studio Relations Committee in 1927, and consisted of a summary of the most common causes for film censorship by city, state, and even foreign censorship boards. Nevertheless, studios could ignore what were essentially guidelines with no internal enforcement mechanism. But the costs of post-production editing, necessary for the distribution of films in major state and urban and foreign centers, had become an unjustifiable luxury as the economic crisis of the Depression began to weigh more heavily on the industry. Even before that economic incentive brought post-production editing to a halt, Hays himself was growing more frustrated with the studio’s reluctance to implement his office’s guidelines. In his President’s Report of 1929, he sharply criticized his colleagues, warning them that “...every time a picture is banned or cuts are made, censorship is justified that much more in the eyes of the people.”¹²

Hays knew whereof he spoke. His office was the recipient of missives from dissatisfied consumers of the Hollywood product. Moreover, his own Protestant base was proving more difficult to please. Increasingly, Hays found that he could turn to another source of support, The International Federation of Catholic Alumnae (IFCA), which sponsored its own Motion Picture Bureau. Their policy of “praising the best and ignoring the rest” was, as Frank Walsh points out, “all Hays could have asked for.”¹³ Moreover, the Catholic leadership’s inclinations had traditionally rejected government intervention in favor of self-regulation. The severity of the Depression, however, had led many Catholic leaders to break with this traditional view in favor of

¹² Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996): 49

¹³ *Ibid.*

stronger government powers, temporarily, in order to relieve the economic crisis. Nevertheless, that reversal did not extend to regulation of the motion picture industry, where many Church leaders feared that government censorship would paradoxically allow issues such as divorce and birth control to become acceptable movie content

Therefore, in 1930, with the Hays Office increasingly frustrated with its dismissal by the studios and the country suffering from the initial effects of the Depression, the time seemed ripe for a more systematic approach to self-censorship. The Production Code drafted by Quigley and Lord was a more prescriptive set of rules than any previously furnished to the industry. Quigley and Lord would both later claim it was based on the Ten Commandments. In the opening summary of the document, its authors described its main objectives:

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

The document goes on to list particular applications of the Code in sections on “Crimes Against the Law,” “Sex,” “Vulgarity,” “Obscenity,” “Profanity,” “Costume,” “Dances,” “Religion,” “Locations” (i.e. bedrooms), “National Feelings,” “Titles,” and “Repellant Subjects.” Any dissembling that might result from debate over such potentially contestable concepts as “evil,” “wrongdoing,” or “correct standards of

life,” were absorbed by invoking “natural law,” which was defined under the Code’s “General Principles” in this manner: “By natural law is understood the law which is written in the hearts of all mankind, the great underlying principles of right and justice dictated by conscience.”¹⁴

The authors’ invocation of “natural law” in the Code reflects what historian Jay Dolan has termed the “Catholic confidence” that emerged after World War I, as their numbers swelled with new Catholic immigrants and parishes began a building boom that would last well into the latter half of the century.¹⁵ At the same time, the American Catholic Church had come to identify increasingly with the theology of Thomas Aquinas, particularly following the reign of Pope Leo XIII and his revival of Thomistic philosophy at the turn of the century. Citing the Church’s grounding in this theological framework, itself a reaction to what its adherents regarded as an overly relativist modernism, Catholic theology had what one author called a “‘ready justification for democracy’ in natural law, and a ‘ready justification for an entire system of morality’ in Thomist theology,” making American Catholics “‘much closer in their intellectual and emotional response to the great majority of Americans’ in their acceptance of the American status quo.” For the same reasons, it also made Catholics – represented by Quigley and Lord – the perfect authors for a Code whose predecessors had been weakened by lack of enforcement, as well as disagreement over every particular philosophical and material aspect.¹⁶

¹⁴ “A Code,” adopted March 31, 1930, Box 2, Folder 8, MJQ.

¹⁵ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985): 350, 352.

¹⁶ Edward A. Purcell, Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington, KY: 1973) quoted in Couvares, “Hollywood, Main Street and the Church,” 609.

Reflecting that confidence in its intellectual (and theological) basis, the Code included a section that details the “Reasons” behind each application and articulates a particular role for the motion picture – that it be purely for leisure and entertainment. Because in this scheme entertainment and leisure are by themselves amoral, both the “good” and the “bad” versions of entertainment must be defined. Good entertainment, the authors wrote, “tends to improve the race, or at least to re-create and rebuild human beings exhausted with the realities of life,” and “raises the whole standard of a nation.” Bad entertainment was distinguished by its tendency “to degrade human beings, or to lower their standards of life and living.” Bad or degrading entertainment was illustrated with the very Catholic (and uncontroversial) example of “the effect on ancient nations of gladiatorial combats, the obscene plays of Roman times, etc.” But the emphasis in particular on entertainment for entertainment’s sake in order to refresh the exhausted soul would become ever more important toward the end of the decade, when concern shifted from the moral aspects of motion pictures to their use as tools of propaganda.¹⁷

The Code received public approval from the American Catholic hierarchy shortly after its adoption by the MPPDA in March 1930. Cardinal Hayes, the Archbishop of New York, wrote an open letter to the editor of the Catholic periodical *America*, saying, “I have heard nothing, in a long while, more encouraging and hopeful for the future moral well-being of the country than this action of self-

¹⁷ “A Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures formulated by the Association of Motion Picture Producers and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.,” March 1930, Box 2, folder 8, MJQ.

ensorship by those who control the Motion Picture world.”¹⁸ The influential Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago offered his endorsement that summer at the dedication of a Catholic high school in Wilmette, Illinois, calling the Code “a solemn pledge of morality, decency, patriotism, respect for God’s law and good citizenship.” Mundelein even went so far as to enlist national support for the efforts of the producers, saying “I bespeak for them the cooperation of every religious and civic agency in order that the Code, and the purposes for which they have committed themselves, their players and their writers, may be realized in art that serves to inculcate sound morality.”¹⁹ In this respect, Mundelein acknowledged the potential of the motion picture to impart lessons (or even propaganda) along with, or in the guise of, entertainment.

Mundelein’s rhetoric echoes more of the language of the Code, this time the authors’ notes on the obligations of motion pictures and their potential as mass culture. Part II, Reason 3 of the Code states, “The motion picture, because of its importance as an entertainment and because of the trust placed in it by the peoples of the world, has special moral obligations,” particularly because it is an art that “appeals at once to every class, mature, immature, developed, undeveloped, law abiding, criminal.” For Mundelein, whose flock included the quickly assimilating Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants of Chicago, as well as the students of his beloved parochial schools, the recognition, at least in the language of the Code, of these obligations fit squarely within his own worldview.²⁰ Indeed, Mundelein himself likely

¹⁸ Letter from Cardinal Hayes to Rev. Wilfrid Parsons, S. J., editor, *America*. July 25, 1930, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ.

¹⁹ Typed manuscript, “Mundelein Story: Secular Press.” Undated, Box 1, Folder 3, MJQ.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

suggested at least some of the language of the Code. Father Daniel Lord referred to the Code as “the Cardinal’s Code,” in reference to Mundelein’s involvement in its adoption.

But the adoption of the Code, including its meticulous reasoning and confident outlines of morality, did not guarantee successful enforcement. Breen’s anxious letter to Quigley in May 1932 illustrates the degree to which he felt the Code was being ignored: “Hays is terribly worried about the future of our Association [the MPPDA]. I think you know that a number of the companies are paying no dues.” In fact, Breen’s opinion of Hays’s abilities was at an all-time low. He described Hays as “not strong on qualities of leadership.” Breen cited many reasons for the lack of enforcement. There was Hays himself, who he characterized a man of no conviction who, when confronted: “...crawls. He trims. He seems to have no willingness to controvert the companies for any cause whatever.” But for Breen, the more sinister force at work was the profit-driven nature of the industry itself, a characteristic he attributed directly to the Jewishness of many of its personnel and producers:

I hate like hell to admit it, but really the Code, to which you and I have given so much, is of no consequence whatever. Much of the talk you hear about it from Hays, or Joy, is bunk. Joy means well. So does the boss, for that matter. But the fact is that these dam (sic) Jews are a dirty, filthy lot. Their only standard is the standard of the box-office. To attempt to talk ethical values to them is time worse than wasted. The whole thing is hardly more than an act. I give you my solemn word, I haven’t heard a single human being in Hollywood, outside our

office, ever mention the Code. Censorship? Yes. They all have a lively interest in possible Censorship difficulties but as far as the Code is concerned – bunk.²¹

Breen's angry anti-Semitic rhetoric conveys more than just his frustration with lax enforcement of the Code. His characterization of the problem as a fundamentally Jewish one reveals a consistent tendency on Breen's part, albeit one expressed only privately, in his correspondence with Quigley and others. But his language also reflected a perception held by a sizable portion of Americans – Catholic and Protestant – that Hollywood was the province of an alien, un-American morality. The Episcopalian periodical, *The Churchman*, published a 1929 article calling “shrewd Hebrews” the power behind Will Hays's throne. The author accused Jewish producers of using Hays as a “smoke screen to mask their meretricious methods of playing to the tabloid mind.” Fred Eastman, of the Chicago Theological Seminary, expanded on the subject of an alien Hollywood in the Protestant journal, *Christian Century*. He blamed Hollywood's transgressions on city life, which brought with it the “small Jewish cloak and suit merchants” who introduced movies to the “slums” in which they were “born.”²² The Legion of Decency, while never using the explicit language of anti-Semitism, would mimic Breen's language less than two years later in the literature accompanying their campaign for Code enforcement. Citing the “standard of the box office” as the industry's “Achille's heel,” the Legion authors never engage in explicit anti-Semitic rhetoric. But by singling out the profitability of Hollywood as

²¹ Letter from Breen to Quigley, May 1, 1932, Box 1, Folder 3, MJQ

²² Fred Eastman, “Who Controls the Movies?” *The Christian Century*, February 5, 1930 quoted in Steven Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 126.

its real point of vulnerability the authors – wittingly or not – echo Breen’s charge that the only standard adhered to by the studios was “ the standard of the box-office.”

Breen’s private anti-Semitic outbursts, as well as the more public statements of Eastman and *The Churchman*, hint at the ethnic and religious identities at stake in the Code itself. While the more famous aspects of the Code concerned sexual behavior and miscegenation, the Code also included guidelines concerning respect for religious and national sentiments. The Code, in fact, would have strictly forbidden exactly the type of language that Breen used in his private letters, as a violation of both Part I, Section VIII. Religion, “No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith,” and Part I, Section X. National Feelings, “The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.” How those rules were reflected on the screen was another story. In the case of representations of Jewish characters, the solution seemed to be to avoid any overt engagement of the subject. Jewishness, if it came up at all, was never the object of a film. Rather, it might be the unmentioned subtext, as in the anti-Nazi movies of the late 1930s.²³ After America entered World War II, war films often included an obviously Jewish-named soldier as part of a “multicultural platoon,” including the Jewish private of the predominantly Irish-Catholic regiment in *The Fighting 69th*.²⁴ But outside these examples, there was an almost total lack of Jewish-themed films before 1947 with Twentieth-Century Fox’s release of the anti-anti-Semitic-themed *Gentleman’s Agreement*. Prior to that, the most memorable and explicit treatment of

²³ See Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) especially chapter 4, “Hollywood Unraveled.”

²⁴ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 204-205.

American Jewish experience in films was the 1927, pre-Code “talkie” breakthrough from Warner Brothers, *The Jazz Singer*, a film whose subject matter proved to be a swansong rather than the inauguration of a new genre.

The treatment of Catholicism on the big screen was not unprecedented in 1932, though it was often in the guise of shanty Irish comedies. The most infamous of these was *The Callahans and the Murphys*. Originally promoted as “the mirthquake of 1927,” the film was denounced and even boycotted in the Irish and Catholic communities, where it was condemned as engaging in the worst stereotypes of Irish, and Catholic, family life.²⁵ So successful were the protests that MGM withdrew the film from circulation five months after its release. But although the flap over *The Callahans and the Murphys* gave the industry pause, the frequency with which Catholic themes were showcased on the big screen, unlike its Jewish counterparts, would shift dramatically over the next two decades.

The numbers and influence of American-Catholics were growing, and their status on the margins was quickly changing. Historians of American Catholicism after World War I frequently describe the period between the wars as one of growing Catholic confidence about their place in American society. According to historian Jay Dolan, the number of Catholics continued to grow into the 1920s, when their ranks reached an estimated 20 million. Moreover, their proportions in the urban centers lent them considerable clout in those areas. Although the national proportion of Catholics was 1 in 5, Walsh reports that, “it was between 1 in 2 and 1 in 3 in most large cities east of the Mississippi, where box office receipts were heaviest.” This, coupled with

²⁵ See Frank Walsh’s treatment of the episode in *Sin and Censorship*, chapter 2, “When Irish Eyes Weren’t Smiling.”

strong national organization, led by the Washington, D.C.-based National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) and by the bishops of the largest urban centers, placed the Catholic Church in a better position than any other denomination to remake in their own self-image the content that played on the big screen.

Chapter 2: The Legion of Decency: Catholicism is 20th Century Americanism

Joseph Breen was the son of Catholic immigrants, and attributed his success in life to the Catholic schools he attended, “aided, I am happy to say, by a fine old Irish Mother and an Irish Grandmother.”²⁶ He was also closely allied not only with the industry that paid him, but with a number of Catholic church leaders, dining frequently with Bishop Cantwell and corresponding with many others. In his position as assistant to Will Hays, Breen actively lobbied for a more influential role for Catholic leaders in the industry. By 1933, Breen seems to have given up on the Production Code as the primary tool for Catholic intervention. Agitating for a more public mode of action, he urged the matter upon the doubtful Bishop Cantwell and the more enthusiastic Archbishop McNicholas of Cincinnati, initiating several conversations with both men in order to put the formation of an ecclesiastical committee to oversee motion pictures at the top of the Bishop’s agenda at their annual meeting in Washington, DC. Striking a conspiratorial tone, Breen wrote to McNicholas, on MPPDA letterhead, in October of 1933:

Bishop Cantwell has very cleverly brought about a situation locally, among our producers, which must be maintained at all costs. As matters now stand the Jews are quite apprehensive lest Bishop Cantwell unloose the flood-gates of condemnation upon the whole

²⁶ Letter from Breen to Archbishop McNicholas, March 22, 1934. National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC)/United States Catholic Conference (USCC) Collection, Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures (Hereafter referred to as NCWC), Catholic University of America Special Collections.

business. They fear him chiefly because they magnify his ability to injure them. There has been no intelligent deliberation that might lead to a change of heart because of the wrong kind of pictures that are being made but there is evident on all sides a disposition to be more careful with the making of pictures lest perhaps the companies making these wrong kinds of pictures are singled out for special condemnation...Bishop Cantwell has them all pretty well scared and we must keep them in that frame of mind if it is at all possible to do so.²⁷

According to Breen, whatever action the Bishops took would have the effect of “sustaining the present situation” by keeping “suspended over the heads of the producers the sword which is now threatening to decapitate them.”²⁸ Breen seems to have been successful, as the Bishops formed an Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures that same year. Breen’s tone is markedly changed from his more desperate letter to Quigley the year before. Though he still refers to his adversaries in the industry as “Jews,” he has clearly struck on a formula to do what he earlier said Hays could not – to “confront” and “controvert” the industry players who had previously not implemented the Code in a manner pleasing to Breen. His alliance with the Bishops was more than a way to put moral pressure on the industry, though. Stephen Vaughn has shown that powerful Catholic Bishops, especially Mundelein in Chicago, had used their connections with the bankers who financed Hollywood’s unprecedented expansion in the late 1920s to influence adoption of the Code in

²⁷ Letter from Breen to Archbishop McNicholas, October 27, 1933. NCWC. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ Ibid.

1930.²⁹ Mundelein was so instrumental in the Code's adoption, in fact, that Daniel Lord referred to it as "the Cardinal's Code."³⁰ By 1933 the industry was in a far more vulnerable economic position than in 1930, and Breen had taken the opportunity to use Bishop Cantwell to persuade two more powerful bankers to stop making loans to studios if they did not improve the content of their films.³¹ His statement that the studio heads "magnif[ied] [Cantwell's] ability to injure them" suggests that it was not only the bankers, but the additional specter of censure by the Catholic Church, that Breen held over their heads. In both cases, Breen made good on his threats.

The Boycotts

In July 1934, Father FitzGeorge Dinneen, pastor of Martin Quigley's north side Chicago parish, St. Ignatius, began preparations for a major campaign against indecency in the motion pictures. He wrote to the Sisters of St. Ignatius to inform them that their regular Saturday picture shows would have to be cancelled during the campaign, in order to set an example for the rest of the parishioners. That abstinence, he told them, would extend even to those motion pictures not deemed harmful by the campaign. Moreover, in an effort to separate the parish from any unseemly relationships, he warned the Sisters:

Some of the convents have been favored with motion pictures from another source connected with the city department of motion picture censorship. This very special concession is granted by the picture

²⁹ Stephen Vaughn, "Financiers, Movie Producers, and the Church: Economic Origins of the Production Code." *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law* 4 (1988): 201- 217. See also, Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 59-60.

³⁰ Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 60.

³¹ Walsh, 85.

people with the expectation that they will be favored when it comes to the censoring of their pictures. It seems unwise to accept such favors from that source which may amount to a petty bribe. Remember the words of Washington: “Beware of entangling alliances.”³²

And, in fact, “entangling alliances” had done their part to bring Hollywood and the Catholic Church to the brink of war. Cardinal Mundelein, who had been so instrumental in the adoption of the Production Code in 1930, began to feel betrayed by the industry as criticism continued to mount against a perceived increase in immoral content. Three days after he had written his letter to the Sisters, Father Dinneen wrote to Breen to alert him that Cardinal Mundelein had approved the launch of the campaign in Chicago. In closing his letter, he told Breen:

You have a tougher job than ever. You’ll be damned if you do and damned if you don’t. The moral support for this campaign is the only power that can enable you to put it over. You and Martin made a bad mistake in opposing the continuance of it while your new set up goes into action. It was astonishing to me to see how much resentment against both of you was aroused by the press reports which seemed to indicate that you tried to sell the Catholic Church out to the industry. I never saw the Cardinal so roused up.³³

Dinneen had also drawn up a “black list” of films to be boycotted, despite the controversy he knew that would cause with Breen and Quigley, who preferred the campaign stick to the more industry-friendly “white lists” of films that were safe to

³² Letter from Father F.G. Dinneen to the Sisters of St. Ignatius Church, July 2, 1934, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ.

³³ Letter from Father G. Dinneen to Joe Breen, July 5, 1934, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ.

patronize. As Dinneen's letter makes clear, coddling the industry was no longer a priority for the campaign's organizers. Even Breen, who had encouraged the threat of boycott, was sheepish at the thought of what a real economic boycott might produce. But the bishops and priests who now faced mounting criticism for their initial support of Hollywood self-censorship were among those most eager to champion the anti-Hollywood campaign.

The campaign itself was led by an Episcopal Committee made up of the Bishops of Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Fort Wayne, Indiana. Additional strong support came from key Bishops and Cardinals, including Mundelein in Chicago, Cardinal Dougherty in Philadelphia, Bishop Cantwell in Los Angeles, and Bishop Hayes in New York. These church leaders harbored resentment toward the industry after their cooperation and words of support had gone unrewarded, un-remarked upon, or worst of all, had caused them to appear star-struck, naïve and bamboozled by the industry they had initially tried to court. The campaign was, therefore, not only an effort to clean up the movies, but likewise a campaign to salvage the authority and credibility of some very powerful Catholic clergymen, and in the process, to burnish the image of the Church itself.

To that end, the Episcopal Committee formed The Legion of Decency in the spring of 1934, the central plank of which was a pledge to "remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality." According to James Skinner's useful history of the Legion of Decency, what followed was a "ground swell of enthusiasm, pledge-taking was held throughout the nation by a variety of effective, if uncoordinated methods," including pledges taken by entire

congregations at Sunday mass and in the classrooms at Catholic schools, as well as reminders and exhortations in diocesan newspapers and Catholic magazines.³⁴ By the summer, the success of the campaign could be measured by the degree of enthusiasm being generated among non-Catholics, including the Protestant Federal Council of Churches and the Methodist Board of Education, who placed requests for shipments of pledges for their own congregations to sign.³⁵ The boycott of the industry was in full swing, helped along in no small part by two of its insiders, Martin Quigley and Joseph Breen.

In August of 1934, nearly two months into the Legion of Decency boycotts, former journalist Lupton Wilkinson set out on a survey of cities and towns to assess their support. His report, commissioned by the Hays Office, described a relatively unified perception of the Hollywood product among those he interviewed. Newspaper editors, local movie critics, theater owners and townspeople expressed sympathy with the premise of the boycotts: that Hollywood was reaping what it had sown when the industry introduced what many characterized as gratuitous vulgarities and double-entendres into the movies. But he also reported that the boycotts themselves were granted only a lukewarm reception.³⁶

³⁴ Skinner, *Cross and the Cinema*. 37.

³⁵ *New York Times*, "Clean-Film Pledge May Flood Nation," July 15, 1934

³⁶ Gregory Black and Frank Walsh have drawn different conclusions regarding actual participation in the boycotts. Black concludes that the boycotts had little economic impact, drawing heavily on the Lupton Wilkinson reports. Walsh seems to conclude that the economic impact was most profound in cities like Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, with dense Catholic populations and enthusiastic Church leaders. Philadelphia, in particular, was the site of serious economic damage to the industry, as the city's prelate, Cardinal Dougherty, called for an outright ban on movie attendance by Catholics. Walsh reports that Warner Brothers, who owned several theaters in Philadelphia, was losing \$175,000 a week at the boycott's height. The success of the boycotts in that city seem to have surprised even Breen, who made several attempts to discuss the industry's positive response to the boycotts with the cardinal. See Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 116-117.

In Charleston, South Carolina there was little evidence of boycott activities, due perhaps to the lack of a strong Catholic base of operations. Nevertheless, in this Protestant stronghold, Thomas Waring, editor-in-chief of the *Charleston Evening Post*, told Wilkinson that while “there is no rebellion in Charleston against pictures...there is a definite feeling that the industry has smeared much of its product in a regrettable way,” citing “injected vulgarities” and the industry’s “assumption that all men are both base and stupid and will fall for dirt instead of inventiveness.” Despite vigorous protests from Catholic clergy in Baltimore, a city with a decidedly denser population of Catholics than Charleston, newspaper editors claimed that attendance at the boycotted film, “Of Human Bondage,” was breaking attendance records. Nevertheless, A.B. Chievers, General Manager of the *Baltimore News and American*, warned that the Hays Office “should not ignore the fact that at least one-third of the population of Baltimore have been at least gravely disturbed and made distrustful on the subject of motion pictures.” In Albany, New York, the publisher of the Hearst-owned *Albany Times-Union*, H.H. Fris, was less sanguine: “I can say it all in one sentence – ‘Get the filth out!’” Wilkinson reported of Fris that, “He thinks we pushed ‘too far over the line, and reasonable care will get you out of the jam.’”³⁷

It was Wilkinson’s visit to Chicago, though, that convinced him of the fundamental root of the problem confronting the film industry. The Chicago Censor Board, composed of five Catholics and one Protestant, exercised considerable political control over the movie situation and for the moment had prevented the film *Vergie Winters*, the story of a milliner in love with a married politician, from showing

³⁷ Albany Report, signed Lupton A. Wilkinson, undated; Chicago Report, signed, L.A.W., August 14, 1934; Charleston Report, September 4, 1934, Box 2, Folder 19, MJQ.

at local theaters. Despite reportedly lukewarm participation in the boycotts by Chicago audiences, Wilkinson nevertheless encountered a harsh review of the film industry from Chicago's newspaper men and women. Victor Watson, managing editor of the *Herald Examiner*, compared the movies to the current crop of modernist books and magazines, telling Wilkinson, "To say it in one phrase, you got caught in a battle of competitive filth." Mae Tinae, movie critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, whom Wilkinson described to his Hays Office colleagues as "with us," said that Hollywood had to clean up the "lugged-in vulgarities" in order to survive.

Homer Guck, publisher of *The Chicago Herald Examiner*, suggested Wilkinson attend the [Chicago World's] fair where the "best-paying concession" was "the Black Forest." Guck told Wilkinson that, "The entertainment there is fancy skating. Everybody wears clothes. There's not an off-color line." He elaborated on his point, saying, "The American people are fed up with fornication. Moreover, even among youth curiosity about sex has been satiated." Not entirely convinced of Guck's analysis, Wilkinson made his way out to the fair, only to find "hooch dances of the rawest type" were so well attended that "he nearly got trod on in the crush." Reflecting on his conversations, Wilkinson wrote in his report to the Hays Office:

The thought forces itself: why, then, do sophisticated people, including Guck, who looks about as prudish as W.C. Fields, and Mae Tinae, the snappy movie critic of the *Tribune*, unite in the verdict, "You had it coming to you."

The answer, I believe, lies in this. Movies have frightened parents. Parents feel that rough stuff, scenes, philosophy, gags, are too

easily available to their children. There is a companion fact that intelligent folks are disgusted at the frequency with which movies offend taste. But the child angle – there is the dynamite and its fulmination.³⁸

Though he does not mention it in his report, Wilkinson’s conclusion echoed the reasoning of the Legion of Decency, whose literature emphasized the “child angle” as one that transcended religious objections to Hollywood films. Even the membership card for the Legion campaign stated:

Although owing its purpose to the Catholic Hierarchy, it [the Legion of Decency] is in point of fact, an organization springing from the very heart of child-loving, innocence-respecting, America.³⁹

As did Guck, the Legion of Decency linked childhood innocence to American values – a value system that in their calculation also embodied Catholic values. In fact, one early idea for what would become the Legion of Decency focused entirely on children, centering around a pledge card, to be signed at their Confirmation ceremony, declaring they would not patronize the movies.⁴⁰ This marker of mainstream morality was being threatened, though, by the unprecedented influence of the motion picture. Cardinal Mundelein had articulated that very point in a 1930 interview:

A Catholic ecclesiastic cannot possibly fail to be interested in the moral significance of motion and talking pictures. Here is the most popular form of entertainment that has been developed in the world’s

³⁸ Chicago Report, signed, L.A.W., August 14, 1934, Box 2, Folder 19, MJQ.

³⁹ Legion of Decency Manual of Handy Reference, 1934, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ.

⁴⁰ Letter from Breen to Dinneen, March 17, 1934, NCWC/USCC.

history...Such a universally popular entertainment, one so inexpensive and accessible, must necessarily leave a deep impression on those who frequent it. And the fact that the picture audiences are made up of children in large numbers is my special reason for watching the development of the industry with deep interest.⁴¹

Certainly it was true that children (and adults) were going to the movies in large numbers. A 1926 study of 10,000 Chicago schoolchildren found that 64.1% attended the movies “once a week or more.”⁴² In his 1933 summary of the Payne Fund Studies, a series of privately funded studies conducted between 1929 and 1933 to measure the effect of motion pictures on children, researcher Henry James Forman estimated that “virtually every mother’s son and daughter in America, free to go, is a member of our vast and unprecedented movie audience.” And, echoing some of the same aspirations that Mundelein, Lord, and others saw in the motion pictures, Forman exclaimed, “The millennial dreams of all the saints and sages could scarcely have aspired so high. Here is an instrument fashioned at last in universal terms. Send forth a great message, broadcast a vision of truth and beauty, if only you broadcast it by means of the so-called silver screen, literally all America will be your audience.”⁴³

Visions of truth and beauty, however, did not seem to be what a vocal portion of the American audience felt it had beheld on the silver screen. Newspaper reports from that summer routinely cited impressive numbers of participants: In Chicago 50,000 school children were reported to have marched down Michigan Avenue to

⁴¹ Typed interview, 1930, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ

⁴² Garth S. Jowett, “Giving Them What They Want: Movie Audience Research Before 1950.” *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law*, 1985: 19-35.

⁴³ Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1934), 12.

show their allegiance to the Legion of Decency. The Protestant Federal Council of Churches placed orders for “large shipments” of pledge cards. A *New York Times* headline on July 8, 1934 claimed that 12,000,000 Protestants and Catholics were expected to “aid the movie drive.”⁴⁴ The Legion, in concert with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in America, appeared to have successfully tapped a broad sense of disappointment and moral unease with the products of the film industry. This impression remained despite some ambiguity regarding the campaign’s ultimate success at keeping people out of the movie theaters – Wilkinson reported more or less normal attendance everywhere except Philadelphia. In fact, the *New York Times* reported in January 1935 that in the six months since the initiation of the boycotts (July 1934-January 1935) movie receipts had actually increased by 12%.⁴⁵ Clearly the economic pressure that the boycotts purported to exert on the industry was secondary to the public relations fiasco the boycotts actually produced. Regardless of the actual box office receipts – and the boycotts did cause some studios significant anxiety in key regions – the appearance of widespread participation forced the industry to respond to the demands of the protesters. Moreover, as Hollywood struggled to position itself as a middle class leisure activity, not just a “working-class entertainment and repository of vice,”⁴⁶ this kind of publicity struck at the industry’s true Achilles’ heel – its reputation.

⁴⁴ Associated Press, “50,000 March in Film War,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1934; *New York Times*, “Clean-Film Pledge May Flood Nation,” July 15, 1934; *New York Times*, “12,000,000 Expected to Aid Movie Drive,” July 8, 1934.

⁴⁵ Douglas Churchill, “Hollywood Discovers that Virtue Pays,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1935.

⁴⁶ Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

With the combined pressures of an economic boycott by the industry's lenders and what amounted to public relations pressure in the form of the Legion of Decency boycotts, Hays and, especially, Breen were able to reinvigorate the Production Code. 1934 saw the establishment of the Production Code Administration (with Breen as its newly appointed Chief administrator), the seal of the PCA, and the threat of a \$25,000 fine on any studio that released a film without the PCA seal. But perhaps even more impressive was that the Church, with the assistance of Hollywood insiders like Breen and Quigley, as well as by the power of its own growing influence, was able to leverage popular discontent to craft an image of Catholicism as a saving remnant of inherently American values. That image would soon find its expression on the silver screen itself, where the Church understood not only the negative effect that such an "inexpensive" and "accessible" medium could have, but its power to shape positive impressions.

The Catholic Church that led the Legion of Decency campaign in 1934 was a decidedly healthy, growing institution. The immigration restriction laws that had gone into effect in 1924, while strongly opposed by the Church, helped transform it from an immigrant church to one of a growing, second-generation, established middle class with a strong stake in claiming the ideals of Americanism. Many historians of the Church describe this period between the world wars as an age of "Catholic confidence," even "Catholic smugness," in the words of novelist Flannery O'Connor.⁴⁷ Historian William Halsey identifies this confidence as a developing

⁴⁷ Dolan. *American Catholic Experience*, 352.

conviction that the “eminent reasonableness of the Catholic outlook toward life” was “simply the other side of American optimism.”⁴⁸

That confidence in merging the mission of Catholicism with the ideals of Americanism is manifest in the literature of the Legion of Decency. In order to appeal to an audience beyond the parish boundaries, Legion rhetoricians embarked upon a careful and deliberate effort to frame the campaign as a theology-free and denomination-neutral endeavor. Pastors initiating a Legion chapter in their parish were instructed in their *Manual of Handy Reference* to:

...impress upon the laity that...(the Legion of Decency) is not so much a movement involving religion as DECENCY—common decency; therefore a cause in which every DECENCY RESPECTING American man, woman and child, regardless of creed, race or color, can and should, rightfully and fittingly join.⁴⁹

The language of the Legion stressed the image of large numbers of adherents (“Legion” – which also has military overtones, especially Roman), and an inclusive and non-sectarian, American-centered base (“American man, woman, and child, regardless of creed, race, or color”). The use of the imperative “can and should” begged the question, “What sort of person wouldn’t support the Legion of Decency?” In his weekly radio address on the Rochester, New York *Catholic Hour*, Reverend Lester Morgan narrowed that field. He began by reading the pledge to his listeners:

I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I am united with all who protest

⁴⁸ William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 47.

⁴⁹ Legion of Decency Manual of Handy Reference, MJQ. Emphasis in original.

against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country and to religion.

I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land.

I shall do all that I can to arouse public opinion against the portrayal of vice as a normal condition of affairs, and against depicting criminals of any class as heroes and heroines, presenting their filthy philosophy of life as something acceptable to decent men and women.

I unite with all who condemn the display of suggestive advertisements on bill-boards, at theatre entrances and in newspapers, and the favorable reviews often given to immoral motion pictures in the daily press.

Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motions pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality. I promise further to secure as many members as possible for the Legion of Decency.

I make this protest in a spirit of self-respect, and in the conviction that the American public does not demand filthy pictures, but clean entertainment and educational features.⁵⁰

Reverend Morgan then concluded that, “this pledges those taking it to no more than they are already bound in conscience to do as practical Catholics, or, we might add, as

⁵⁰ Chicago Council Pledge of the Legion of Decency, July 9, 1934, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ.

practical Christians, or, as self-respecting unbelievers.”⁵¹ The deliberate inclusiveness of Father Morgan’s statement demonstrates just how self-evident the Legion believed its position to be. The argument implied that only an atheist utterly lacking in self respect could dispute the moral obligation to demand clean movies. But as inclusive as Father Morgan’s statement was, his audience had tuned in to listen to the “Catholic Hour,” and would likely have understood that his message was ultimately a Catholic one. In fact, his own defense of the pledge was based on a statement from Archbishop Edward Mooney of Detroit. Ultimately this was a Catholic movement, and it was understood to be that by the public. That it was understood as Catholic, and at the same time an expression of mainstream morality, was really the point.

The Legion of Decency, by claiming that the Catholic Church was at the center of mainstream American morality, staked out a place where it was possible for the Church to speak as a legitimate mouthpiece for the typical American movie-goer of any religious or non-religious affiliation. In the same broadcast, Reverend Morgan insisted that the campaign was “not against Motion Pictures,” but rather its aim was to “redeem and preserve” them. According to Morgan, “It is only an unnecessary abuse of this good thing that is attacked.”⁵² The Legion of Decency was ultimately interested in defining the status quo in order to find themselves precisely at its center. In the narrative they created, the Legion of Decency, and the American Catholic Church by extension, were part of a nationally understood sense of common decency

⁵¹ “Our Movies, Our Morals,” from a radio address delivered on WHAM radio, Sunday, July 18, 1934, Clippings Files, International Federation of Catholic Alumni Collection (hereafter IFCA), Catholic University of America Special Collections.

⁵² “Our Movies, Our Morals.” IFCA.

– understood to consist of love of country, chastity until marriage, and entertainment for morally-edifying entertainment’s sake – that the motion picture industry, in this story, was carelessly ignoring, even against its own best interests.

The Legion’s *Manual of Handy Reference* repeated that theme. A catechism section imagined potential questions that Catholics as well as concerned citizens of other faiths might put to the organization. One question in particular stands out – that of whether or not the Legion of Decency was a reform organization. In answering, the authors stressed the Legion’s harmonization with American culture, which meant emphatically that it was not a reform organization, but something else:

It is a *conformer*. Namely, it *conforms* to the laws of decency *now existing*, clearly and comprehensively, in the courts, National, State and Municipal, of our country⁵³

This claim accomplished a number of tasks. First, it reflected the Catholic understanding of itself as the savior of American ideals, and cannily defined the Church and the movement as an outgrowth of American idealism, naturally expressed in Catholic action. But by arguing that the Legion of Decency was, in fact, asking no more than for existing decency laws to be enforced – presumably those of the state and municipal censors, and the Production Code itself – the Legion pledge conflated Catholic notions of morality with regionally-exercised policies, and elevated those to the level of official law. Moreover, they suggested those policies benefited from the attentions of the Catholic Church to see they were enforced.

Their language also helped to forestall charges that its efforts were un-American attempts to censor mass media and impose Catholic theology on the film

⁵³ Legion of Decency, *Manual of Handy Reference*, 1934, MJQ: Emphasis in original.

industry, and the American audience by extension. The argument clearly skirted the issue of who authored the Production Code, and who dominated the censor boards in country's largest cities. But, the point was expounded upon again and again in the Legion's manual:

Is not the Legion of Decency's campaign, therefore, eminently patriotic; deserving and meriting the hearty support of every citizen who believes in conforming to the laws of our country.⁵⁴

For the average American, as imagined by the *Manual's* authors, the Legion's mission was uncomplicated, unassailable, and non-religious: "...every unbiased observer can readily see, not only the absurdity of Hollywood's charge that the Legion of Decency is a meddling clerical reformer, but above all the irrefutable strength of the Legion of Decency's position."⁵⁵ The Legion appeared to minimize its mission as a spiritual organization in order to cast itself as a civic organization. In doing so, they inserted Catholicism into mainstream conceptions of civic responsibility.

The response from other organizations and religious groups seems to bear out the rhetoric of the Legion's manual. A month into the 1934 campaign, the National Conference of Jews and Christians called the boycotts "one of the most spontaneous cooperative movements among those of various faiths in the history of this country."⁵⁶ At the same time, the Methodist Ministers of Philadelphia praised that city's own Cardinal Dougherty for his "heroic stand against the corrupting motion pictures of our day, and join with him requesting our young people to join the legion

⁵⁴ Legion of Decency, *Manual of Handy Reference*, 1934, MJQ: Emphasis in original.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *New York Times* "Interfaith Amity Seen in Film Fight," July 6, 1934.

of decency (sic) and urge our people to boycott all motion picture plays.”⁵⁷ That same month, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, a Protestant organization, voted to join in the Legion of Decency’s campaign, citing ongoing violations of the “high moral code” written for the industry in 1930.⁵⁸ The Pope himself recognized the legitimation that approval from the Jewish and Protestant communities, among others, brought with them. In his 1936 encyclical, *On the Motion Pictures*, Pope Pius XI explicitly thanked not only Catholics, but also “high minded Protestants, Jews and many others” for their “cooperation in this holy crusade.”⁵⁹

Of course, not everyone saw the Legion of Decency as a benevolent enforcer of majority American values. A letter Martin Quigley retained in his files shows the frustration at least one moviegoer, San Franciscan Ferrell Emmet Long, felt compelled to express. Long went straight to code enforcer Joseph Breen to file his complaint and target those he saw as the real menace to society:

This nefarious campaign to rob us of our enjoyment of the motion picture screen is not even human, and if you had any true American patriotism in you, then you would close your ears to these clerical ‘rats’ who have no place in the scheme of human happiness. They are not American; they are an importation from medieval-minded Europe.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *New York Times* “Join Boycott of Movies: Methodist Ministers of Philadelphia Praise Cardinal,” June 12, 1934.

⁵⁸ *New York Times* “Protestants Map Clean-Film Drive,” June 26, 1934.

⁵⁹ *Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pius XI: On the Motion Pictures*. Vatican Polyglot Press, 1936, 7-8. Box 2, Folder 7, MJQ.

⁶⁰ Letter from Ferrell Emmett Long to Joseph Breen, September 27, 1934, Box 2, Folder 6, MJQ..

Long's anti-clericalism notwithstanding, his reference to medieval-minded Europe was a reminder of the troubling trends emerging in that region. Certainly to some observers, the dual effect of the Legion of Decency boycotts, coupled with renewed enforcement of a Catholic-authored Production Code, resulted not in a realignment of Hollywood with American values, but in a chilling suppression of any movie content that was not in line with the mores of the Catholic Church. Some observers saw troubling parallels with deteriorating conditions overseas. Running next to the *New York Times*'s column announcing the Federal Council of Church's adoption of the Catholic-led campaign was an article titled, "[Eddie] Cantor Film Banned in Reich as 'Idiotic'." In it, the German censor cited the 1934 film *Kid Millions* – a musical about a Brooklyn boy who must travel to Egypt to claim his inheritance – for its "brutalizing influence, notably on the younger generation."⁶¹ The potential for drawing parallels between the Legion of Decency's campaign and censorship activities in Europe did not go unnoticed. Reverend James Ryan, Rector of Catholic University, addressed this concern in September of the same year, saying:

The Legion of Decency has not embarked on a censorship or prohibition campaign. It wants and demands one thing only – clean, wholesome movies...

...The American people are very wary of censorship, and their instincts are sound. Censorship can be and has been used for very degrading and stupid purposes. But it is a far cry from what we are now asking of movie producers and a censorship of movies. We are

⁶¹ *New York Times*, "Protestants Map Clean Film Drive" June 26, 1934.

asking a voluntary clean-up and we expect and will continue to demand it.⁶²

Charges that the Legion of Decency was waging an un-American censorship campaign echoed the anti-Catholicism that had marred the Church's ascent in the previous decade. Only a few years earlier, a nascent Catholic renaissance in the United States reached its apotheosis and its nadir in the Presidential campaign of New York's Catholic governor, Al Smith. The anti-Catholic smears toward his candidacy often questioned the ability of Catholics to participate fully in the American culture of democracy, while at the same time fulfilling their duty of obedience to Rome. A lengthy and detailed "Open Letter" to Governor Smith, published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in April 1927, addressed exactly those concerns, claiming that his status as a "loyal and conscientious Roman Catholic" was "irreconcilable" with the Constitution and with the "principles of civil and religious liberty on which American institutions are based."⁶³ The boycotts themselves, especially through the rhetoric of the Legion of Decency, sought to invert the claims of that letter writer, and proposed instead that Catholicism and the principles of American democracy were one and the same.

Anti-Catholicism does not seem to have predominated in discussions of the boycotts. Al Smith's own campaign had provided a platform for him to challenge the common perception of Catholicism's problematic dual loyalties. But it was also that perceived obedience that served as an organizational asset to Catholic movements and institutions, and that consequently made the campaign so effective, either in the form

⁶² *New York Times*, "Bishop Denies Film Censorship Is Sought; Says Clean Shows Is Only Aim of Crusade.", September 24, 1934.

⁶³ Charles C. Marshall, "An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1927), 540.

of boycotts, or in the public relations campaign that helped convince Americans and Hollywood that the Church knew what was good for America. In the most extreme example, box office receipts in Philadelphia fell by 40% during the boycott, upon the declaration of that diocese's Cardinal Dennis Dougherty that *all* movies should be considered an occasion of serious sin.⁶⁴ But as Wilkinson and some newspapers reported, turnout for the boycotts may in fact have been either modest, or short-lived.

The campaign, therefore, seemed to have affected the box office less than it did the public relations office. It was not just Hollywood who stood to gain from improved public relations. For the Church, an effective campaign led by the Legion of Decency – with newspapers reporting thousands and even millions of pledge cards signed, and at least a convincing specter of box office disaster for Hollywood – could help propagate the myth of Catholic cohesion and confidence. This was certainly a view promoted in some Catholic journals. Extolling the historical moment occasioned by a successful “Catholic Action” against movies, Father Owen McGrath clearly outlined the opportunity for the Church to redefine mainstream American values in an article for *The Ecclesiastical Review* (subtitled, “a monthly review for the clergy”) in September 1934:

...it is now an urgent matter of sincere Catholics injecting Christian principles into American life, into business, government and education. If Catholics do not do this, who will? Paganism and Protestantism have failed in their erroneous attempts to influence or regulate our national life peacefully or honorably; they have brought

⁶⁴ Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church*. (New York: Random House, 1997),165.

about a lamentable degeneration of national character, resulting in the present condition of open indecency, depraved business relations and ruinous educational institutions. Now, it appears, Catholics have stood forth to do battle.⁶⁵

McGrath is clearly not concerned with selling non-Catholics on the non-denominational character of the Legion of Decency in this instance. Instead, he uses his persuasive power to convince his audience, made up primarily of the clergy itself, that “the future moral reconstruction of our country is in their hands.”⁶⁶ McGrath singles out the ineffectiveness of the Protestant church in particular at a time when it could no longer speak with one voice – something at which the Catholic Church had demonstrably excelled. And, as if to add insult to injury, Protestant denominations had recently experienced their own series of Hollywood-grade moral scandals, the most famous of which was the faked kidnapping and possible affair, in 1926, of Aimee Semple-McPherson, founder of the Protestant fundamentalist Foursquare Gospel Church.

Protestantism had also ostensibly failed in its approach to the Hollywood problem. By attacking industry business practices, especially block-booking and blind-selling, the Protestant approach threatened the industry’s business model, whereas the Catholic emphasis on content was much less disturbing to the bottom line, even possibly advantageous to it. While relatively minor Church spokespersons like McGrath did not oppose tactics such as organized opposition to block-booking, the policy among the bishopric was to avoid that particular avenue of reform. Breen

⁶⁵ Owen A. McGrath, C.S.P., “Catholic Action’s Big Opportunity,” *The Ecclesiastical Review: A Monthly Publication for the Clergy* 91 (1934): 285.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 283.

and Quigley, as industry insiders, were absolutely opposed to any sort of government intervention. And, aside from the most staunch anti-movie prelates, such as Cardinal Dougherty, resorting to government pressure was understood by most of the hierarchy as a far more hostile action than the boycotts the Legion ultimately staged. Moreover, it was an avenue that offered no room to *influence* content.

It was by ignoring just that sort of enforced regulation that Catholic Action groups like the Legion of Decency maintained alliances in Hollywood. One year after the launch of the Catholic boycotts, Carl Milliken, Secretary of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), wrote a favorable letter regarding the National Legion of Decency to Martin Quigley saying,

I believe it might be stated without offense that one of the reasons for the influence of the Legion of Decency movement on the public and therefore on the industry, was the fact that its leaders wisely refused to be beguiled into attacks upon the trade practices and criticism of the machinery of the industry. They properly concentrated their attention upon the moral and social values in motion pictures.⁶⁷

In other words, the movement backed the right horse. Hollywood, as the symbol of the motion picture industry, was a rationally functioning business enterprise, interested primarily in producing pictures the public wanted to see, or said it wanted to see. If the Legion of Decency had provided a *Sullivan's Travels*-like moment of audience insight, perhaps the boycotts were a boon rather than a bane to the industry. Certainly it was a boon to be allowed to leave successful industry practices intact and

⁶⁷ Letter from Carl Milliken to Martin Quigley, March 23, 1935, Box 2, Folder 6, MJQ.

not disturb what many others, particularly some members of Congress, saw as a dangerous monopoly. The Legion of Decency efforts enabled Hollywood to argue and demonstrate that reform groups could exert enough pressure on the industry to ensure it enforced its own self-regulatory code.

Given the mood of the country in 1934 – Roosevelt had been elected in 1932, called a bank holiday in 1933, and created the National Recovery Administration (NRA) later that same year – the boycotts were remarkably well timed. The NRA was charged with establishing codes of fair practice for all industry, including motion pictures. Although the Supreme Court struck down the NRA in 1935, government-led investigations of unfair industry practices continued, and Senate hearings on block-booking ensued in 1936, and again in 1938 and 1939. The Code, and the groups active in overseeing its enforcement, helped Hollywood forestall charges that “they place personal profit ahead of the common good,” and ignore the more serious charges of monopoly.⁶⁸

But the Catholic strategy was not wholly one of self-conscious leniency toward industry practice. The Vatican itself took a somewhat more stringent line on the tactics that could be employed to control movie content. Where Quigley, Breen, and the Legion of Decency had lobbied to restrict regulation to the industry’s own self-regulatory efforts, the Vatican praised efforts by “certain governments” to “set up reviewing commissions and ...other agencies which have to do with motion picture production.”⁶⁹ While the Vatican stopped short of calling for efforts to enforce

⁶⁸ Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 106.

⁶⁹ *Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pius XI: On the Motion Pictures*. Vatican Polyglot Press, 1936, Box 2, Folder 7, MJQ.

through government regulation, its position clashed with that of industry insiders like Quigley and Breen to whom government regulation was anathema. Moreover, such a strategy clashed with the principles that the Legion of Decency had itself declared for its efforts in 1934.

Though the Legion of Decency, along with Martin Quigley and Joseph Breen in the Hays Office, steered clear of calls for government intervention, voices both from within the Church as well as from other denominations continued to look for remedies beyond self-regulation, even as they cooperated with the Legion's efforts. Fred Eastman, who had publicly characterized Hollywood's Jewish producers as "cloak and suit merchants," was a Professor of Drama at the Chicago Theological Seminary. A Methodist, Eastman wrote an article – published in several religious magazines in 1934 – urging government intervention in the film industry. Citing the Legion of Decency's efforts as the starting point for industry regulation, Eastman called for legislation to outlaw block booking and blind selling as a way to "give the public some form of liberal social control without censorship." For Eastman, the real problem with the motion picture industry was its unwillingness to produce "strong drama" whose "strength does not depend on dirt." He likened the struggle to reform the industry to "the fight our fathers made thirty years ago for pure food, but it is more important."⁷⁰ Eastman sent an inquiry to Quigley after he received what he deemed a "rather wide and favorable response from the Churches" although not from the motion picture industry itself. Quigley, whose own opposition to the regulation of industry practices was no secret, replied by correcting him on his depiction of the

⁷⁰ Typed Manuscript titled "The Movie Outlook" by Fred Eastman, Box 2, Folder 8, MJQ.

Legion of Decency's campaign. Eastman had written that, "If the producers think that Catholics, Protestants and Jews, who are working together for better movies, are seeking only decency in films, they are wrong...Religious people want far more. They want honest, sincere pictures, great pictures." Quigley replied that he was not familiar with the objectives of the Protestant or Jewish Churches. But regarding Catholics, Quigley assured Eastman, "I can state to you, quite definitely, that the first sentence in your article, insofar as it applies to Catholics, is incorrect. The Legion of Decency is seeking only decency in films."⁷¹

Eastman was not the only activist from outside the Catholic Church who was at odds with aspects of the Catholic policy toward the industry. Worth M. Tippy, Executive Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, told the *New York Times* in March 1935 that the Production Code itself was in need of revision, as it was based on a Catholic viewpoint, and at variance with the Protestant viewpoint on a number of moral issues, especially "swearing and divorce." Martin Quigley wrote to Tippy, forwarding copies of the letter to both Hays and Milliken, inquiring as to where the Protestant and Catholic viewpoints differed on swearing, and where it was in the Production Code that Tippy felt a "divergence of attitude between Catholics and Protestants" regarding divorce was represented. According to Quigley, "The production code was intended and is believed to be based simply and

⁷¹ Letter from Fred Eastman to Martin Quigley, December 20, 1934; Letter from Martin Quigley to Fred Eastman, copy to Carl Milliken, January 3, 1934 (sic), Box 2, Folder 8, MJQ.

wholly on a set of moral principles commonly believed in by all right thinking and right living people, irrespective of doctrinal believes (sic).”⁷²

Tippy replied that with regard to swearing, “taking the names of God and our Lord in vain, and such a vulgar expression as ‘S.O.B’ were purely off limits. However, in his opinion, “hell” and “damn” could be used as long as they “fit the person and circumstances.” With regard to divorce, Tippy conceded that the difference in positions between the Catholic and Protestant churches were “insignificant as compared with their essential agreement on the sanctity and integrity of Christian marriage,” but he worried that the real differences between the two positions might “assume undue proportions if they were to come into conflict in Mr. Breen’s office.” Tippy did not elaborate further on the divorce issue, but as the rest of his letter made clear, his real concern was that the Catholics had hijacked the Production Code offices, leaving the Protestants potentially without influence.⁷³

Tippy explained that he was in favor of the Production Code, and felt that it had been “admirably drawn” and was “as a whole permanently sound” – in need of enforcement more than it was of revision. However, he felt that some revisions were necessary, and compared the Production Code to the Federal Council of Churches’ *Social Creed*, which he explained had undergone two revisions in response to the fact that “society moves on steadily into new experiences and new ethical interpretations of life.” This was a position that he must have known would be problematic for members of the Catholic Church, where the pace of change was historically much

⁷² Letter from Martin Quigley to Worth M. Tippy, copy to Will Hays and Carl Milliken, March 14, 1935, Box 2, Folder 6, MJQ.

⁷³ Letter from Worth M. Tippy to Martin Quigley, March 20, 1935, Box 2, Folder 6, MJQ.

slower. Tippy offered several changes he felt could be made to the Code, which in general he felt was “too exclusively negative... too preoccupied with sex, and that its moral concepts are too preponderantly individualistic.” For Tippy, the Code did not “take sufficient account of the moral standards which are emerging out of the present social ferment, and especially of the new concepts of industrial and political responsibility.” He added that “the morality of collective action and responsibility needs statement,” and that “the sin of war should be in the picture.” Tippy suggested that the Code should permit the depiction of “vested evils and entrenched privileges,” allowing, for example, the “sensitive and skillful treatment” of “white slavery,” which was prevented by the Code, in order to “arouse people, and put girls on their guard.” He also advocated a rephrasing of the Code’s admonition against ridiculing any religion or religious person or figure to “make it clear that the churches do not consider themselves sacrosanct, or free from evil, and therefore not under any circumstances to be subject to critical treatment.”⁷⁴

As Tippy’s letter makes clear, he was in favor of regulation of the moral content of films and had supported, along with the Federal Council of Churches itself, the Legion of Decency’s campaign, even using a slightly modified form of the Catholic pledge. However, for Tippy the relationship between Hollywood and Catholic Church had left out the moral viewpoints of a good number of Americans, particularly, in his case, that of more the liberally minded wing of the Protestant denomination. He ended the letter by advising Quigley: “The self-censorship at (sic) Hollywood is, I think, too largely an affair between the Catholic Church and the

⁷⁴ Tippy to Quigley, 1935, MJQ.

industry – probably necessarily so till now but not long desirable for the Catholic church itself. I believe this is becoming a public opinion.”⁷⁵

There is no record of Quigley’s reply, if there was one. However, Milliken contacted Quigley about the letter. It was in regard to Tippy’s letter that Milliken expressed his opinion that the Legion of Decency had won the favor of the public and the industry by withholding “attacks upon the trade practices and criticism of the machinery of the industry.” Milliken felt that the Legion of Decency had rightly concentrated upon the “movie-going tastes and habits” of the people, rather than “the question what pictures the industry should or should not make,” a position he felt Tippy meant to take, particularly with his suggestions regarding the depictions of evil and entrenched privileges. Finally, Milliken suggested that any changes to the Code should be left to the industry itself, though the industry was willing “to accept suggestions from all responsible sources.” Tippy did not fit into this category, though, according to Milliken and his sources. Rather, Milliken characterized him as full of “ambition to get in on the situation and help run the show,” while as far as Milliken was concerned, “no responsible factor in the industry has any confidence in that gentleman’s judgment or that he represents a considerable degree of crystallized public opinion among his supposed constituents.”⁷⁶

While the Legion of Decency and its spokespersons publicly promoted the ecumenical nature of the Production Code, influential supporters like Quigley privately betrayed opposing points of view. In an undated letter, Quigley admitted to Bishop McNicholas of Cincinnati, “Our ideas of morality in entertainment differ

⁷⁵ Tippy to Quigley, 1935, MJQ.

⁷⁶ Milliken to Quigley, 1935, MJQ.

radically from those held by the vast majority of the American public.”⁷⁷ Certainly the Catholic morality that was touted as such a sure thing in public crusades was less so when it came to negotiating its appearance on the silver screen. Even the two authors of the Production Code couldn’t necessarily agree on how far to take the Catholic viewpoint with regard to film content. Quigley and Lord disagreed over the appropriateness of even portraying certain historical figures on screen. In 1934, following Lord’s publication of a “black list” of films in his magazine, *The Queen’s Work*, Quigley wrote to chastise Lord on his selections and reasoning (not to mention that Quigley was adamantly against a black list):

In your reference to Catherine the Great, Henry the Eighth and Queen Christina you say “These three pictures are lavish productions exemplifying the lives of men and women of loose morals and unbridled passions who breathe the atmosphere of foreign courts and indulge in practices that could never be squared with the principles of Catholic morality.” Now does that mean the only such characters may be used whose practices can be squared with principles of Catholic morality?⁷⁸

Lord and Quigley’s dispute, however, was less over the degree to which Catholic morality could represent American morality, and more over Lord’s more stringent reading of the Code’s restrictions on depictions of religious faith. According to resolutions adopted by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in America that year, the Legion of Decency campaign – and by extension the Code it meant to enforce – was

⁷⁷ Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 63.

⁷⁸ Letter from Quigley to Daniel Lord, July 31, 1934, Box 2, Folder 2, MJQ.

at its core not a manifestation of Catholic values and beliefs, but rather a pure expression of the sound instincts of the American people. Therefore, according to the bishops, who had backed the Production Code in 1930 and now led the boycotts in 1934, “if the producers should return to their old ways and the moving picture industry is made to suffer, the responsibility must be placed at the door of those who failed to understand the inherent decency of the American character.”⁷⁹

Because of the prominence of many of Hollywood’s Jewish producers and studio owners – including Adolph Zukor and Barney Balaban, the heads of Paramount, William Fox of the Fox Film Corporation and later Twentieth Century Fox, the Warner Brothers, and of course, Louis B. Mayer - it would not be difficult to imagine that the Bishops’ had them in mind when they issued this declaration. Neil Gabler, in his history of Hollywood’s Jewish producers, put it this way, “The paradox is that the American film industry, which Will Hays, president of the original Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, called ‘the quintessence of what we mean by ‘America,’” was founded and for more than thirty years operated by Eastern European Jews who themselves seemed to be anything but the quintessence of America.”⁸⁰

Certainly Hollywood was popularly viewed in some quarters as a kind of foreign culture, one whose cohesion could be spun negatively as insularity, and one that, like the Catholic Church, could be viewed as under the control of a religious/ethnic group from outside the American mainstream. Hollywood was singled out as such by an anonymous essayist in a 1942 volume titled *Jews in a*

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, “Catholics Widen Movie Campaign,” November 17, 1934.

⁸⁰ Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), 1.

Gentile World. The author, in his essay “An Analysis of Jewish Culture” portrayed the movie industry as an example of Jewish separateness that in the writer’s view benefited from its Catholic antagonists (who are portrayed in this account as belonging to the mainstream): “It is only because they [the Hollywood Jews] are outside the moral sphere of American culture that they blunder so badly that they require periodic campaigns such as that of the Legion of Decency to set them right.”

But as Neal Gabler elaborates, the irony was that “while the Hollywood Jews were being assailed by know-nothings for conspiring against traditional American values and the power structure that maintained them, they were desperately embracing those values and working to enter the power structure.”⁸¹ Gabler suggests that Jewish Hollywood was, in many respects, attempting the same reconciliation with American culture that the Catholic Church was attempting. And as the anonymous author of “An Analysis of Jewish Culture” unwittingly makes clear, the two found each other useful for those purposes, despite misgivings about each other on both sides.

Most notably, the private correspondence of Joseph Breen, a devout Catholic, betrays a knee-jerk anti-Semitism aimed at the largely Jewish producers and studio heads with whom he frequently butted heads over film content. But it is difficult to know how to interpret Breen’s anti-Semitic rhetoric. This is a man, after all, who spent most of his career both deeply engaged with and often frustrated by Hollywood producers – both Jewish and Gentile. Harold Brackman, writing about anti-Semitic attacks on Hollywood, perhaps takes things a bit too far when he states, “Though not

⁸¹ Gabler, *Empire of their Own*, 2, 433.

voiced in public, Breen's anti-Semitism was hardly distinguishable from Henry Ford's." Importantly, Breen's outbursts appeared exclusively in private letters seemingly as a way to express frustration with the stubbornness of the industry in adopting the Code. But his willingness to employ anti-Semitic slurs also served to demonstrate to like-minded allies that he was tougher and more qualified than Will Hays or James Wingate, whose job he eventually won. Ford's outbursts were public, and expressed from a position of real power. As Brackman quotes from Ford's Dearborn Independent newspaper, "About producers 'of Semitic origin,' Ford's newspaper also observed that 'many . . . don't know how filthy their stuff is – it is so natural to them.'"⁸² While Breen's anti-Semitism should not be underestimated – during the effort to cow the studio heads into implementing the Code in 1934, Breen allowed the specter of the rise of Hitler in Germany and its possible negative effect on perceptions of Jews in the U.S. to be used as one tactic to intimidate industry executives – his differences with Ford should be noted. Ford felt that Jewish Hollywood producers could not help creating morally questionable material. Breen, however, as head of the Production Code Administration, necessarily felt that they could. Breen was no doubt anti-Semitic. But unlike Gregory Black's suggestion that Breen's Code activities were motivated by his anti-Semitism, Breen was more likely *motivated* by a self-serving ambitious streak. Anti-Semitism was an all-too-handly tool for a Catholic climbing the ladder in a Jewish-dominated industry.⁸³

⁸² Harold Brackman, "The Attack on 'Jewish Hollywood': A Chapter in the History of Modern American Anti-Semitism," *Modern Judaism* 20 (2000): 1-19.

⁸³ For more on Black's discussion of Breen's anti-Semitism, Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 170-173.

And in fact, Jewish support for the Code was expressly and successfully sought out by the Episcopal Committee, though the tactics they employed were not altogether friendly. The language used by Bishop Cantwell to persuade Rabbi Goldstein, Chairman of the Social Justice Committee of the General Conference of American Rabbis, bears some resemblance to Breen's strong-arm tactics. In December 1934, he wrote to Rabbi Goldstein:

It is especially gratifying to have the cooperation of your group, since Jews are for the most part the producers of the motion pictures. It is to be hoped that you will convince the producers, if further conviction is necessary, that any attempt to popularize again the salacious cinema, even if such an attempt bring a temporary gain, will hurt seriously the name of the Jewish race and cause permanent financial loss.⁸⁴

Cooperation from the studios was almost immediate. Later, public statements by Daniel Lord, the Jesuit Priest responsible in part for the content of the Production Code, would suggest at least a *publicly* easy relationship between the Hollywood producers and the Catholic sponsors of the Code. Ignoring the threats of withdrawn loans and anti-Jewish backlash that had been a part of the effort to convince industry heads to comply, Lord wrote in a Letter to Editor of the *Hollywood Reporter* in 1946, "This Code was thoroughly discussed by the heads of the industry, and with no impulsion or compulsion from anyone was signed and accepted by the responsible heads...There is hardly, however, a man in Hollywood who went through that period of history, the Spring of 1934, who does not feel grateful to the Catholic Church and

⁸⁴ Letter from Bishop Cantwell to Rabbi Sidney Goldstein, December 31, 1934, NCWC/USCC.

to the hundreds of thousands of non-Catholics who joined the Legion of Decency for the insistence, that was made nationally, upon the observance of the industry's own production (sic) Code."⁸⁵ A publicly amicable relationship masked the inevitable private tensions between Hollywood's producers, writers, directors, and actors, and the Production Code Administration.

⁸⁵ Daniel Lord, Letter to the Editor, *Hollywood Reporter*, November 8, 1946 (original typescript), Box 1, Folder 19., MJQ.

Chapter 3: Silver Screen Catholicism

Gabler also notes the affinity that some of the most powerful Jewish studio magnates had with Catholicism. Perhaps the most powerful of all, Louis B. Mayer apparently maintained a professional friendship with the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Francis Spellman:

‘Louis admired power, clout, importance,’ and Spellman had them. ‘He was *the* cardinal in America, probably *the* cardinal in the world,’ said Judge Lester Roth, a friend of Mayer’s. ‘As a consequence Mayer could use Spellman and did...When the Catholic church or its censors were about to ban some picture or insist upon having something cut out of a picture, Mayer went to the court of last resort. And he could do it by telephone. He’d pick up the phone and call the cardinal.’ In return Mayer provided ‘very effective service to help build the kind of image of their church that they wanted to build.’⁸⁶

Indeed, the Catholic-themed film became a popular genre following the enforcement of the Production Code. MGM atoned for the sins of ambitious dance hall singer Mary Blake in the 1936 film, *San Francisco*, by introducing the character of Father Tim, played by Spencer Tracy, who saves her from a sordid life with his childhood friend, the rough and exploitative Blackie Norton, played by Clark Gable. Two years later, Spencer Tracy would take center stage as Father Flanagan in 1938’s tearjerker hit, *Boy’s Town*, based on the true story of a Catholic-run home for wayward boys in

⁸⁶ Gabler, *Empire of Their Own*, 285-286

Omaha, Nebraska. 1938 also saw Warner Brothers' release of *Angels with Dirty Faces*, starring Tracy's fellow Milwaukeean, Pat O'Brien, as the childhood friend-turned-priest of mobster Rocky Sullivan, played by James Cagney. And, while Gabler's interviewee suggests that Louis B. Mayer, and his Metro Goldwyn Mayer studios, promoted the New York Cardinal's ideas of Catholicism in its productions, they were not responsible for the lion's share of Catholic-themed films produced during this period. Rather, Paramount and 20th Century Fox produced the most successful of the biggest batch of Catholic pictures, beginning in 1943, including *The Song of Bernadette* (20th Century Fox, 1943), *The Keys of the Kingdom* (20th Century Fox, 1944), *Going My Way* (Paramount, 1944), and *Bells of St. Mary's* (Paramount, 1945). Perhaps the most successful of these films was *Going My Way*, a film that managed to garner box office success, critical accolades, as well as praise from many (though certainly not all) of the clergy who saw it as a realization of their own idealized self-image, writ large. Somewhat suddenly, it seemed, the image of American religion on screen – an image distributed not only among Americans but to a growing international clientele – was Catholic.

Despite the occasional and inevitable tangles with Hollywood producers, writers, and advertisers, enforcement of the Production Code proceeded much as Quigley and Breen had envisioned it should, interrupted now and then by rows with the Legion of Decency regarding the rare condemnation of a Code sanctioned film, or attempts by the studios to push through subject matter the Hays Office found difficult to approve. Between 1938 and 1944, the Legion of Decency condemned 43 films and

gave an A-1, the highest Legion rating, to 1,873 films.⁸⁷ The high number of approvals reflects the success of the Production Code office in screening out films offensive specifically to Catholic morality as well as to what the Legion defined as American morality.

At the outset of the Legion of Decency campaign in 1934, Breen had expressed his hope that the action might lead to the establishment of a separate Catholic film-making industry, similar to the system established in the parochial schools. Writing to Dinneen, he was both hopeful and pessimistic:

I think that no worth-while progress will ever be made until we setup, in every parochial plant in the U.S., a sound talking picture equipment which will enable us to show our people reasonably decent film entertainment at a modest price. . . . It may be that the Bishops would have to underwrite the undertaking for the first year or two, while the scheme was getting under way, at least to the extent of guaranteeing a reasonable number of play-dates for each picture made for this particular field. But when you think of what we have done and what we are doing now, out of our poverty, by way of a separate system of Education, the motion picture equipment suggestion is trifling. Think it over.⁸⁸

The suggestion was never taken up by the Bishops. They had, after all, established a publicly successful campaign to clean up the motion pictures, and presumably other

⁸⁷ Legion of Decency Review Booklet, Comparative Statistics on Feature Pictures Reviewed and Classified, 1963, Box 2, Folder 16, MJQ.

⁸⁸ Letter from Breen to Dinneen, March 17, 1934, NCWC/USCC.

matters had now to be seen to, as the worst years of the Depression were taking its toll on their flocks. The effort to turn out Catholic-themed fare would have to take place within the Hollywood machinery. In 1936 an article in the Catholic magazine *America* ventured that the movie-makers might consider, “instead of the usual sex and violence,” films featuring “priests and nuns...Catholic husbands and wives...altar boys and first communion girls.”⁸⁹ But while Frank Walsh assumes that “the market for films about altar boys and first communion girls was obviously limited,” the market for films about priests, nuns, Catholic families, and altar boys and communion girls was actually quite viable in the period following *America*’s suggestion.⁹⁰ *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *Boy’s Town* (1938), *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), *Going My Way* (1944), and the *Bells of St. Mary’s* (1945) were all bona fide box office hits.

The trend was noted in a short piece titled “Celluloid Revival” which appeared in the “Religion” section of the April 24, 1944 issue of *Time Magazine*:

After a decade of worldly dalliance Hollywood has once more hit the sawdust trail. Between *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *The Song of Bernadette* (*Time*, Feb. 7), only *One Foot in Heaven* (1941) and a handful of politely portrayed priests and parsons so much as nodded at God in the passing cinema. But with the story of the little visionary of Lourdes, something started. It gathers momentum this week with *Going My Way*, a warm, gentle comedy-drama about life in a Roman

⁸⁹ Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 150

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Catholic rectory. And it is likely to get bigger and bigger as long as the war lasts.⁹¹

Time's analysis echoed an earlier front-page story headlined "Religious Films Prove Big B.O. (Box Office)" in the December 29, 1943 issue of *Variety*. That article also attributed the trend in religious and spiritual movies to war weariness: "Industry execs are convinced that the swing towards religious-spiritual features is a normal public reflex to the troubled aspects of the present world situation."⁹² In fact, exhibitors and the public had begun to weary of the war movies that had become so prevalent since the United States entered into the conflict in 1941. The establishment of the Office of War Information (OWI) in Washington meant that Hollywood had yet another regulatory agency to whom it had to answer. With ticket receipts up significantly, the industry seems to have accepted their interference with little fanfare.⁹³ But by late 1943, new story-lines were clearly in demand. An ad for Paramount's film line-up for 1944 declared, "Paramount continues its industry-pacing, what-the-public-wants program of demilitarized entertainments..." An article in the *Motion Picture Herald* the following week was titled, "Exhibitors Ask More Music, More Comedy, Less War."⁹⁴

The same issue of the *Motion Picture Herald* that touted Paramount's "demilitarized" fare featured a two-page ad for one of the biggest religiously-themed box office hits of the Production Code era, *The Song of Bernadette*. Plugged in the ad

⁹¹ *Time Magazine* "Celluloid Revival," April 24, 1944.

⁹² *Variety*, "Religious Films Prove Big B.O." December 29, 1943.

⁹³ see Gregory Black and Clayton A. Koppes, "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945," *The Journal of American History* 64 no. 1 (1977): 87-105.

⁹⁴ *Motion Picture Herald*, Advertisement, January 1, 1944; *Motion Picture Herald*, "Exhibitors Ask More Music, More Comedy, Less War," January 8, 1944.

for its “enormous ... money-making potential,” the film was a biopic of sorts.⁹⁵ Based on a novel by Austrian Jewish exile Franz Werfel, the film dramatized the story of Bernadette Soubiros, a French girl whose reports of witnessing apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes in 1858 created an international phenomena. Moreover, Bernadette herself had been canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church just ten years earlier, in 1933. The book on which the film was based had hit the top of the best seller lists in June 1942, knocking the war-themed novel *Bombs Away*, by John Steinbeck, out of position.⁹⁶ It was just as successful as a film, becoming the top-grossing movie for Twentieth Century Fox in 1943, and the second top-grossing movie for all studios in the same year. The film began with a foreword that read, “To those who believe in God, no explanation is necessary. To those who do not believe, no explanation is possible.” An ecstatic reviewer for *Variety*, however, echoing the ecumenical rhetoric of the Legion of Decency, added, “to every person who sees ‘Bernadette,’ there is warmth, inspiration and pause for reflection regardless of creed or non-belief.”⁹⁷ Remarkably, a film with a decidedly Catholic theme – particularly with its emphasis on miracles, the Virgin Mary, and sainthood – had not only been made by a major studio, but had done boffo box office.

Historian John McGreevy has called the success of *The Song of Bernadette* “the best evidence” that the 1940s were “more generally a moment when once exotic Catholic customs, along with Catholics themselves, edged toward the center of

⁹⁵ *Motion Picture Herald*, Advertisement, January 1, 1944.

⁹⁶ Peter Stephen Jungk, *Franz Werfel: A Life in Prague, Vienna, and Hollywood*, trans., Anselm Hollo (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1987), 201.

⁹⁷ *Variety*, “Film Reviews: The Song of Bernadette,” December 22, 1943: 12.

American popular culture.”⁹⁸ It was no accident that the sea change was invoked at the movies. In fact, the same mechanism that had forced Hollywood to adopt its own Production Code was set in motion to support *The Song of Bernadette*, though this time, with the assistance of Twentieth-Century Fox studios. An ad campaign by the studio targeted Catholic newspapers, while Los Angeles Archbishop Cantwell directed parish priests in his diocese to “urge their people to see the film,” which had premiered on two screens locally. Father Emmett Regan of the Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago wrote to Joseph Breen to request that his group sponsor the Chicago premier of the film, telling him, “We would give it excellent publicity from the Catholic standpoint, and judging from the adds (sic) in the Catholic papers, they are seeking just that.”⁹⁹

While the film’s public reception might suggest that it was received equally well by the Production Code offices, its subject matter was, in fact, a cause for some concern and engendered a particular kind of treatment by Breen et al. For at least four months, Jason Joy, who was now working for Twentieth Century-Fox films, sent in revised scripts to the PCA, each one reviewed in detail for its fidelity to the technicalities of Catholic belief and the possibility of blasphemous utterances. Although Breen told Joy that the PCA had “read with great pleasure” the first draft of the script, and that the “material seems to conform to the provisions of the Production Code,” he suggested they call in a Catholic priest to act as technical adviser on matters such as proper recitation of the Rosary, the administration of the Sacrament of

⁹⁸ John T. McGreevy, “Bronx Miracle,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 3, 2000: 419.

⁹⁹ Letter from Father Emmett Regan to Joseph Breen, January 11, 1944, and telegram from Breen to Regan, January 13, 1944, Song of Bernadette Files, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Production Code Administration Files (hereafter PCA).

Extreme Unction, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and statements from the Pope upon the death of the main character. Breen interceded over 30 times in the first draft of the script regarding changes in, or elimination of phrases or suggestive situations. In that way, his interventions were not unlike those he made when reviewing scripts with less Catholic subject matter, though in some cases his suggestions seem especially cautious. He asked twice that the following line be rewritten or omitted: “Learn at once to fall asleep quickly. The right way of sleeping is a great art of monastics.” Breen’s reasoning was that the statement might cause “offensive misunderstanding on the part of the audience.”¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, though, Breen was so pleased with the production that he called it “the most satisfying screen film that has come across your path in many years.”¹⁰¹

While the commercial success of *The Song of Bernadette* was significant, historians have also read alternative reasons for the rise of Catholic subject matter in the movies. In *Hollywood and the Catholic Church*, Les and Barbara Keyser suggest that the surge in Catholic-themed films served as a device to introduce “compensating moral value” into films dealing with urban crime. To that end, a new Hollywood icon was born along with the new genre: “Priests were to become major heroic figures in crime films; shoulder to shoulder with FBI men, revenue agents, and other agents of morality, they became part of a phalanx for truth, justice and the American way.”¹⁰² Top box office stars of the day fell in line to play men of the cloth. Pat O’Brien’s role in *Angels with Dirty Faces* and Spencer Tracy’s in both *San Francisco* and *Boy’s*

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Breen to Joy, February 26, 1943, Song of Bernadette Files, PCA.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Joseph Breen to Revered Emmett Regan, January 17, 1944, Song of Bernadette Files, PCA.

¹⁰² Barbara and Les Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church: the Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 62.

Town both served the purpose of correcting the paths of gangsters and fallen women. While the Keyzers are correct in observing that “hero-priests” served as morally compensating devices in films such as these, in others they were the main event, perhaps most memorably with Bing Crosby’s star turn in *Going My Way*, and its sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary’s*.

Following quickly on the heels of the success of *The Song of Bernadette*, Paramount’s *Going My Way* superceded that film’s box office haul to become the biggest hit film of the Catholic genre. A very different kind of religious picture, the film starred real-life Catholic Bing Crosby, the year’s biggest box office star according to Quigley’s *Motion Picture Herald*. Crosby played the young Father O’Malley, a hip priest sent to help revive the parish of St. Dominic’s in a down-and-out Irish and Italian immigrant neighborhood in New York.¹⁰³ The plot centered around the cultural and generational conflicts between the young O’Malley and Father Fitzgibbon, the elderly Irish priest who had founded the parish 45 years earlier, played by Dublin stage actor (and Irish Protestant) Barry Fitzgerald. The conflicts, as well as terms of reconciliation, between the old ways of the Catholic Church and Hollywood popular culture are played out in the relationship between O’Malley and Fitzgibbon. The film introduces O’Malley as a man comfortable, not just in the Church, but in the surrounding neighborhood as well. The first glimpse of the new priest is a high-angle shot from the vantage point of the neighborhood Irish women washing their windows in a crowded row house. As he stops to ask for directions to St. Dominic’s, the shot gives us a full-body view of O’Malley, clearly a priest in his

¹⁰³ *Variety*, “Crosby Tops Box Office,” December 29, 1944.

collar and black suit, but also sporting a leisurely straw boater, Crosby's own signature topper. By contrast, the first shot of Father Fitzgibbon is in the office of the Church, wearing the more traditional black cassock and biretta. He is shown negotiating with the father and son team from the Knickerbocker Savings and Loan Corporation (a reference to the old, established New York, in contrast to the newer, immigrant New York of the 45-year old parish), who hold the Church's mortgage, and are threatening to foreclose. When O'Malley and Fitzgibbon finally meet for the first time, it is in Fitzgibbon's office and the terms of the cultural conflict are vividly displayed again through costume. O'Malley, having been sprayed by a cleaning truck after an eventful walk to the Church, arrives wearing not his clerical garb, but a sweat suit emblazoned with the name of his all-American home team, the St. Louis Browns.

O'Malley's penchant for leisure and pop culture (a characterization that builds on Crosby's established star image) becomes an asset to the parish, as he helps to teach a runaway teenage woman how to sing popular tunes, but with feeling. He also enlists the neighborhood toughs in a traveling boy's choir by first taking them to baseball games and the movies. By contrast, Fitzgibbon is almost never seen outside the confines of the church building and its garden (though the film depicts the older priest's manner in a nostalgic fashion, rather than deriding him). The film presents an ideal, Hollywood version of an urban Catholic parish, and by extension, an American Catholic church. It is a church that embraces, and even benefits from popular culture, and that has the potential spokespersons to persuade the older order of its advantages.

It is still an immigrant church, though the new priests are without accents and engage in all-American pastimes such as golf, baseball, and singing about their

college alma mater. The young O'Malley is even progressive and cosmopolitan enough to attend *Carmen*, an opera about a prostitute, simply to appreciate the singing of an old friend without passing judgment on the subject matter, and to bless the marriage of a young couple – the singing runaway and the youngest Knickerbocker – who, it was implied, had been living together. (We come to find out, of course, that the groom has patriotically enlisted in the military and is off to the front to fight in the war.)

O'Malley's attitude toward such improprieties is disclosed at the end of his first meeting with Fitzgibbon. As they leave for a tour of the Church, O'Malley turns his back toward Fitzgibbon, and we see the other side of his St. Louis Browns sweatshirt emblazoned with a picture of three monkeys – see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Fitzgibbon immediately grabs a spare jacket for O'Malley to sport while inside the Church. But the image isn't a throwaway. It establishes the philosophy of the new priest – one that Hollywood studios, eager to expand the parameters of the Production Code without offending the Legion of Decency or raising the ire of the bishops of large urban parishes, hoped the Church might adopt – that of not being concerned as much with policing behavior, but as Father O'Malley demonstrates throughout the movie, inspiring goodness through leisure and entertainment.

In this Hollywood version of an urban parish, an ideal Catholic Church embraces its immigrant culture, but in ways that also distance it, by embracing it primarily as nostalgia (and especially Irish nostalgia), as in the Irish lullaby “Too-ra-loo-ra” that both priests sing over a shot of Bushmill's whiskey, or the Irish mother

who is brought to America for Father Fitzgibbon, rather than sending the elderly priest back to the old country for retirement. It also embraces popular culture, amply demonstrated throughout as O'Malley and his other priest friend from the neighboring parish play golf, and interact with the music industry to try to sell one of O'Malley's ditties. O'Malley is even depicted as discerning enough to reject the waning boogie-woogie style in favor of his own sentimental crooning.

It has been argued that the influx of hero priests and religious films was Hollywood's way of making amends to the Catholic Church and guaranteeing high Legion of Decency ratings.¹⁰⁴ But consider a more encompassing reading of the sudden crop of religious, and especially Catholic films. Perhaps both the Church and Hollywood were collaborating in reframing the image of the Church in ways that could serve the larger cultural projects of each party. Rather than making amends, the producers and studio executives who had witnessed the public relations effect of the boycotts may have been grateful to the Church for "saving" the industry by requiring that they do no more than enforce a Production Code already in place. But even more important, the Church had demonstrated that an audience existed who might enjoy seeing itself reflected, if not idealized, on the big screen. The question for both the Church and for Hollywood was, how would non-Catholics – Catholics were still, after all, a minority, though a significant one – respond to these primarily urban folk tales?

Bosley Crowther, writing for the *New York Times* in 1944, seemed to sense this about *Going My Way*, to which he gave a favorable review. He wrote of the characters of the two priests, "Quietly, without your even knowing it. They insinuate

¹⁰⁴ Keyser, *Hollywood and Church*. 62

themselves into your heart and give you a new, respectful feeling for clergymen – at least, with regard to the screen.”¹⁰⁵ Crowther wasn’t the only reviewer to sense the image-making Hollywood had accomplished for the Catholic Church. In his review of *Going My Way* for *Time* magazine, James Agee (himself a Catholic, though of a more liberal stripe than Quigley or Breen) wrote: “*Going My Way* goes the way of tons of Hollywood flesh this season: it is a religious picture. It is also one of the year’s top surprises. It presents Bing Crosby as a Catholic priest, and gets away with it so gracefully that Crosby, the priesthood and the audience are equal gainers.”¹⁰⁶

As *The Song of Bernadette* demonstrated, Catholic-themed films were not automatically an easy sell in the offices of the Production Code. Though *Going My Way* eventually earned an A-1 rating, its highest, from the Legion of Decency, its content initially raised more than a few questions with Joseph Breen and the PCA.¹⁰⁷ After Breen’s first reading of the script in 1943, he wrote back to Paramount studio executive Luigi Luraschi that “the material, in its present form, seems to us to need very careful handling and, possibly, some considerable revamping, against the possibility that it may give serious offense to Catholic patrons.” He added, “We think, too, that the characterization of the three priests might well be re-examined and, possibly, raised considerably in general tone and flavor,” citing the two young priests as “thoroughly undignified.”¹⁰⁸ Upon the film’s release, though, the reception of the Catholic clergy was largely, though not unanimously, favorable. On the dissenting

¹⁰⁵ Bosley Crowther, “Clerical Callers: ‘Going My Way’ Gives a Human Picture Of Men of God for a Change.” *New York Times*, May 7, 1944.

¹⁰⁶ James Agee, *Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies*. (New York: Random House, 2000) 332.

¹⁰⁷ Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 229.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Breen to Luraschi, August 12, 1943, *Going My Way* Files, PCA.

side, the consensus was that the film erred by omitting any demonstration of the Sacraments or Mass. A writer for the Catholic journal *The Tidings*, though, brushed aside those criticisms as “nonsense,” saying:

If there are to be no motion pictures dealing with Catholic action unless time is taken in each to explain the Divine Mystery of the Sacraments and the whole teachings of Mother Church, then Hollywood dramatists will feel inclined to turn for inspiration to the Salvation Army and Aimee Semple McPherson.¹⁰⁹

The same author saw in *Going My Way* a “screenplay capable of dispelling much misunderstanding and prejudice which exists against the Catholic Church and particularly against the priesthood.”¹¹⁰ Arguably, though, what the film accomplishes is less a debunking of myths than the creation of new ones.

Casting Crosby, a practicing Catholic, in the lead role not only guaranteed a strong box office return, it lent a note of authenticity to the depiction of the priest, while benefiting Hollywood by any positive reverberations the role lent to Crosby’s image. The Catholic press had already recognized Crosby’s religious affiliation in 1940, when movie columnist Louella Parsons moonlighted for *The Holy Name Journal* to spread the word that “Actors are Good Catholics.” In the article, she highlighted Crosby’s family and devotional life. Citing his three children, and Paramount’s apparent anxiety over his transformation from a romantic single crooner to a married father of three, Parsons crowed, “The fans are still crazy about this boy

¹⁰⁹ William H. Mooring, “The Sound Track,” *The Tidings*. August 25, 1944, Clipping, Going My Way Files, PCA.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

who has proven that he puts being a good husband and father and Catholic above all the imaginary ‘dangers’ to his career.” But Crosby wasn’t the only actor singled out for accolades. Irene Dunne was praised for her donation of an altar and a statue of Saint Theresa at her parish. And Spencer Tracy and Pat O’Brien, both Catholics, were commended for their contributions to the faith via their “reverent” portrayal of priests. Parsons stressed that in these cases, the actors were not only co-religionists, but exemplary practitioners of the faith. According to Parsons, these stars attended Mass despite the late hours used as “an excuse for some Catholics not in pictures.”¹¹¹ The implication, of course, was not only that Hollywood’s reputation as the Sodom of the Western world was exaggerated, but that the stars who graced its products exemplified the characters they portrayed. Not just anyone could play a Catholic religious – Frank Sinatra’s misguided foray into the genre in the 1948 film *The Miracle of the Bells* was widely panned, for example, in part due to the difficulty of believing that Sinatra could occupy the priesthood.¹¹² Ingrid Bergman, who successfully played a nun opposite Bing Crosby in *The Bells of Saint Mary’s*, was nonetheless considered too sexually potent to portray a nun in *The Keys of the Kingdom*. By 1948, Bergman’s scandalous affair with Roberto Rossellini had prompted calls for the Production Code to be amended to include disciplinary action against errant star behavior.¹¹³ The suggestion was never adopted, but Bergman never inhabited a habit again.

¹¹¹ Louella O. Parsons, “Actors are Good Catholics,” *The Holy Name Journal*. October 1940, Clippings files, IFCA.

¹¹² Thomas M. Pryor, “Herewith, the Ten Worst Pictures of 1948,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1948.

¹¹³ A.H. Weiler, “By Way of Report: Errant Stars Censors, Bergman to Italy?” *New York Times*, December 5, 1948.

The same year that *Going My Way* dominated the box office, Twentieth Century Fox released another film about a priest, *The Keys of the Kingdom*. The film, starring Gregory Peck as a Catholic priest doing missionary work in China, ran into considerably more trouble at the Production Code offices than Crosby's star vehicle. Anticipating trouble but eager to make a film of author A. J. Cronin's novel, agents Richard Halliday and Frank Vincent wrote in defense of the subject matter to Geoffrey Shurlock before the script had even made its way to the PCA offices, quoting an anonymous studio source who characterized the story as one that:

...covers sixty years in the life of a man who is a real Christian in every sense of the word, and therefore, is classed as a church rebel. But leaving out anything that would be offensive to the Catholic church, there is still enough incident, action and drama in this story make a great picture.¹¹⁴

Halliday and Vincent were already working at a disadvantage, as word of the project had made its way to the Offices of the Legion of Decency as early as March 1942. But despite an early intervention by Father Wilfrid Parsons, there were still numerous issues with the script that raised the eyebrows of Breen and the PCA. Just days after Shurlock received that letter, Breen wrote to Louis B. Mayer, who was considering making the film, that the story "suggest(ed) three major difficulties." The first problem Breen cited was the potential of the story to violate the Production Code regulation against portraying the clergy as villains or subjects of comic ridicule. He told Mayer, "From a reading of the brief synopsis at hand, there is a possibility that

¹¹⁴ Letter from Richard Halliday and Frank Vincent to Geoffrey Shurlock, May 20, 1941. The Keys of the Kingdom Files, PCA.

some of the priests, who are in conflict with Father Francis, might be developed into the kind of clergymen, the characterization of which might not be acceptable under the Code.” He suggested, though, that the film need not develop that way, and that “the story, it seems to us, can be told without any such derogatory characterization.”¹¹⁵ Breen’s second objection was to “certain of the details, having to do with Catholic belief and practices,” particularly one incident in which the main character, Father Chisholm, publicly endorses a miracle that turns out to have been a fake. Explaining his objection, Breen says, “The difficulty, here, it seems to us is not so much that the child and her mother undertake to perpetrate this fraud. That, in itself, might be a dramatic and thoroughly acceptable incident. The difficulty lies with the suggestion that this fraud is publicly endorsed by a Catholic priest, even though he does so with the best intentions in the world.”¹¹⁶ The incident does not appear in the final version of the film.

But it was not only the clerical portrayals that Breen cited. The PCA was also concerned about the portions of the story that took place in China, and “ha[d] to do with the activities of war-lords and with famine and pestilence.” In letters to both Louis Mayer, at MGM, and Jason Joy, then at Twentieth Century Fox, Breen warned, “It is our impression that the present governmental regime in China is likely to protest rather vigorously against the picturization of these kinds of incidents in a film, which is to be distributed throughout the world.” To deal with both the Catholic Church and with China, Breen recommended technical advisers. For China, he referred Mayer and Joy to that country’s local consul. And for the Catholics, he referred them, as he

¹¹⁵ Letter from Breen to Louis B. Mayer, May 22, 1941, The Keys of the Kingdom Files, PCA.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

always did, to Father John J. Devlin, Los Angeles Archbishop Cantwell's "officially appointed technical adviser for motion picture production."¹¹⁷

Father Devlin was called in to offer technical advice on the set of almost any film that dealt with Catholic themes. A September 1942 article in the *Catholic Digest* titled "Padre of the Films" featured the priest, who reportedly kept two offices in the Los Angeles rectory of St. Vincent's – "one for the Church, so to speak, and one for the pictures." As the "representative of the Catholic Church in Movieland...it is to Father Devlin the studio big shots must turn, when they want an opinion on the orthodoxy or inoffensiveness of a story they plan to buy or a script they plan to shoot. It is to him they turn whenever they are confronted with problems concerning morals or ecclesiastical ceremonies."¹¹⁸ Frank Walsh's chapter on official Church intervention in Catholic-themed films centers around Father Devlin's efforts, though Walsh's main story is the struggle over putting *Keys to the Kingdom* on the screen. The story on which the film was to be based was so problematic to the Church, Walsh reports, that additional advisers, including Wilfrid Parsons, had to be called in.

The film's dramatic subject matter, including atheism, suicide, colonialism, and war, tested the limits of cooperation for both Church and industry representatives. Though Walsh does not comment, the three years that Parsons, Devlin, Darryl Zanuck (who eventually sold the film to Fox), director Nunnally Johnson, and producer Joe Mankiewicz spent working out the details of the film together are remarkable for the degree to which both sides were willing to compromise with the

¹¹⁷ Letter from Breen to Joy, August 27, 1941; Letter from Breen to Mayer, May 22, 1941, The Keys of the Kingdom Files, PCA.

¹¹⁸ Charles Johnson and Al Antczak, "Padre of the Films," *Catholic Digest* 6, no. 11, September 1942, 25.

other. Ultimately, the studio agreed to hundreds of the changes asked for by Parsons and Devlin, from the circumstances of a main character's death scene to the rejection of Ingrid Bergman for the role of the Mother Superior. On the other side, though Parsons and Devlin exerted considerable influence in the details of the characterization of the film's protagonist, Father Chisholm, they did, finally, accede to the basic premise of his religious tolerance. What marks the success of this Hollywood/Church collaboration is that this highly problematic film was ultimately released with the PCA seal and after its release garnered the Legion of Decency's A-1 rating.¹¹⁹

The issue of "religious indifferentism" was a central theme for *The Keys of the Kingdom* and, hence, became an overt subject in the three years of negotiations between the film's producers and the Church's technical advisors. But priest characters in many Catholic-themed films from the period were implicitly defined by the same ecumenical tolerance epitomized by Father Chisolm, though it was rarely subject to the same level of scrutiny and negotiation. Devlin raised the matter in reference to a 1940 film on which he was consulted, *The Fighting 69th*, which told the story of Father Duffy (played by Pat O'Brien) and a regiment of Irish-American soldiers during World War I. Devlin complained to Father McClafferty, head of the Los Angeles Legion of Decency, that "producers were always trying to put 'expressions of tolerance in the mouth of the character of a priest,' like 'all religions are good, we're all going to Heaven by different routes' and 'it doesn't matter what

¹¹⁹ See Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 230-240.

your religion is so long as you have religion.’”¹²⁰ The character of Father Duffy was certainly an outstanding example of Devlin’s theory – just before the battalion heads out to Europe and the front, he happily tells the assembled generals and colonels, “If a lot of people back home knew how well that the various faiths got along together back here, it’d cause a lot of scandal to some pious minds.” Likewise, the good-guy persona of Bing Crosby’s Father O’Malley in 1944’s *Going My Way* rests on the priest’s non-judgmental stance toward every other character in the film – the elderly priest wary of O’Malley’s modernity, the worldly opera-star, the about-to-fall woman who has run away from her parents, the Protestant bankers who hold the mortgage on the church, and the multi-ethnic band of neighborhood juvenile delinquents.

O’Malley even attempts to engage the local atheist, trying to meet him halfway by offering his rosary—though with no luck—as a deposit against the window some children have just broken. Father Connelly in *Angels with Dirty Faces* and Father Flanagan in *Boy’s Town* (both 1938) serve as prototypes for O’Malley in this respect. Both engage the rowdy, unloved children of rough neighborhoods. Even the relatively minor character of the priest in *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944), Father Francis, is premised on his ability to deal compassionately with the dramas of the boisterous boys who grow up to become the young men celebrated in the film. Though Fathers O’Malley, Connelly, Flanagan, and Francis are called upon to show tolerance primarily toward juvenile delinquency and rough upbringing, the characters of Fathers Chisholm and Duffy are premised on a more worldly open-mindedness that was more clearly in opposition to traditional Catholic notions about natural law.

¹²⁰ Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 228.

Father Duffy's role as chaplain to an all-Irish brigade might have been one in which tolerance and open-mindedness extended primarily to his own kind. But the film features the character of Mike Murphy – a Jewish soldier born Moshe Moskowitz who changed his name, and his accent, in order to serve with the Fighting 69th. His willingness to “pass” as Irish, despite the obvious sight gag of his prominent nose, ingratiates him to his sergeant and the battalion, who all refer to him as Mike. Even as Moskowitz passes for Irish, though, Cagney's character – Jerry Plunkett, a self-centered Irish street kid – addresses him in Yiddish. The scene functions as a rare in-joke for a Jewish audience. After admitting that he was born Moskowitz and not Murphy to the incredulous sergeant, James Cagney's character turns to him, and in Yiddish says, roughly, “What a pain this guy is!,” to which Murphy replies, in Yiddish, “Sure he's a pain – he's the boss!,” to which Cagney's character replies, “Nisht far mayn gelt!” or “Not for my money!” The short scene is remarkable for the way in which it departs from the movie's otherwise standard formula. And it also telegraphs an affinity between the Irish and Jewish street kids, with Moskowitz modeling the ideal American recruit.¹²¹

If the audience was at all unsure of Father Duffy's ecumenical approach to his post they were quickly reassured early in the film via a direct inquiry from the colonel, who asks in regard to Christmas Eve services:

Colonel: “Father Duffy, how about your midnight mass tonight?”

¹²¹ Cagney was himself apparently a fluent Yiddish speaker. The *Fighting 69th* is one of two movies in which he used the skill. (Rough translation based on Yiddish Dictionary Online, <http://yiddishdictionaryonline.com/>, accessed March 20, 2007)

Father Duffy: “Everything is all set sir, barring the conversion of a few heathens, present company no exception.” (laughter all around)

Colonel: “And facilities for the non-Catholics?”

Father Duffy: “All taken care of sir. Lt. Holmes, the Methodist chaplain, is going to arrange services for the Protestant boys. Oh, and of all people, Mike Murphy is going to build a pulpit for ‘em.”

The scene is a simple set-piece, but it is significant for the message it signals – that the Catholics may be in charge, but despite their appeal, they don’t expect the Protestants to succumb to their charms. Meanwhile, neither the Protestants nor the Catholics have anything to fear from the Jews, who in this story idolize the Catholics, and oblige the Protestants. The next scene reinforces, in a very literal manner, this characterization of Jewish longing for Catholic culture. Mike Moskowitz-Murphy approaches Father Duffy as the chaplain is asking for assistance with preparations for Midnight Mass, and suggests he would like to attend. A bemused Father Duffy asks why, and Murphy replies, almost shyly, yet still in Irish character, “You’re such a swell guy Father, I think I’d go to the devil with you. That is, if you asked me to.”

Made prior to the United States entry into World War II, the film is clearly playing on a growing sense of patriotism, if not jingoism, in the country. The regiment, while historically Irish, receives a very modified version of the “multicultural platoon” treatment that would become de rigeur in the flood of war movies that would follow America’s intervention. But the multiculturalism of this platoon is quite limited – Mike Murphy is the only non-Irish character, and he deliberately takes on all the trappings of an Irish-American working class soldier in

order to participate alongside them. Rather than celebrating his Jewish faith or customs, the film celebrates his willingness to adopt the customs, and possibly even the faith, of his comrades. In order for Moskowitz-Murphy to become American, he had to become Irish-Catholic. Whether the audience accepted, or even noticed, such a message is hard to say. A *New York Times* review of the film bemoaned its “obvious theatrics, hokum and unoriginality,” but acknowledged the “cheers and whistles of a predominantly school-boyish” audience.¹²² While the “school-boys” might have been celebrating the patriotic jingoism of the film, they may have unconsciously registered the subtler message that tolerance was a Catholic value – a value generally considered antithetical to the Catholicism of the first half of the twentieth century. Moshe Moskowitz’s willingness to assume the role of Mike Murphy allowed Father Duffy to comically demonstrate the ecumenical tolerance bemoaned by Father Devlin. But the fact that the same tolerance was celebrated in nearly all the Catholic priest films of the era conveyed an impression that priestly tolerance, as demonstrated by Fathers Duffy, Flanagan, Francis, Connelly, and later, O’Malley, was an all-American expression of Catholicism.

Abie Sings an Irish Song

It is notable that the heterogeneity of the characters embraced by the Catholicism of these films is matched and countered by the ethnic homogeneity of the characters who stand in for the Catholic Church in America. Almost without

¹²² Frank Nugent, “The Screen in Review: The Old Cagney Formula Still Prevails at the Strand in the Warner Brothers Film of ‘The Fighting 69th,’” *The New York Times*, January 27, 1940.

exception, the priests are Irish. The two key exceptions are *The Keys of the Kingdom*'s Father Chisholm (Scot) and *Miracle of the Bell's* (1948) Father Paul (Polish, played by Italian-American Frank Sinatra). In some sense, this pattern of representation reflects simple institutional realities: the Roman Catholic clergy in America was, in fact, dominated by the Irish. In Jay Dolan's history of Catholicism in America, he cites several studies that found the Irish dominated the hierarchy as well as the clergy. In 1900, 62% of bishops were Irish, with more than half born in Ireland. By 1972 things had changed but not by much: "37 percent of the American clergy and 48 percent of the hierarchy still identified themselves as Irish."¹²³ Father Devlin himself was a native of County Cork, Ireland.¹²⁴ To the non-Catholic, or even the newly arrived Catholic immigrant, the image of the Catholic Church in America was certainly that of an Irish church. Lawrence McCaffrey makes the point that newly arrived Irish immigrants had an advantage over their non-Anglicized counterparts: "While German, Italian, Polish, and other Slavic Catholics isolated themselves through their retention of language and cultural uniqueness, the Irish were visible on the American scene."¹²⁵

But the clerical tolerance celebrated in Hollywood films has not historically been regarded as a centerpiece of Irish Catholic neighborhoods and parishes. Historian Lizabeth Cohen writes that the Irish who dominated Chicago's parishes bullied new immigrants, particularly the Italians, into worshipping in the Irish devotional manner, as opposed to the saint-oriented Italian folk style; even to the

¹²³ Dolan. *American Catholic Experience*, 144-145.

¹²⁴ Johnson and Antczak. "Padre of the Films," 25.

¹²⁵ Lawrence McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 60.

point that some Italians abandoned church attendance altogether.¹²⁶ David Roediger and James Barrett have shown that Irish street violence and “neighborhood patrolling” served to intimidate and exclude other new immigrant groups, including Jews, as well as African-Americans.¹²⁷ With regard to Jews, the public intolerance of Irish Catholic “Radio Priest” Father Charles Coughlin, whose strident anti-Semitic sermons were broadcast from 1938 to 1942 when he was finally silenced by an increasingly embarrassed hierarchy, can be seen as the very antithesis of the Hollywood ideal of clerical tolerance.

And in that regard, we can see the kind of cultural work performed by filmic Irish Catholic men of the cloth such as Fathers O’Malley, Duffy, Connelly, Fitzgibbon, and Flanagan. These priests of the silver screen embodied a self-image that Irish Catholics hoped to project of a clergy that would be regarded as educated, refined, and composed. In fact, as McCaffrey and others have documented, during the first half of the twentieth century, the clergy were, as a whole, more well educated than the majority of the laity.¹²⁸ Though it may not have been a deliberate rebuke to Coughlin’s uncouth style and political entanglements, the priests concocted in Hollywood were composed of character traits in marked contrast to those of Coughlin or Irish neighborhood working class toughs. The characterization of *The Fighting 69th*’s Father Duffy is certainly at odds with the increasingly intolerant Radio Priest. Although Father Devlin may have disagreed with Father Duffy’s theological broad

¹²⁶ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 87.

¹²⁷ David Roediger and James Barrett, “Making New Immigrants ‘Inbetween’: Irish Hosts and White Panethnicity, 1890-1930,” in *Not Just Black and White*, ed. Nancy Foner and George M. Frederickson (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 176.

¹²⁸ McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America*, 73.

mindedness, the Jewish Warner Brothers may have helped raise the profile of the Church in a small way by providing a heroic antidote to a visible, but embarrassing representative of the Church.

Selling the Irish to the Irish (and everyone else) was not solely a Hollywood invention. The vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley circuits had recognized that formula early in the century, though the Irish act or ditty mingled with other ethnic novelty songs and performances. Moreover, the Jewish-Irish relationship was a long-running subject of playwrights, comedians, and songsmiths. In the run-up to and throughout the First World War, Tin Pan Alley rolled out hundreds of songs playing on ethnic caricatures, including tunes like “Yiddisher Irish Baby” (1915) and Irving Berlin’s “Abie Sings an Irish Song” (1913). The latter suggests a caricature of the relationship that developed between the Jewish studios and the Irish Catholic hierarchy in the years that followed:

Abie sings an Irish song
When a suit of clothes he sells
He turns around and yells
"By Killarney's lakes and dells"
Any time an Irishman comes in to pick a bone
If he looks at Abie and hollers in an angry tone
"I would like to wrestle with a Levi or a Cohn"

Abie sings an Irish song¹²⁹

The Jewish shopkeeper in Irving Berlin's forgettable song has learned to play by the Irish rules in order to make his living on their turf. It is a similar formula to that of Mike Moskowitz-Murphy in *The Fighting 69th*, though considerably less sentimental. On Broadway, another Abie – this time one half of the lead couple in the hit *Abie's Irish Rose* – found true love among the Irish Catholics in the neighborhood, bringing strife and eventually acceptance to both parties. *Abie's Irish Rose* was a sympathetic, comic story of young lovers Abe Levy and Rose Mary Murphy and their astonished families, and was Broadway's biggest hit during its run from 1922-1927. The play also trafficked in the ethnic caricatures and exaggerated accents that vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley had successfully played for laughs, including the “melting pot marriages (that were) ubiquitous in music, film, and theatre.” In addition to frequently invoked vaudevillian comic device of the Irish-Jewish marriage, the story of Abie and Rose Mary includes its own tolerant Irish priest, Father Whalen, who, along with his Rabbi counterpart, helps shepherd the families to a happy ending. With less success, Bing Crosby revived the play as a film in 1946, the second effort of his eponymous production company.

James Agee, reviewing the year in films for 1944, alluded to just this history in his predictions for what might follow the success of *Going My Way*: “...I am willing to bet that the chief discernable result, if any, of *Going My Way* will be an anxiety-ridden set of vaudeville sketches about Pat and Mike in cassocks; and on that

¹²⁹ For more on the ethnic novelty songs of Irving Berlin and Tin Pan Alley, see Ryan Jerving, “Jazz Language and Ethnic Novelty,” *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 2 (2003): 239-268; and Charles Hamm, “Irving Berlin's Early Songs as Biographical Documents,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (1993): 10-34.

bet, with enough takers, I could set up a studio of my own.”¹³⁰ Though Hollywood began to depart from the vaudeville-tinged priest film in the years following *Going My Way*, light-hearted Catholic-themed fare did remain a viable genre. Though like its sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, with Ingrid Bergman finally playing the role of a sister, the films would begin to center on the role of the nun, rather than the priest. The on-screen device of Jewish-Catholic camaraderie seemed to go the way of “Pat and Mike in cassocks” as well, in the wartime and immediate post-war eras. Whatever grudging cooperation existed behind the scenes was about to disappear as well, as the industry mechanisms that helped the Jewish producers and Catholic censors maintain power were soon to face serious challenges.

But during the run-up to the war, during the years in which Hollywood's vertical integration remained impressively intact, and as the Production Code Offices wielded its most influential power, at least a few films were made that featured the Protestant denominations. Though very few in number, the films merit at least a brief look because they suggest the degree to which the Catholic films came to provide the prototype for representing American religion in general. The non-denominational preacher in *Sergeant York* (1941) would have been an elder in the Church of Christ, the real life Alvin York's church. While he is allowed to remain as much in ignorance about the war going on as the rest of the isolated hillbillies of the Cumberland Gap, he is nevertheless depicted as the most intelligent and worldly individual in a rough and backward valley. Though the character of the preacher is developed in the same way that Catholic priests were routinely depicted, the film stands out for its portrayal

¹³⁰ Agee, *Agee on Film*, 125.

of a decidedly non-Catholic Christianity, with several scenes depicting York discussing literal interpretations of the Bible and the congregation's a cappella call and response style of singing, and certainly York's sudden conversion after a lightning strike on a fateful evening – the intervention of Protestant grace as a redeeming device, as opposed to the Catholic notion of “works.” But Sergeant York seems merely to have been the exception that proves the rule. As Warner Brothers prepared for production of *One Foot in Heaven* (1941), a film based on the life of a Methodist minister, letters to Joseph Breen and Jason Joy stressed proper treatment of the main character. Daniel Poling, President of the Christian Herald Association, told Breen that he was “anxious...that this picture be comparable in its field to ‘Boys Town,’ ‘Knut Rockne,’ etc.”¹³¹ Poling was referring to the reverential treatment both biographical films bestowed on their protagonists. However, his choice of examples – the Irish priest of *Boys Town*, and the Norwegian football coach who brought glory to the Fighting Irish and his beloved priests at Notre Dame (with Knute Rockne played by Pat O’Brien, who by then had portrayed two of Hollywood’s most famous Irish priests) – betrays the degree to which Catholicism had become the dominant on-screen religion.

Even so, their prevalence was noted with some alarm by a few who might have stood to benefit from the images they portrayed. John Nolan, a representative of the Comerford theaters in Pennsylvania, wrote to Martin Quigley that he felt Catholic pictures like *Going My Way*, *The Song of Bernadette*, and *The Sullivans*, were “hurtful in the long run,” apparently worried that some might see the pictures as

¹³¹ Letter from Daniel Poling to Joseph Breen, December 31, 1940, One Foot in Heaven Files, PCA.

further evidence of undue Catholic influence in Hollywood. Quigley replied to Nolan to reassure him that the pictures were not being made due to Catholic pressure, but rather “because they were good stories.”¹³² But a January 1946 *Time Magazine* article illustrated Nolan’s point dramatically. Titled “Protesting Protestant,” the article begins by asking, “Have you heard of the Reformation, Mr. Crosby?” The article announces the formation of a “Protestant Film Commission, one of whose aims was to flavor Hollywood's movie output with as much Protestant salt as possible. . . . When asked if the Commission would try to propagate Protestant analogues of *Going My Way*, etc., (Paul Frederic) Heard answered: That is definitely one of our aims. . . . We will try to find a way to dramatize what the minister calls 'the Christian way of life.’”¹³³ Far from criticizing the subtle caricature of Catholic clergy that some felt Hollywood was perpetuating in the portrayals of Fr. O’Malley and others, the Protestant commission was about to invest well over \$1,000,000 to emulate it. But despite such efforts, the screen population of good natured Protestant ministers (let alone Jewish rabbis) would never reach the critical mass that the Catholic clergy had achieved.

So what might we begin to conclude about what Hollywood gained from its Catholic films? There is probably no single answer, but there are some suggestive patterns. Martin Quigley may have had a point when he reassured the anxious theater owner that the Catholic films were merely good stories. An Irish critic, who favorably reviewed *Going My Way* for a Catholic literary journal in Ireland, seems to have had

¹³² Quigley Publications Office Memo, August 5, 1944; Letter from Quigley to John Nolan, July 13, 1944, Box 2, Folder 4, MJQ.

¹³³ *Time Magazine*, “Protesting Protestant,” January 21, 1946.

that idea, too: “The film is, in fact, just a piece of sentimental comedy, of pleasant make-believe about human beings whose background is Catholic.”¹³⁴ Likewise, in the example of *The Keys of the Kingdom*, the moral lessons were not obviously Catholic, and so played ecumenically to a broader audience than the denomination depicted.

In an essay on the image of the Irish-American gangster in Hollywood, Christopher Shannon suggests that the introduction of Catholic priests into the genre – particularly that of Father Jerry Connelly in *Angels with Dirty Faces* – was “hardly a sop to the Catholics who dominated the Production Code Offices” but, rather “was a move toward a deeper urban realism.”¹³⁵ Shannon’s argument ultimately privileges the Irish storyline over the Catholic, but his point about both is suggestive. Shannon sees the Irish gangster films, as well as *Going My Way*, as sites where “Irish Catholics came to represent certain communal values that resonated deeply with Americans searching for signs of life in local ties threatened by the social dislocation of the Depression and the increasing nationalization of life under the New Deal.”¹³⁶ Ethnicity, he rightly points out, was not a problem for the Irish Catholics portrayed in these films – as opposed to the troubled ethnic identities of Jack Robinson/Jakie Rabinowitz in *The Jazz Singer*, or Moshe Moskowitz/Mike Murphy in *The Fighting 69th*. In this sense, we might better understand the brick-and-mortar Catholicism that was often at the center of the dramatic turns in some of these films (*Going My Way*, *The Bells of St. Mary’s*, *Boys Town*), demonstrated through the inability of a parish at

¹³⁴ Thomas MacGreevy, “Going My Way,” *Father Mathew Record*, November 1944, in *The Thomas MacGreevy Archive*, <http://www.macgreevy.org/home.jsp>.

¹³⁵ Christopher Shannon, “Public Enemies, Local Heroes: The Irish-American Gangster Film in Classic Hollywood Cinema,” *New Hibernian Review* 9, no. 4 (2005): 58.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

first to pay its mortgage, followed by cleverly arranged bit of good fortune in which the property is saved (and usually then some).

But for ethnic Catholicism to become a safe haven for Americans unmoored by the upheaval of the Depression, its image had to depart radically from that of an authoritarian and insular American interloper with suspicious loyalties, to something that was nearly its opposite. One way of doing so, in the movies, was to keep the clerical figures squarely grounded in the parish neighborhood or regiment to which they were assigned. Tellingly, the only film that prominently features Catholic clerics of a rank higher than priest, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, takes place in Scotland and China, not the United States. The same film is also the only to broach the subject of anti-Catholicism, where an anti-Catholic attack is used to illustrate the tragic backstory of Father Chisholm's childhood. The American Catholic-themed films rarely, if ever, mentioned the Pope, and proceeded on the assumption that no dual loyalty problem existed. Indeed, the loyalty exhibited by the priest in each of these films is toward specific and circumscribed characters – the elderly priest of *Going My Way*, the schoolchildren of *The Bells of St. Mary's*, the boys of *Boys Town*, and the neighborhood delinquents of *Angels with Dirty Faces*. War-themed Catholic films, such as *The Fighting 69th* and *The Fighting Sullivans*, followed the same locally oriented pattern, with loyalty to country celebrated almost as an afterthought in the epilogues, but loyalty to regiment and family celebrated as the central allegiance in the narrative.

That formula might not have pleased all Catholics, and particularly clerics, who yearned for a more theologically grounded representation of themselves on-

screen. The always perceptive critic James Agee noted, regarding the on-screen priesthood, in his review of *Keys to the Kingdom*, “Not that priests would by any means be necessary to a good religious picture. I can’t help noticing that they have never yet been shown on the screen at their real business, public or private, just as screen lovers are seldom shown to be capable of love.”¹³⁷ Agee had stumbled on the real formula behind the Catholic film explosion – the films hinted, almost guiltily, at Catholicism, in the same way that love stories hinted at sex. The Production Code made it, in some ways, as difficult to depict religious exercises on screen as it did the amorous. In the case of the Catholic film, that prohibition aided the development of an all-American on-screen Catholicism by eliminating negative portrayals of the priesthood, especially the dogmatic intolerance that was central to 19th and early 20th century Catholicism. Such portrayals could too easily be interpreted as negative characterization in the context of the big screen, and its broad audience.

There is, of course, a more economically-motivated explanation for the abundance of Catholic-themed films. While they had a demonstrable appeal to a large domestic Catholic audience already clearly loyal to movies in general – so that even negative Catholic attention to films was almost always accompanied by positive assertions of what film could be and sometimes was – the films also had a strong potential international appeal. As Ruth Vasey and others have shown, the international market for films was nearly as important as the domestic. And Catholicism was, after all, the most populous Christian denomination in the world.

¹³⁷ Agee, *Agee on Film*, 122 (from January 6, 1945 review of *The Keys of the Kingdom* for *The Nation*.)

The Irish reviewer for *Going My Way* acknowledged the international appeal of that film, particularly to his countrymen:

And so, knowing the conventions of the theatre in such things, we settle down to be charmed by the spectacle of virtue in (slight) distress, fully confident that at the end we shall see it triumphantly rewarded for the touching courage it is infallibly going to display. And that, in fact, is how it works out. And, of course, we are charmed. And, after all, why not? A couple of hours' contemplation of the play of the tear and the smile make even more legitimate diversion when the Erin in whose eyes they blend is trans-, not cross-Atlantic.¹³⁸

The two most successful films domestically, *Going My Way* and *The Song of Bernadette*, were also lauded for their enormous potential in the international film market. Both had an obvious appeal to Europe – Irish viewers were eager to see Fitzgerald in a starring role that touches on Irish emigration to the States, and *The Song of Bernadette* is set in France. But the European market was drying up in the wake of the disastrous economic effects of the war. At the same time, though, the heavily Catholic markets of Latin America were proving to be a potentially lucrative outlet for films. A letter written to Breen from the United States Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs suggested a careful strategy for opening the film there. The Latin American promotion for *The Song of Bernadette*, he suggested, should begin with private showings for the prelates of each city followed by “groups of priests, nuns,

¹³⁸ MacGreevy, *Going My Way*.

and other religious” in advance of any public showings in order to assure “this truly excellent production a stimulating and cordial welcome.”¹³⁹

Luigi Luraschi, director of censorship for Paramount and an expert in international film markets, wrote to Breen to share the positive reception of *Going My Way* on the international scene. He was particularly interested in its reception in the Americas, because “of our political relations with Argentina and also because of the good that the screen can sometimes do in the interest of our country abroad in those lands where we are not as well understood and we would like to be.” Luraschi attached a review from an Argentine newspaper to his letter, which included these glowing endorsements:

And from the Catholic viewpoint, which is liable to interest us most, you will enjoy this picture as never before...The picture is stupendous from a Catholic viewpoint because it will prove to a host of agnostics that Catholicism is not at variance with joy, or with normality and natural feelings...*Going My Way*...shows us priests with a sense of reality and of the century. Men who are very like many we have here; see it, and take with you your friends who are not Catholics. I assure you you will be grateful to me.¹⁴⁰

Catholic-themed films appealed to a domestic audience by tapping into familiar formulas and moderating them against the Production Code’s moral barometer, safely

¹³⁹ Letter to Joseph Breen from Walter T. Prendergast, Executive Office the President, Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, May 24, 1944, The Song of Bernadette Files, PCA.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Luigi Luraschi to Joseph Breen, January 5, 1945, including typed copy of a clipping from the *Criterion* newspaper, Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 30, 1944, Going My Way Files, PCA.

eliminating anything that might warrant censorship in the city and state censorship boards that continued to operate well past its introduction. They appealed to an international audience by promoting a particular brand of Americanism abroad, one imbued with the familiar images of Catholicism, itself moderated by the dictates of the Production Code, which looked out for foreign censorship offices as well.

Conclusion

But by 1946, Martin Quigley had grown less impressed with the ability of motion pictures to spread American Catholic ideals domestically, let alone internationally. Citing the inevitable influence of the Hollywood motion picture he warned his audience that the oversight of the Production Code Administration and its decisions were frequently...

...not pleasing to various elements in Hollywood and elsewhere. As a result a constant and hostile effort in propaganda, manipulation and maneuver is carried on. Inevitably the theatrical motion picture has come to be looked upon as a pearl without price by those who would bemuse and dragoon public opinion into projects and promotions calculated to erase the essential features of what we know as Western Civilization.¹⁴¹

Quigley made clear who the target of his attack was – the screen writers who, he claimed, accounted for the “chief concentration of the extreme Left view in

¹⁴¹ “The Challenge of the Times: An Address by Martin Quigley before the Alumni Association Catholic University of America,” November 17, 1946, Box 4, Folder 19. MJQ.

Hollywood.” Calling for renewed Catholic Action to combat the menace of these Leftist writers, he also reminded his audience where this latest threat to the Catholic moral universe and the “American ideal of decency” originated – in the departure from the moral order (natural law) represented by the ascendancy of Communism in the Soviet Union, and especially, Eastern Europe. Almost exactly one year later, in November 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee cited nine writers and one director – the Hollywood Ten – for contempt of Congress for refusing to testify as to whether they were, or had ever been, members of the Communist party.¹⁴² By then, the first years of the Cold War had begun to move the mainstream of American thought away from the liberal notions of ecumenical tolerance expressed by the Hollywood priests, and toward an affinity for the rigid premises of natural law favored by the Catholic hierarchy.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, the host of the popular radio and television show *Life is Worth Living* exemplifies the shift in emphasis that took place in the post-war years. Sheen’s television program – yet another challenge to Hollywood’s box office – relied on the Bishop’s willingness to engage in the same kind of casual humor audiences had grown accustomed to seeing in the Father O’Malley and Father Duffy types of the big screen. He was, however, not only a bona fide Catholic prelate, but a member of the hierarchy as well. And while his delivery was on the whole relaxed, it was not informal. Sheen stood alone on a stage, in full vestments, with a chalk-board that he used to illustrate his main points, which were delivered as sermons. In the same year that HUAC cited the Hollywood Ten, Catholic church’s around the country

¹⁴² Challenge of the Times, MJQ.

held special May Day services to pray for “the enslaved people of Russia.” Sheen, serving as the national spokesman for the Church that day, straddled the divide between the idealized Catholic tolerance celebrated on the big screen, and the increasingly dogmatic mood of the country when he reminded the forgetful that “Communists are human beings.”¹⁴³

Sheen’s weekly sermons, along with the Legion of Decency campaign, helped create a nationally-oriented Catholic culture by deliberately courting non-Catholics through the mediums of mass culture, even as both delivered specifically Catholic theological messages. The Catholic-themed movies of the era, in contrast, created a public nostalgia for Catholicism as the American religion of the neighborhood par excellence. It wasn’t Catholic theology or even morality that was being sold, but an agreeable version of the Church as your friendly neighborhood institution, one that any American could appreciate, regardless of creed.

But at the same time that Catholic-themed movies were becoming popular staples of the Hollywood oeuvre, the Legion of Decency and the Production Code were waning in influence. The old order for both Hollywood and Catholicism was changing. The studios were becoming more unanimous in their calls for amendments and liberalizations to the Code. And a number of court cases served to decrease the influence of both markedly. In 1948, the Justice Department ruled against the industry regarding block-booking and theater monopolization, effectively disrupting the vertical integration that had allowed the studio system to thrive, and with it, the

¹⁴³ *Time Magazine*, “Prayer for May Day,” May 12, 1947.

jurisdiction of the Production Code.¹⁴⁴ Then, in 1952 the Supreme Court struck down the 1915 ruling that had left the industry without constitutional protection of free speech. The subject of that ruling was a religiously-themed Italian film, *The Miracle*, directed by Roberto Rossellini and released in the United States in December 1950. The New York Board of Regents revoked the film's license one month after its American debut, on grounds that the film – which told the story of an abandoned peasant woman who thinks she has been impregnated by Saint Joseph – was sacrilegious. It was also a defeat for the Legion of Decency, whose campaign against the film failed to substantially decrease attendance. The fact that *The Miracle*, an independent Italian production, was not subject to the jurisdiction of the Production Code or the Hollywood system left the Legion of Decency with no bargaining partners. Simply put, the episode would not have been possible prior to the divestiture of the industry that took place two years earlier, and effectively demonstrates the degree to which Catholic Action relied on Hollywood's system of vertical integration.

But despite the weakening of the Legion of Decency, Catholicism in America was gaining in national influence. Even as *The Miracle* controversy was brewing in New York (the geographic center of that significant episode, which was ultimately minor in terms of public awareness) Catholicism was on its way to becoming the national religion not only of the silver screen, but of Washington as well. In 1960, John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic president of the United States, just two years before the opening of the second Vatican council, which would modernize the face of Catholicism.

¹⁴⁴ See especially Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood*.

The War and immediate post-War years continue to be a touchstone for the confluence of Hollywood and Catholic culture, thanks in no small part to television. Regular showings of such Catholic-friendly movies as *The Sound of Music* and *It's a Wonderful Life* have done their part to mainstream a specifically Hollywood version of Catholicism to broad audiences of more than one generation. Movies didn't have to be explicitly religious to make the point. Perhaps the most popular of the perennials, Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946), never reveals the denominations of its main characters, despite Clarence's angelic presence and conversations with his maker. But as Jimmy Stewart, aka George Bailey, returns to his beloved, restored Bedford Falls after being shown the tawdry enclave it would have become had he committed the sin of suicide (both in the mores of Catholicism and in the letter of the Production Code), we know we're back in the neighborhood of O'Malley's America because *The Bells of St. Mary's* is playing its second smash week at the local theater. The denomination had ceased to be of real importance, as Hollywood had succeeded in making Catholicism the national religion, at the very least, of the big screen.

Bibliography

Collections Consulted:

International Federation of Catholic Alumnae Collection, American Catholic History Research Center, Catholic University of America.

Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Production Code Administration Files, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

National Catholic Welfare Conference, Records of, American Catholic History Research Center, Catholic University of America.

Quigley, Martin J., Papers. Special Collections, Georgetown University Library.

Bibliography:

Agee, James. *Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies*. (New York: Random House, 2000)

Bernstein, Matthew, ed. *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999)

Black, Gregory D. *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

———. *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies: 1940-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Black, Gregory D. and Clayton A. Koppes. "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945." *The Journal of American History* 64 no. 1 (1977)

Brackman, Harold. "The Attack on 'Jewish Hollywood': A Chapter in the History of Modern American Anti-Semitism," *Modern Judaism* 20 (2000)

Carr, Steven. *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Churchill, Douglas. "Hollywood Discovers that Virtue Pays." *New York Times*. January 20, 1935.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

- Couvares, Francis G. "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies Before the Production Code." *American Quarterly* 44, (1992): 584 - 616.
- Crowther, Bosley. "Clerical Callers: 'Going My Way' Gives a Human Picture Of Men of God for a Change." *New York Times*, May 7, 1944.
- Decherney, Peter. *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)
- Doherty, Thomas. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)
- Dolan, Jay P. *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985)
- Forman, Henry James. *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1934)
- Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988)
- Gerstle, Gary. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001)
- Giovacchini, Saverio. *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001)
- Halsey, William M. *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980)
- Hamm, Charles. "Irving Berlin's Early Songs as Biographical Documents." *The Musical Quarterly* 77 no. 1 (1993)
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)
- Jerving, Ryan. "Jazz Language and Ethnic Novelty." *Modernism/modernity* 10 no. 2 (2003)
- Johnson, Charles and Al Antczak, "Padre of the Films," *Catholic Digest* 6, no. 11 (September 1942)
- Jowett, Garth S. *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976)

- . “Giving Them What They Want: Movie Audience Research Before 1950.” *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law*, (1985)
- Jungk, Peter Stephen. *Franz Werfel: A Life in Prague, Vienna, and Hollywood*, trans., Anselm Hollo (New York: Grove Weidenfeld. 1987)
- Keyser, Barbara and Les. *Hollywood and the Catholic Church: the Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984)
- Los Angeles Times*. 1932. Premiere at Chinese Prepared: Grauman Makes Plans for Spectacular Presentation of ‘Grand Hotel’. April 17.
- Marshall, Charles C. “An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1927), 540.
- MacGreevy, Thomas. “Going My Way.” *Father Mathew Record*, November 1944, in *The Thomas MacGreevy Archive*, <http://www.macgreevy.org/home.jsp>.
- Maltby, Richard. “More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of ‘Pre-Code Cinema’,” *Senses of Cinema* no. 29 (2003): http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/29/pre_code_cinema.html , Accessed April 11, 2006.
- McCaffrey, Lawrence. *Textures of Irish America*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992)
- McGrath, Owen A., C.S.P. “Catholic Action’s Big Opportunity,” *The Ecclesiastical Review: A Monthly Publication for the Clergy* 91 (1934)
- MacGreevy, John T. *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003)
- . “Bronx Miracle.” *American Quarterly* 52 no. 3 (2000)
- Morris, Charles R. *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America’s Most Powerful Church*. (New York: Random House, 1997)
- Motion Picture Herald*. 1944. Exhibitors Ask More Music, More Comedy, Less War. January 8.
- New York Times*. 1934. 12,000,000 Expected to Aid Movie Drive. July 8.
- New York Times*. 1934. 50,000 March in Film War. September 28.
- New York Times*. 1934. Bishop Denies Film Censorship Is Sought; Says Clean Shows Is Only Aim of Crusade. September 24.

- New York Times*. 1934. Catholics Widen Movie Campaign. November 17.
- New York Times*. 1934. Clean-Film Pledge May Flood Nation. July 15.
- New York Times*. 1934. Interfaith Amity Seen in Film Fight. July 6.
- New York Times*. 1934. Join Boycott of Movies: Methodist Ministers of Philadelphia Praise Cardinal. June 12.
- Nugent, Frank, "The Screen in Review: The Old Cagney Formula Still Prevails at the Strand in the Warner Brothers Film of 'The Fighting 69th,'" *The New York Times*, January 27, 1940.
- Pryor, Thomas M. "Herewith, the Ten Worst Pictures of 1948," *New York Times*, December 26, 1948.
- Roediger, David and James Barrett, "Making New Immigrants 'Inbetween': Irish Hosts and White Panethnicity, 1890-1930." In *Not Just Black and White*, edited by Nancy Foner and George M. Frederickson, 167 - 96. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.
- Staiger, Janet ed. *The Studio System*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994)
- Shannon, Christopher. "Public Enemies, Local Heroes: The Irish-American Gangster Film in Classic Hollywood Cinema." *New Hibernian Review* 9 no. 4 (2005)
- Skinner, James M. *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993)
- . Review of *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies*, by Gregory D. Black. *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (1996): 252 - 53.
- Time Magazine*. 1944. Celluloid Revival. April 24.
- Time Magazine*. 1946. Protesting Protestant. January 21.
- Time Magazine*. 1947. Prayer for May Day. May 12.
- Variety*. 1943. Film Reviews: The Song of Bernadette. December 22.
- Variety*. 1943. Religious Films Prove Big B.O. December 29.
- Variety*. 1944. Crosby Tops Box Office. December 29.
- Vasey, Ruth. *The World According to Hollywood: 1918-1939* (Madison, WI : University of Wisconsin Press, 1997)

Vaughn, Stephen. "Financiers, Movie Producers, and the Church: Economic Origins of the Production Code." *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law* 4 (1988)

Walsh, Frank. *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996)

Weiler, A.H. "By Way of Report: Errant Stars Censors, Bergman to Italy?" *New York Times*, December 5, 1948.