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secularisation' (1958-1978)**

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CATHOLICISM IN ITALIAN CINEMA IN THE AGE OF
'THE NEW SECULARISATION' (1958-1978)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the portrayal of Italian Catholicism in five feature films: *E venne un uomo* (*A Man Named John*, dir. Ermanno Olmi, 1965), *Galileo* (1968, dir. Liliana Cavani), *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini), *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972, dir. Marco Bellocchio) and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972, dir. Franco Zeffirelli). Challenging the notion of Italian Catholicism as a monolithic and unified system of thought, this investigation brings out its fragmented quality, thereby validating Antonio Gramsci's claim of the coexistence of a plurality of religious tendencies in the country. The study focuses on a twenty-year period between 1958 and 1978, as it is during this period—referred to as “the new secularisation”—that the fragmentation underlying Italian Catholicism emerged with clarity.

Within this context, the five chosen films offer ideal case studies to assess the plurality of attitudes towards Catholicism in that period: not only do they employ a large repertoire of narratives, persons, symbols, iconography, quotes, rituals and places of Catholic tradition, but they also reimagine this repertoire in either orthodox or provocative ways, effectively upholding or critiquing Catholicism as a belief system, Catholicism as practiced by the faithful and the Catholic Church as an institution. Analysis of the films is organised across the four areas suggested by Melanie J. Wright, namely narrative, style, cultural and religious context, and reception, with a focus on reception amongst Catholics. Analysis of these elements uncovers the five directors' personal and unique approaches to religion, ultimately attesting not only to the immense cultural and social legacy of Catholicism in the country, but also to the existence of a multiplicity of religious sensitivities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Chapter 1: Literature Review	22
1.0 Trajectories and Trends	23
1.1 The Narrative-Oriented Approach	25
1.1.1 Jesus and Christ-figures	27
1.1.2 Intertextuality	28
1.1.3 Iconography	30
1.2 The Style-Oriented Approach	32
1.3 The Ethics-Oriented Approach	35
1.3.1 Official Catholic Policies	38
1.4 The Audience-Oriented Approach	39
1.5 Issues about the Field of Religion and Film	41
1.6 An Alternative: the Works of Miles, Wright and Treveri Gennari	46
Chapter 2: Vatican Documents on Film from its Origins to the 1970s	52
Chapter 3: Olmi's <i>E venne un uomo (A Man Named John, 1965)</i>	69
3.1 Cultural and Religious Context	70
3.2 Narrative	77
3.3 Style	91
3.4 Reception	98
Chapter 4: Cavani's <i>Galileo (1968)</i>	107
4.1 Cultural and Religious Context	108
4.2 Narrative	115
4.3 Style	130
4.4 Reception	135
Chapter 5: Pasolini's <i>Teorema (Theorem, 1968)</i>	146
5.1 Cultural and Religious Context	147
5.2 Narrative	153
5.3 Style	172
5.4 Reception	175
Chapter 6: Bellocchio's <i>Nel nome del padre (In the Name of the Father, 1972)</i>	185
6.1 Cultural and Religious Context	186
6.2 Narrative	192
6.3 Style	212
6.4 Reception	214
Chapter 7: Zeffirelli's <i>Fratello sole, sorella luna (Brother Sun, Sister Moon, 1972)</i>	221
7.1 Cultural and Religious Context	222
7.2 Narrative	229
7.3 Style	247
7.4 Reception	250
Conclusion	258
Appendix I	267
Appendix II	268
Bibliography	269

LIST OF IMAGES

Chapter 3

3.1 An archival image of Pope Giovanni XXIII employed in the film's prologue.....	79
3.2 An archival image from the prologue, showing Pope Giovanni XXIII during his visit to the children's hospital	82
3.3 Young Angelo carrying the stolen pumpkin	85
3.4 Angelo's baptism.....	86
3.5 Uncle Zaverio leading the rosary while holding young Angelo in his arms.....	87
3.6 Roncalli kissing the sacred book during an orthodox procession in Bulgaria	88
3.7 A close-up of Rod Steiger looking into the camera in his role as the mediator.....	95

Chapter 4

4.1 A nun holding a boy in her arms while watching Bruno's public execution.....	120
4.2 Bruno's execution	121
4.3 A Dominican friar spying on Galileo.....	129
4.4 The statue of Pope Urbano VIII	131
4.5 Galileo kneeling before the judges.....	132
4.6 A low-angle shot of the cardinals during Galileo's trial	132
4.7 Galileo and Bruno talking on a circular staircase	134

Chapter 5

5.1 Lucia looking at a statue of don Nicola de Martino after dropping off the young men.....	160
5.2 Bacon's <i>Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent XIII</i>	163
5.3 The father screaming in the desert	166
5.4 A close-up of Emilia during her burial.....	169
5.5 Emilia levitating	170
5.6 Angiolino delivering the telegram.....	171
5.7 The Visitor surrounded by a halo.....	173

Chapter 6

6.1 Angelo portrayed between the school emblem of the eagle and a crucifix.....	196
6.2 Muscolo suspended from the rings in the school gym in front of a painting of the crucifixion	198
6.3 The servants listening to the school director's speech on Christmas Day	200
6.4 Faustolo and God in the final scene of the school play.....	203
6.5 Angelo, dressed in his dog costume, kidnapping Fra' Matematicus's corpse	205
6.6 The Virgin comforting Marsilio.....	209
6.7 Lisetta talking to the Virgin Mary, surrounded by her parents and other faithful	211

Chapter 7

7.1 Francesco sleeping in his bed during his sickness	231
7.2 Francesco on the roof of his house after his long sickness	233
7.3 Pope Innocenzo III kissing Francesco's feet.....	234
7.4 Francesco after his renunciation.....	237
7.5 Francesco during his renunciation.....	239
7.6 Francesco and Chiara sitting in a field	245
7.7 Francesco contemplating nature in the film's last frame	246

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby confirm that this thesis is the product of my own work. All sources used are referenced.

Signed:

Date:

Introduction

This research seeks to address how the fragmented quality of Italian Catholicism¹ is reflected—through the use of Catholic themes and symbolism—in five feature films. These films are *E venne un uomo* (*A Man Named John*, dir. Ermanno Olmi, 1965), *Galileo* (1968, dir. Liliana Cavani), *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini), *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972, dir. Marco Bellocchio) and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972, dir. Franco Zeffirelli).² Indeed, far from being the monolithic system of thought it is often perceived to be from the outside, Italian Catholicism is actually characterised by a rather splintered and variegated nature. While this has long been a mark of religion in Italy, as acknowledged by Marxist Antonio Gramsci,³ it became especially evident in the post-war era and, in particular, during what Pollard defines as the age of “the new secularisation.”⁴

The analysis of each film allows us to uncover five specific and unique attitudes to Italian Catholicism.⁵ By drawing on the incredibly vast repertoire of the narratives, persons, symbols, iconography, quotes, rituals and places of Catholic tradition and reimagining this in either an orthodox or a provocative way, these films effectively uphold or critique Catholic ideology and its ramifications in post-war Italian society. In this sense, the traditional repertoire becomes a powerful ideological tool that can be bent to different ends.

¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the terms “Catholicism,” “Catholic” and “Catholic Church” instead of the more complete “Roman Catholicism,” “Roman Catholic” and “Roman Catholic Church.” I feel justified in doing so because while I am aware that not all Catholics are Roman Catholic and that there are indeed seven non-Latin, non-Roman ecclesial traditions, this distinction is hardly relevant in the case of Italy, an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country. For the same reason, when I speak of religion in Italy, I mean Catholicism, unless otherwise specified. For more information on religious pluralism—or lack thereof—in Italy, see Franco Garelli, *Catholicism in Italy in the Age of Pluralism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 97-113. For more information on the seven non-Latin, non-Roman ecclesial traditions, see Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 6.

² For purposes of clarity and coherence, throughout the thesis, I only consider the Italian versions of the films; further, as their release year, I refer to the year in which the films made their first appearance in Italy, whether at a film festival or in cinemas across the country. In fact, since a large part of this research is concerned with the films’ receptions in Italy, and particularly within the Catholic world, I feel that focus should be placed first and foremost on the Italian context.

³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 420.

⁴ John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008), 130.

⁵ As suggested by Porter in his analysis of Polish Catholicism, three interwoven aspects must be considered when dealing with Catholicism: Catholicism as a belief system, Catholicism as practiced by the faithful and the Catholic Church as an institution. Far from being indivisible units, these three positions must be understood together, as they are all expressions of the same religious, social and cultural tradition, which is rooted in centuries of Italian history. When referring to Catholicism in this thesis, if not otherwise specified, I mean these three aspects. For more information, see Brian Porter, “Catholicism, Ethno-Catholics, and the Catholic Church in Modern Poland,” (NCEEER Working Paper 2004), accessed 1 August 2016, http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2004_818-12_Porter.pdf.

In particular, while Olmi and Zeffirelli use these elements to create a compliant portrayal of Catholicism, Cavani, Pasolini and Bellocchio do so to critique both the Catholic Church and Italian society. Further, an examination of the films' reception also helps unveil other, often contradictory, approaches to religion in Italy.

Overall, the directors' different approaches to Catholicism attest not only to the key importance of its cultural legacy but also to the complexity of religious sensitivities existing in the country. As Italy constitutes a particular case from a religious point of view, with far-reaching consequences on the social and cultural life of the country, I believe it appropriate to first provide a short digression on Italian Catholicism.

The Specificity of the Italian Case

The relationship between film and religion in Italy is unique insofar as the country has always been—and in spite of the various claims of secularisation still is—an inherently Catholic nation.⁶ Both Catholicism as a belief system and the Catholic Church as an institution have exercised such an uncontested and prolonged influence on Italy and its people that being able to separate the notion of national identity from religious identity appears not only an arduous intellectual operation but also a futile one. In the words of Garelli: “The Catholic identity has always been a national characteristic, in a country whose history and culture are too steeped in a faith of tradition to let it sleep to the margins of society and consciousness.”⁷ This very same concept has recently been emphasised by Pope Benedetto XVI.⁸ In his message to President Giorgio Napolitano on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the unification of Italy, the pontiff stated that,

⁶ Many studies have explored the question of secularisation in Italy, generally reaching the consensus that while Italy is not an exception to the rule of secularisation, it is undeniable that the Catholic religion is still very much a part of the private and public lives of the Italian population. For more information, see Garelli, *Catholicism in Italy in the Age of Pluralism*; Marco Impagliazzo, *La nazione cattolica: Chiesa e società in Italia dal 1958 a oggi [The Catholic Nation: Church and Society in Italy from 1958 up to Now]* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2004); Guido Formigoni, *L'Italia dei cattolici: dal Risorgimento a Oggi [Catholics' Italy: From Risorgimento up to Now]* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2010); Roberto Cartocci, *Geografia dell'Italia cattolica [Geography of Catholic Italy]* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2011). Throughout the thesis, my use of the term “secularisation” is aligned to Pollard's understanding of this phenomenon as “the historical process whereby society and culture is liberated from the control of religion.” See Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 2.

⁷ Garelli, *Catholicism in Italy in the Age of Pluralism*, 1.

⁸ Throughout the thesis, I use the Italian names of Italian Popes and saints.

“Christianity contributed in a fundamental way to the construction of the Italian identity through the work of the Church, of her educational and charitable institutions, establishing models for behaviour, institutional structures and social relations, but also through an extremely rich artistic activity: literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, music.”⁹

As a result of both geographical and historical circumstances, the Catholic Church has found itself in the position of deploying power of unprecedented proportions, with far-reaching consequences on social, cultural and political outcomes. In fact, Italy has only been a nation, in the modern sense of the term, for a little more than one hundred and fifty years.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it has hosted Popes for more than two thousand years, with the exception of the years of the “Avignon Papacy.”¹¹ In a country long under different foreign dominations, the presence of the Vatican has been one of the few institutional constants, and Catholicism has been one of the few forms, if not the only one, promoting a sense of unity among Italians.¹²

While the early relationship between Italy and the Vatican state was characterised by alternating phases of dialogue and conflict, during its young life, the Italian state has done little to separate its agenda from that of the Vatican and to establish itself as a truly secular institution,¹³ ultimately granting the Catholic Church enormous political leverage. Agreements such as the Lateran Pacts of the Fascist Era¹⁴ and the almost fifty years of

⁹ Benedetto XVI, *Message to the President of the Italian Republic on the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy*, Vatican Website, 17 March 2011, accessed 17 May 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20110317_150-unita_en.html.

¹⁰ A rift between the two institutions marked the very birth of Italy as a modern nation. After the unification in 1861, Rome was declared the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. However, at the time, the designation was purely formal: Rome was in fact protected by French troops, and it was not until it was militarily occupied in 1870 that it effectively became the capital. As a result of the occupation, the Holy See was forced to relinquish its territories, which were incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy. Pope Pio IX (1846–1878) proclaimed himself a “prisoner” in the Vatican and excommunicated King Vittorio Emmanuele II. The Vatican’s reaction to its loss of temporal power was to openly condemn the modern age and reassert the papal primacy in matters of spiritual guidance.

¹¹ During the “Avignon Papacy” from 1309 to 1378, the Popes resided in Avignon, France instead of Rome. For more information, see John O’Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 139–147.

¹² With regard to this, Allievi observes: “In spite of long-standing divisions at various levels [...] all of which are evident in the divide between north and south and in other divisions, Italy considers itself (and is considered) to be substantially united through the fact that its citizens share the same religion.” For more information, see Stefano Allievi, “Silent Revolution in the Country of the Pope. From Catholicism as ‘The Religion of the Italians’ to the Pluralistic ‘Italy of Religions,’” in *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, ed. Fabrizio De Donno (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 288.

¹³ It should be pointed out that Article 7 of the Italian Constitution states that “The State and the Catholic Church are, each in its own order, independent and sovereign.” For more information, see Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 114. On the difference between secularism, laicism and the Italian *laicità*, see Alessandro Ferrari and Silvio Ferrari, “Religion and the Secular State,” *The Cardozo Electronic Law Bulletin* 16, no. 1 (2010): 432–433.

¹⁴ The Lateran Pacts were an official agreement signed by King Vittorio Emmanuele III and Pope Pio XI in 1929. The Vatican acknowledged Italian sovereignty over the former Papal States and Italy recognised papal sovereignty over Vatican City. Moreover, the Italian state committed to paying the Vatican as a form of indemnity for the loss of the

political dominance of the Christian Democracy (DC)¹⁵ are the most evident examples of the implications of the overlapping of spiritual and temporal powers in Italy. In addition, the Catholic Church has always been able to count on an impressively large number of widespread networks and organisations. These groups include free-time organisations such as *Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action)*,¹⁶ professional bodies and Catholic-oriented unions such as CISL (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacato Lavoratori*) and ACLI (*Associazione Cattolica Lavoratori Italiani*) and Catholic publications, which effectively propagate Catholic ideology at the grassroots level and perpetuate the key role of the Church in matters of culture, education and even entertainment.¹⁷

However, if from the outside Italian Catholicism appears to be a monolithic and homogeneous system of thought, equally grounded in almost unassailable doctrinal teachings and in the myriads of daily activities and practices, closer examination suggests that there is no singular Catholicism but rather a plurality of different Catholic tendencies. Gramsci understood this characteristic quite early, famously pointing out the often irreconcilable differences that characterise approaches to religion in Italy. His quote from *The Prison Notebooks* is enlightening in this respect:

Every religion, even Catholicism (indeed Catholicism more than any, precisely because of its efforts to retain a “surface” unity and avoid splintering into national churches and social stratifications), is in reality a multiplicity of distinct and often contradictory religions: there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the petites-bourgeois and town workers, one for women, and one for intellectuals which is itself variegated and disconnected.¹⁸

(cont'd)

papal state and the properties it had confiscated. A Concordat was also signed that gave the Vatican many privileges including the extension of religious instruction to secondary schools, the legal value of church marriages, exemption for seminarists from military service and the institution of state stipends for priests and bishops. For more information, see Mark Donovan, “The Italian State: No Longer Catholic, No Longer Christian,” *West European Politics* 26, no. 1 (2003): 95–116.

¹⁵ From 1946 to 1992, the DC was the plurality party in all general elections. For more information, see Gianfranco Baldini, “Christian Democracy. The Italian Party,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, eds. Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), kindle edition, 263-264.

¹⁶ *Azione Cattolica Italiana (Italian Catholic Action)* is the oldest and most popular lay Catholic organisation in Italy. For more information, see Ernesto Preziosi, ed., *Storia dell’Azione Cattolica: la presenza della Chiesa nella Società Italiana [History of the Catholic Action. The Presence of the Church in Italian Society]* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008).

¹⁷ Percy Allum, “Catholicism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104.

¹⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 420.

Despite this national characteristic, such fragmentation—or rather, this plurality—of religious tendencies was heightened by the social, political and cultural changes that took place in the post-war era, especially after the election of Pope Giovanni XXIII in 1958 and his summoning of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Indeed, as a consequence of Italy transitioning to a more liberal and economically advanced country and openly challenging traditional, millennia-old values,¹⁹ the Catholic Church too attempted a degree of internal innovation and an opening up to the issues of the contemporary world. This process, which began under the papacy of Giovanni XXIII, peaked with the Second Vatican Council, the first ecumenical council in more than a hundred years²⁰ and certainly the first global one.²¹ The Church came out of the council deeply changed; until that point the influence of ecclesiastical directives, attendance of rites and general compliance to Catholic tradition had been deeply rooted in the collective consciousness, almost bordering on superstition and reverential fear. However, increased emphasis was now placed on individual consciousness, religious and political tolerance and the greater participation of the laity,²² ultimately leading to instances that questioned and challenged the spiritual and political authority of the Church.

Moreover, patterns of powers and relations were also shifting within the Catholic Church,²³ further encouraging religious and spiritual fragmentation and pluralisation and often leading to irreconcilable divisions among the Catholic hierarchies. In the words of Pollard: “By the end of the 1960s, such had been the weakening of internal discipline that a number of groups of both clergy and laity were in dispute with their bishops.”²⁴ In particular, a growing number of groups were in open dissent with the Catholic hierarchies. These “Cattolici del dissenso” (“dissident Catholics”) were organised in “Comunità di base” (“grassroots communities”), which stressed their reliance on the Gospel message and its commitment to the poor and underprivileged.²⁵ Their position, however, clashed with the more traditional faction of the Church, still entrenched in extremely defensive

¹⁹ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 212–245.

²⁰ The First Vatican Council was held in Rome from 1869 to 1870. For more information, see Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Council: Conciliar Movements, Religious Practice, and the Papacy from Nicaea to Vatican II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 192–193.

²¹ Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 3.

²² Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 140.

²³ Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48.

²⁴ Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 140.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

postures regarding the pressing issues of the times such as clerical celibacy, birth control and the emancipation of women.²⁶ This division would never quite be reconciled, and the effects and implications would be far reaching.²⁷

Overall, while it is undeniable that this period witnessed a decrease in religious participation and practice as well as a questioning of the teachings and traditional models of the behaviours enforced by the Catholic Church,²⁸ the main effect of the process of secularisation in Italy was not the loss of the relevance of Catholicism, but rather the loss of its monolithic character and the revealing of its fragmented underlying quality.²⁹ This religious, political and social framework encouraged cultural and ideological pluralism³⁰ and opened up avenues of dialogue with self-professed atheist directors as well as communist affiliates, effectively heralding a new era in which different and particular religious sensitivities could find their way onto the screen. Italian directors were finally able to address previously avoided topics and raise issues regarding the religious question, whether theological and doctrinal concerns or open critiques of the Catholic Church and its pervasiveness in Italian society.³¹

The Anarchic Field of Religion and Film

Immense confusion, even anarchy, still characterises the relatively new discipline of religion and film. Traditionally, academics have focused on two main areas. On the one hand, previous studies have investigated the history of the complex and ever-evolving relationship between the Catholic Church and film industry. In particular, a large proportion of authors have discussed the Church's attempts to harness film production through censorship and by creating organisations to control the morality of films.³²

²⁶ Linda Woodhead, "Christianity," in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, eds. Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami, and David Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 185.

²⁷ Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 130.

²⁸ Ginsborg, *A History of Italy*, 245.

²⁹ Percy Allum, "Uniformity Undone: Aspects of Catholic Culture in Postwar Italy," in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Robert Lumley (New York: St. Martin, 1990), 94.

³⁰ Dillon, *Catholic Identity*, 49.

³¹ Sitney argues that parodies of religious icons can already be found in the works of Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica. Nevertheless, I believe that Pasolini was the first director to employ such a practice systematically and throughout his career. For more information, see Paul Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 12–13.

³² This trend is particularly common in North-American studies, which focus on the work of the "Legion of Decency" and the creation of "The Movie Picture Production Code" (commonly known as the "Hays Code.") On this topic, see

On the other hand, academics have considered how to bring religion and film into dialogue through four broad categories of approaches: story-oriented, style-oriented, ethics-oriented and audience-oriented.³³ However, there is still very little consensus on the best way in which to approach this challenge, if not open scepticism that such an endeavour is even possible.

Much of this uncertainty is due to the very personal and subjective interpretation of what constitutes “religion” in a film. Is it the presence of certain religious elements (narratives, symbols, iconographies, quotes and so on)? Or is it the religious feelings that the film supposedly awakens in the viewer through the use of a particular style or theme? Or perhaps the similarities linking the two experiences of churchgoing and film watching? Further, should a film of this genre coincide with a specific religious tradition and therefore be limited historically and geographically, or is it rather, in the words used by Schrader to describe the transcendental style, “a universal form of representation”?³⁴ Each of these interpretations has its supporters and detractors in the academic world depending on whether scholars interpret religion in film from a *substantial* point of view (i.e., the story narrated), from a *formal* point of view (i.e., the film style) or from a *functional* point of view (i.e., the moral impact of the film on the audience as well as the degree of similarity between going to church and watching a film).³⁵

Moreover, what emerges from an analysis of the existing scholarship in the field of religion and film is a bias, especially in English and North American literature—which constitutes the majority of the field—towards the selection of North American films.³⁶ Oddly enough, Italy is rarely central to these analyses despite the country’s high rate of religious adherence to Catholicism and prolific film industry.³⁷ Similarly, general

(cont’d)

Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

³³ For a discussion on the different approaches identified by scholars in the field of religion and film, see Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 11-31; Steve Nolan, *Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Religious Film Analysis* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 3-4; Clive Marsh, “Theology and Film,” in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. William L. Blizek (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2009), 62-68.

³⁴ Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 9.

³⁵ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 5.

³⁶ For example, of the fifty films analysed in *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films*, thirty-seven are North American. For more information, see Adele Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films* (London: Routledge, 2013).

³⁷ The most studied Italian film that deals with religion is Pasolini’s *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964). Pasolini’s film, however, is rarely analysed, and it is often used rather as an example to prove that

compendiums and overviews of Italian cinema also fail to address this question. For example, *The Italian Cinema Book*, edited by Peter Bondanella, includes thirty-nine sections such as “Seeing Anew: Children in Italian Cinema, 1944 to the Present,” “Forgotten Sisters: Italian Cinema from the Perspective of Female Friendship” and “Italian Cinema and Holocaust Memory;”³⁸ yet, it does not feature a single essay about the representation of Catholicism in Italian cinema.

However, Italian studies themselves have also often failed to grant the question of the cinematic representation of Catholic themes and symbolism adequate attention. Given the *auteurial* approach that dominates Italian film criticism—and with the exception of Pasolini, to whom larger, more in-depth works have been dedicated³⁹—when one director’s relationship with Catholicism is actually studied, it is usually relegated to brief, biographical accounts, journal articles or chapters in edited volumes.⁴⁰ Indeed, in-depth, systematic approaches to the question of Catholicism and Italian cinema are scarce, both in English and in Italian.

Methodology and Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

This research seeks to offer an alternative to these dominant trends by suggesting that any examination of the question of religion and film must first be *particular*, namely it must be inscribed into a precise religious tradition as well as fit within a specific timeframe. Scholars such as Miles, Deacy, Wright and Treveri Gennari have recently acknowledged the importance of the historical and social contexts in which films that deal with religion are conceived, produced and received. In particular, Wright’s methodological proposal of considering each film around the four main areas of film narrative, style, the cultural and

(cont’d)

a communist can produce a spiritually authentic film. See, for example, Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, 10; John R. May, “Visual Story and the Religious Interpretation of Film,” in *Religion in Film*, eds. John R. May and Michael Bird (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 23–43; Roy M. Anker, “Narrative,” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2011), 331–349.

³⁸ For more information, see Peter Bondanella, ed. *The Italian Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2014).

³⁹ See, among others, Gabriella Pozzetto, *Lo cerco dappertutto: Cristo nei film di Pasolini [I Look for Him Everywhere. Christ in Pasolini’s Films]* (Milan: Ancora, 2007); Tomaso Subini, *La necessit  di morire: Il cinema di Pier Paolo Pasolini e il Sacro [The Necessity of Dying. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Cinema and the Sacred]* (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2007); Erminia Passannanti, *Il Cristo dell’eresia: rappresentazione del Sacro e censura nei film di Pier Paolo Pasolini [The Christ of Heresy: Representation of the Sacred and Censorship in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Films]* (Novi Ligure: Joker, 2009).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Mino Argentero, “Il cattolicesimo di Liliana Cavani” [“Liliana Cavani’s Catholicism”], in *Lo sguardo libero: il cinema di Liliana Cavani [The Free Gaze. Liliana Cavani’s Cinema]*, eds. Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1990), 130–134; Virgilio Fantuzzi, “Marco Bellocchio: tra sacralit  e dissacrazione” [“Marco Bellocchio. Between Sacrality and Desecration”], in *Marco Bellocchio: il cinema e i film [Marco Bellocchio. His Cinema and His Films]*, ed. Adriano Apr  (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), 70–91; Clodagh J. Brook, “The Spectacle of the Unseen: Marco Bellocchio and Lure of the Catholic Church,” *Italian Studies* 68, no. 3 (2013): 399–410.

religious contexts and reception seems to be suited to preserving the specificity of cinema as a medium—without turning film into a vehicle for the spread of religious ideas—as well as refuting any universalising claims that what constitutes religion in film can be identified uniformly.⁴¹

In agreement with these authors, I oppose the idea that religion in film can be identified by a universal formula, valid for any country and time. Similarly, I also reject the notions that it coincides with a supposedly “mystical” experience or with an encounter with the “sacred,” that such an encounter is linked to the presence of a particular style, that it awakens religious feelings in the viewer and that the audience is therefore able to assimilate the experience of film watching and churchgoing. In fact, these elements rest on parameters characterised by a high degree of subjectivity and variability and, as such, hardly constitute an appropriate scale with which to measure the presence of religion in film. Further, this research does not seek to submit religion to cinema, or cinema to religion, but rather grant both equal consideration and attention. I do not intend to limit its scope to what Catholicism can tell us about film—through its official policies and appeals to conformity and orthodoxy—but rather broaden it to what specific films can tell us about Catholicism, considered in a specific timeframe and in a number of case studies. In what then becomes a double movement, one discipline reveals something about the other, allowing an analysis of the films selected “in their own right,” while at the same time accounting for the particular nature of the religious question in Italy.

Finally, I seek to bring the fragmentation of Catholicism to the forefront. A number of studies have recently explored the plurality of approaches within a specific context, such as the book *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema*,⁴² as the undeniable relevance of religion in the contemporary world makes it increasingly hard to ignore. Yet, no study has been dedicated to the plurality of approaches in Italy, nor, more specifically, to such a crucial juncture as the twenty years between 1958 and 1978, an incredibly challenging period during which Catholicism changed shape and form, clearly revealing its splintered nature.

⁴¹ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 78.

⁴² See Costică Brădăţan and Camil Ungureanu, eds. *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

This investigation is limited both chronologically and geographically, focusing on the presence of the elements of a specific religious tradition over a particular period. In this sense, the twenty years between the election of Pope Giovanni XXIII in 1958 and the death of Pope Paolo VI in 1978, a period that Pollard terms the age of “the new secularisation,” constitutes the perfect timeframe for the analysis of religious fragmentation in Italy. Indeed, this juncture coincides not only with a drastic change in the nature of Italian Catholicism—namely the loss of its monolithic character—but also with the enormous economic, political, social and cultural transformations that turned Italy into “a modern, urban and industrialised state akin to other Western countries.”⁴³

Within this context, I focus on five case studies in which the portrayal of Catholic themes and symbolism occupy a central role. The analysis of these five films does not exhaustively address the question of the representation of Catholicism in film, but rather aims to offer significant examples of approaches to religion in Italy. While not all of these works are necessarily Catholic *per se*, they can be seen as a way of explaining their directors’ unique attitudes towards religion. In particular, the importance of the cultural and social legacy of Catholicism to Italian cinema is undeniable regardless of the directors’ active involvement in the practice itself. The fact that not only Catholic filmmakers such as Olmi and Zeffirelli but also self-professed atheist and agnostic directors such as Pasolini, Bellocchio and Cavani⁴⁴ repeatedly approach religious topics in their works is certainly testament to the key role played by Catholicism in Italian society, particularly so between 1958 and 1978.

As far as Catholic themes and symbolism go, *E venne un uomo*, *Galileo*, *Teorema*, *Nel nome del padre* and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* offer a reinterpretation of episodes of the Scriptures such as passions, last suppers and nativities as well as religious figures (Christ-like figures, saints and the clergy). In addition, they present Catholic rituals (masses and burials), sacraments and devotional practices as well as other religious elements such as the supernatural (angels and miracles). Moreover, they convey Catholic elements through direct quotes from the Scriptures and from elements of the “Catholic Social Doctrine”

⁴³ Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, 130.

⁴⁴ Pasolini and Bellocchio both defined themselves as “atheists”, while Cavani preferred the term “agnostica” (“agnostic”) or “laica” (“lay”). For more information, see Laura Bergagna, “Intervista sincera con Pasolini sul mondo, l’arte, il marxismo” [“Sincere Interview with Pasolini on World, Art and Marxism”], *La Stampa*, 12 July 1968, 3; Emilia Costantini, “Cavani torna a raccontare Francesco” [“Cavani Portrays Francesco Once Again”], *Corriere della Sera*, 4 July 2014, 50; Claudia Morgoglione, “Solo la passione può salvarci. L’ultima provocazione di Bellocchio” [“Only Passion Can Save Us. Bellocchio’s Last Provocation,”] *La Repubblica*, 18 April 2006, accessed 04 September 2016, http://www.repubblica.it/2006/04/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/regista-di-matrimoni/regista-di-matrimoni/regista-di-matrimoni.html?ref=search.

such as the principles of solidarity and human dignity. They also comprise constant references to symbols (the cross, the halo, the sacred book, to name a few) as well as elements of the Catholic iconographical repertoire.⁴⁵ Finally, they feature physical Catholic places such as churches and Catholic schools as well as key symbolic places in the Catholic tradition such as the desert and the garden.

This repertoire is employed in the five films in very different ways and to opposite ideological ends. Indeed, while Olmi and Zeffirelli employ these elements to uphold Catholic ideology and the authority of the Church, Cavani, Pasolini and Bellocchio do so in order to highlight the constant overlapping of religious and secular power in Italy, to challenge the repressive and censorial attitude often displayed by the Church and to emphasise the hypocrisy of a formal and uncritical adherence to Catholicism. The particular way in which each film accomplishes that is discussed in detail in the individual chapters, serving to illustrate the multifaceted quality of Italian Catholicism. What emerges from the analysis are both the always-surprising similarities as well as the anticipated differences that characterise the five directorial gazes. Olmi's zealous compliance with Catholic guidelines and socially aware beliefs, Cavani's extremely critical yet respectful attitude towards religious power, Pasolini's relentless quest for the sacred in a dimension dominated by bourgeois values, Bellocchio's contempt for the narrow-mindedness and bigotry fostered by religion and Zeffirelli's penchant for the more superficial and celebratory aspects of Catholicism all verify the multifaceted character of Italian Catholicism.

⁴⁵ I use the term "Catholic iconography" rather than the more widely employed "Christian iconography" as I believe it is more correct for a number of reasons. Many of the beliefs and practices differ between Catholicism and other forms of Christianity such as Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy. For instance, areas of disagreement include justification by faith, the existence of purgatory, the infallibility of the Pope and the doctrines concerning the Virgin Mary, to name but a few. Further, Catholicism emphasises Marian devotion and the veneration of saints in contrast to Protestantism. Such differences are markedly reflected in the arts and painterly tradition. While many of the images discussed in this thesis belong to the Catholic tradition as well as the Christian tradition, this is not the case for every image; as a result, it appears more appropriate to refer to the iconographic repertoire as "Catholic" rather than "Christian." It should be pointed out, however, that not all critics and commentators make a distinction between the two terms and that, particularly in Italian, the term "Christian" is employed rather loosely. This is, at least partially, because it has traditionally been used as a synonym for "man," or "civilised man," as Gramsci points out in *Prison Notebooks*. For more information, see Antonio Gramsci, *Note sul Machiavelli: sulla politica e sullo stato moderno* [*Notes on Machiavelli. On Politics and the Modern State*], ed. Valentino Gerratana (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977), 323. On the topic of the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism in their approach to the arts, see Patrick J. Sherry, "Art and Literature," in *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, eds. James J. Buckley, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, and Trent Pomplun (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 463–476.

Other films released in the same period could lend themselves to an analysis of Catholic themes and symbolism, such as Fellini's *Roma* (1972),⁴⁶ Marco Ferreri's *L'udienza* (*Papal Audience*, 1972), Giuliano Montaldo's *Giordano Bruno* (1973) and Elio Petri's *Todo Modo* (1976), to name a few. They share, after all, many of the characteristics of the films selected. Produced and released in Italy within the age of "the new secularisation," they present a repertoire of Catholic themes and symbolism employed to ideological ends. However, while a number of Italian directors have addressed the religious question in their films, for the purpose of this thesis I selected those who did so systematically throughout their careers. Indeed, not only did Pasolini imbue the majority of his works preceding *Teorema* with Catholic themes and symbolism, but it was only his untimely death in 1975 that prevented him from shooting his project *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, "a journey toward a new Bethelhem" and "a summation of Pasolini's apocalypticism."⁴⁷ Cavani's *Galileo* was preceded by *Francesco d'Assisi* (*Francis of Assisi*) in 1966 and followed by another two works, both titled *Francesco*, in 1989 and in 2014. Similarly, after following *Fratello sole, sorella luna* with works such as *Gesù di Nazareth* (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 1977) and *Storia di una capinera* (*Sparrow*, 1994), Zeffirelli has also recently stated his desire to make another film about the Umbrian saint.⁴⁸ Olmi's career is certainly constituted of examples of films that focus strongly on Catholicism—from his masterpiece *L'albero degli zoccoli* (*The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, 1978) to *CamminaCammina* (*Keep Walking*, 1983) to the more recent *Centochiodi* (*One Hundred Nails*, 2007) and *Il villaggio di cartone* (*The Cardboard Village*, 2011). Finally, Bellocchio has since the 2000s returned to the topic of Catholicism with renewed vigour as demonstrated by *L'ora di religione* (*My Mother's Smile*, 2002), *Bella addormentata* (*Sleeping Beauty*, 2012) and *Sangue del mio sangue* (*Blood of My Blood*, 2015).

⁴⁶ Fellini's use of Catholic elements and his exclusion from this thesis is discussed in more depth in the conclusion.

⁴⁷ Armando Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 107.

⁴⁸ Orazio La Rocca, "Zeffirelli rivela: 'Farò il sequel del film su san Francesco'" ["Zeffirelli Reveals: 'I Will Make a Sequel of the Film about Saint Francis'"], *La Repubblica*, 19 December 2007, accessed 04 September 2016, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/12/19/zeffirelli-rivela-faro-il-sequel-del-film.html?ref=search>.

An Auteurist Approach?

The issue of authorship has proven to be an incredibly problematic and slippery concept, both in literature and in cinema. Challenged during the 1960s by the works, among others, of Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault,⁴⁹ who famously pointed out the limitations of interpreting a text based on concepts such as authorial intention and who argued for the centrality of the reader in the meaning-making process, the notion of *auteur* has since been the object of countless disputes.⁵⁰ In spite of this, monographs on directors continue to be published, retrospectives are organised, media centres arrange their material according to director and the director's name is still the main way of attracting investment and funding as well as marketing the film after its release.

While it is not my intention to argue for the primacy of *auteur* theory, I believe that an emphasis on directors' biographies and filmographies should be a part of this thesis for a number of reasons. First, there has always been, and still is, a marked tendency in Italy to judge and value a film according to its director. Wood offers an analysis of this practice, observing how the Italian *auteur* is understood as a "quality package" whose identification relies on a number of factors such as the ability to attract funding and investment, critical attention and a sophisticated and cinematically literate audience with their serious themes, personal vision and *mise-en-scène*.⁵¹ While Wood observes how this is still valid today, it was certainly even more so during the 1960s and 1970s when Italian cinema enjoyed unrivalled prestige and recognition both at home and abroad and films such as Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1961) made it possible "for other films to court critical and market attention up to the mid-1970s."⁵² The

⁴⁹ Umberto Eco's *L'Opera Aperta* was published in 1962, followed by Roland Barthes's seminal essay "The Death of the Author" in 1967 and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" in 1969. Eco has since rethought a large number of his claims. See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work [The Open Work]* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, eds. Michel Foucault, Donald F. Bouchard, and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–138; Umberto Eco and Stefano Collini, eds. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁵⁰ Among those who rejected these claims are Camille Paglia and, more recently, Sean Burke. In her book *Sexual Personae*, Paglia addresses Barthes's claims, stating that "Most pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything more affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe. Behind every book is a certain person with a certain history. I can never know too much about that person and that history." For more information, see Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Penguin, 1992), 34; Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2011).

⁵¹ Mary P. Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 110.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 111.

directors discussed in this research —with, arguably, the exception of Zeffirelli⁵³— all operate within this framework and can, as such, be considered to be *auteurs* in the sense of how the term is discussed by Wood.

Further, as one of the purposes of this research is to show the relevance of Catholicism in Italy, regardless of the directors' involvement in the practice itself, references to the directors' biographies and filmographies are essential. In fact, while I do not intend to suggest a prominence of biographical elements over others, disregarding the directors' religious upbringings and their declared positions in relation to Catholicism would not be conducive to an exhaustive analysis. It follows that I consider their comments, either in interviews or in their writings, to be highly relevant to the purpose of this research.

Another key element to this argument is that of accountability, both in the legal and in the religious arenas. As Foucault acknowledges, among the four features traditionally associated with the function of an author is that of ownership as a result of the introduction of a penal code regulating a text's appropriation. Foucault emphasises the historical character of this feature: "Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive."⁵⁴ However, while the Italian law written during Fascism suggests that the owner of the film is the producer,⁵⁵ in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy, the film often appears to be solely the director's product and, as such, his or her responsibility. Indeed, the history of the Catholic Church is full of examples of actions undertaken against single individuals. For instance, the Church has reacted brutally, mercilessly and most of all *personally* to the challenges posed by figures such as Dante, Joan of Arc, Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei, condemning Dante, Joan and Bruno to the stake⁵⁶ and forcing Galileo to retract his thesis. Perhaps precisely because their unorthodox claims could be considered to be mouthpieces of an underlying and widespread mentality, the Catholic hierarchies have

⁵³ For a number of reasons, which are discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis, Zeffirelli resists the label of *auteur* in the traditional sense.

⁵⁴ Foucault, "What Is an Author," 124.

⁵⁵ Article 45 of Legge, n. 633 of 22 April 1941, established that "The exercise of the rights of economic use of the cinematographic work belongs to whom has organised the production of said work, within the limits indicated by the following articles" ("L'esercizio dei diritti di utilizzazione economica dell'opera cinematografica spetta a che ha organizzato la produzione dell'opera stessa, nei limiti indicati dai successivi articoli"). For more information, see "Nuove norme di tutela del diritto d'autore," Parlamento Italiano website, accessed 30 June 2016, <http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/002481.html>, sec. Legge 22 April 1941, n. 633.

⁵⁶ While Dante escaped and spent the rest of his life in exile, both Joan of Arc and Giordano Bruno were publicly executed. On Bruno, see Chapter Four.

thought best to swiftly eliminate the threat posed by these individuals, in what was clearly a scapegoating logic. While the Church has certainly reconsidered its violent methods over time, traces of a persecutory attitude towards single individuals can still be found in the motivations behind a film's condemnation. One only has to read the comments made by the Catholic hierarchy about the films by Pasolini, Bellocchio and Cavani to realise that the film, more often than not, becomes the pretext for an accusation of personal, ideological and religious nature.⁵⁷

Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises seven chapters. The first two chapters are of a contextual nature: while the first situates the question of Catholicism and Italian cinema within the existing body of the academic literature, the second examines official Vatican documents such as encyclicals, apostolic exhortations and instructions, and decrees with regard to cinema. The main body of this research is focused on the five films, which I present in chronological order according to their first Italian screening, as that moment constitutes a point of reference for the subsequent analysis of the films' receptions. The films are analysed around four areas: first, the cultural, social, political and religious context; second, an examination of the film's narrative (i.e., story, plot and characters); third, an analysis of the film's style (from *mise-en-scène* to editing to sound); fourth, a consideration of the film's reception, with a focus on its official Catholic reception.⁵⁸ The analysis of the films is aided by the employment of still images, which help illustrate the points made in the chapters. The reception of each film is explored with the help of the reviews of the most circulated Italian newspapers such as *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa* and *Il Messaggero*⁵⁹ as well as the official Vatican publication *L'Osservatore Romano* and the Italian Episcopal Conference daily *Avvenire*.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ In this research, such an analysis is performed in each chapter in the section dedicated to the film's reception.

⁵⁸ The analysis of the films' exhibition, albeit a fascinating topic, lies outside the scope of this research.

⁵⁹ The newspaper circulation data available for 1971 reveal that the most circulated newspaper was *Corriere della sera* (603,703 daily copies), followed by *La Stampa* (504,352) and *Il Messaggero* (325,804). For more information, see Paolo Murialdi, "Giornale e giornalismo, IV Appendice" Treccani Enciclopedia Italiana, accessed 1 July 2016, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giornale-e-giornalismo_res-7e54d2a9-87e9-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29.

⁶⁰ My decision to base the analysis of the Catholic reception of films on *L'Osservatore Romano* and *Avvenire* answers to the necessity to clearly portray the gap between the official position of the Catholic Church and the variety of religious sensitivities existing in the country.

Chapter One is divided into three sections. The first section offers an overview of the existing methodologies and trends in the field of religion and film, outlining a four-pronged approach: story-oriented, style-oriented, ethics-oriented and audience-oriented. The second focuses on a number of problematic issues that characterise our current understanding of this body of knowledge. Finally, the third section outlines my approach to examining the question of religion and film. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, such an approach relies heavily on the work of Wright, who suggests that the study of religion and film would benefit immensely from cultural studies. Her methodology of organising the analysis of individual films around the four areas of film narrative (in terms of story, plot and characters), style, cultural and religious context, and reception serves as the model for the analysis presented in this thesis.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the official Catholic documents issued by the Vatican up to the 1970s, with the aim of uncovering Catholic ideology in relation to the film industry. The chapter gives an account of the Church's ambivalent attitude towards cinema and clarifies that the role the Church attributes to cinema is mainly a didactic and informative one. In fact, the media, including cinema, are primarily seen by the Church as instruments that serve Catholic ideology, and it is this perspective that informed the relationship between cinema and the institutional Church throughout the twentieth century. In this chapter, I rely heavily on official Catholic documents from the origins (the first document being the encyclical *Vigilanti Cura*, promulgated by Pio XI in 1936) to the 1970s (the last document analysed being the pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio* from 1971).

Chapter Three focuses on Olmi's *E venne un uomo*. A hybrid product, falling in between a documentary and work of fiction, the film is a respectful yet rather dull narration of the life of the popular Pope Giovanni XXIII. The film traces his life from his birth in the peasant village of Sotto il Monte to his death without ever focusing on what is arguably his greatest achievement: the summoning of the Second Vatican Council. In an atypical casting decision for Olmi, he chose an international star, Rod Steiger, to play the Pope. Further, Steiger had to act as a "spectator" in the first part of the film, witnessing Roncalli's upbringing, only to later become a "mediator" of his actions and thoughts. Always dressed in the same clothes and wearing no makeup to make him look more like the Pope, Steiger essentially remained himself. While Olmi's genuine faith and respect guided this methodological choice, the result is rather artificial and inauthentic. Similarly, the film's extremely compliant use of Catholic themes and symbolism makes it rather stiff

and extremely close to hagiography, nullifying the atmosphere of authenticity and intimacy created in the first part of the film set in the peasant world. Indeed, the film was met by generally negative reviews, with some sections of the Catholic press even forced to acknowledge its shortcomings.⁶¹

Chapter Four examines Cavani's portrayal of Catholic themes in *Galileo*. The contrast between faith lived as a personal choice and the Catholic Church as an institution peaks in this film. Galileo, depicted as a religious and respectful man, struggles to obey and comply with the demands of an extremely reactionary Church, which refuses to take his findings into account, lest they disqualify a literary interpretation of the Bible and disprove the Ptolemaic system and Aristotelian tradition. The film follows the scientist's journey from his first relevant discoveries to admonitions by the Vatican and finally to Galileo's trial and abjuration. Interestingly, and significantly, great space is reserved for the figure of Giordano Bruno, from his hypothetical encounter with Galileo to his trial and execution. Relying heavily on monologues and dialogues, Cavani powerfully underlines the obtuse prejudices and fear of progress that characterised the Church in the seventeenth century and draws a parallel with contemporary reality in Italy, where the attempts at reformation initiated by the Second Vatican Council were dampened by the reactionary papacy of Paolo VI. Moreover, the analysis of *Galileo* allows us to uncover some interesting and important elements of the Catholic reception of the film. In fact, it was rated "VM18" (i.e., unsuitable for children) and was never shown on public television in Italy.

Chapter Five focuses on Pasolini's *Teorema*. The film narrates the arrival of a mysterious, unnamed guest in a bourgeois household. His numinous presence upsets what turns out to be the incredibly precarious balance holding the family together: faced with the sacred for the first time in their lives, one after the other, the father, mother, son and daughter, as well as the maid, succumb to the Visitor's spiritual, intellectual and sexual fascination. While the maid's proletarian status allows her to reconnect with her genuine faith of her peasant world, the members of the bourgeois family are thrown into a spiral of longing and despair as the shallowness of their lives is uncovered. The emotional and existential crisis they experience is only worsened by the young man's departure, as they unsuccessfully try to recover a sense of meaningful living and spiritual authenticity. *Teorema*'s debut was marked by one of the most controversial moments in Italian cinema:

⁶¹ See, for example, Gian Battista Cavallaro, "Il film su Papa Giovanni a Venezia" ["The Film on Pope John in Venice"], *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 1 September 1965, 5; Mario Guidotti, "Olmi: lo rifarei così" ["Olmi: I Would Do It Again"], *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 1 September 1965, 5.

the film was seized and tried for obscenity. On the one hand, the film was condemned by Pope Paolo VI and the Vatican publication *L'Osservatore Romano*; on the other hand, it was awarded the OCIC (Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma) prize at the Venice Film Festival, thus signalling an unprecedented split within the Catholic world.⁶²

Chapter Six focuses on Bellocchio's *Nel nome del padre*, certainly the most openly critical film among those selected. Not unlike *Teorema*, it relates the arrival of a charismatic young man in a close environment—this time a Catholic boarding school—as well as the consequences of his arrival on those around him. From the very beginning, the boy, Angelo, sets off to undermine the Catholic institution and the ideology behind it in a series of acts of disruption and provocation of increasing proportion. The institution does eventually collapse, but more of its own accord than due to the childish and disorganised nature of the students' rebellious acts. Set during the school year 1958/1959, it portrays an extremely narrow-minded, sex-phobic, oppressive form of pre-conciliar Catholicism; yet, its rebellious tone against any form of authority as well as its *tout court* criticism, including Angelo himself, resonates with the atmosphere of the early 1970s, especially in light of the failures of the student protest. The film, in which Bellocchio is creative in his use and subversion of traditional Catholic themes and symbolism, was met with mixed reviews; the Catholic world, however, was united in its condemnation.⁶³

Finally, Chapter Seven explores Zeffirelli's interpretation of the story of Francesco of Assisi. *Fratello sole, sorella luna* concentrates on a few episodes of the saint's youth, from his participation in the war between Perugia and Assisi, to his conversion, to the Franciscan order's foundation, concluding with its approval by the Pope. An extremely compliant and orthodox portrait, the film's lack of problematisation and critical reading of any aspect of Francesco's journey, such as his conversion and his renunciation, which are presented more like a sudden change of heart than a gradual and painful process of conscious and spiritual awakening, make for a rather saccharine product. Similarly, Zeffirelli prefers to focus on certain aspects of Francesco's personality such as his compassion and love for every living creature as opposed to his determination and rebellious attitude towards the Church of the time. The film's casting, editing and *mise-en-scène*, contributing to its highly hagiographical quality, also highlight these choices.

⁶² See Chapter Two for more details on OCIC and Chapter Five for a complete account of the reception of *Teorema*.

⁶³ The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico condemned the film through its publication *Segalazioni Cinematografiche*. Similarly, *Avvenire* also gave a negative review. On this matter, see Chapter Six of this thesis.

Once again, the reception was mixed, ranging from negative reviews to praise; however, quite surprisingly, the two major Catholic publications were aligned in its condemnation of the film.⁶⁴

As discussed above, the next chapter situates this research within the contemporary body of knowledge and accounts for the existing methodologies within field of religion and film, acknowledging both their merits and the limits. Following the methodological suggestion of the likes of Wright and Miles it argues for the importance of an approach that grants equal, careful attention to both the film and the specific religious tradition in which it has been conceived.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Francesco Bolzoni, “Quasi un musical per l’esportazione” [“Almost a Musical to Export”], *Avvenire*, 31 March 1972, 6; Luigi Saitta, “Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna” [“Brother Sun, Sister Moon”], *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6 April 1972, 5.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

As Treveri Gennari points out, Italian film criticism is dominated by *auteurial* and historiographical approaches.¹ Scholars such as Bondanella, Brunetta, Sorlin, Wood and Sprio have, for example, presented broad overviews of Italian cinema.² Their compendiums and general histories can be used as comprehensive guides with which to situate Italian films within their historical, social and cultural contexts. English and North American studies—which comprise the majority in the studied field—have rarely engaged with religion in Italian cinema in a systematic way. For example, of the fifty films analysed in *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films*, thirty-seven are North American.³ The fact that Italy is rarely central to these analyses seems to be particularly strange given the combination of the country's high rate of religious adherence to Catholicism and its rather prolific film industry. Some studies have addressed the complex and evolving relationship between the Catholic Church and Italian film industry as well as the Vatican's attempts to shape the latter through the practice of censorship. Others have examined the presence of Catholicism in the works of specific directors, although such investigations have typically been relegated to a journal article or a sole chapter in a monograph dedicated to a director.⁴ Indeed, in-depth, rigorous studies of the question of Catholicism and Italian cinema are scarce, both in English and in Italian.

¹ Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2009), xvii.

² Bondanella has written extensively on Italian cinema, from his seminal work *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, first published in 1983, to the more recent *A History of Italian Cinema* and *The Italian Cinema Book*. He has also penned relevant monographs on Italian directors, such as *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*. Brunetta is arguably one of the key Italian film critics and historians. In addition to *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from its Origins to the Twenty-first Century*, published in 2009, he has compiled many histories of Italian cinema, such as *Cent'anni di cinema italiano [A Hundred Years of Italian Cinema]*. Sorlin has often focused on the link between national cinema and society (see, for example, *European Cinemas, European Societies 1939-1990*). In particular, *Italian National Cinema: 1896-1996* questions the very complex notion of “national cinema.” As opposed to a fixed set of discernible marks and characteristics of “Italianness,” Sorlin sees Italian national cinema as the more fluid process of the creation, distribution, exhibition and consumption of films, along with the always-evolving relationships that surround the Italian film industry. Not unlike Sorlin, Wood's *Italian Cinema* argues against those studies, which focus exclusively on the films' directors and genres, advocating the necessity of an analysis of the cultural power relationships governing film production, distribution and exhibition in Italy. Sprio's *Migrant Memories* focuses on the influence exercised by the cinema on Italian immigrants in Britain and how this contributed to their notion of Italian identity.

³ For more information, see Adele Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁴ With the exception of Pasolini, whose position towards Catholicism has been studied in depth, the analysis of directors' relationships with religion is characterised by a rather limited scope. This issue is addressed in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

Based on the foregoing, this research seeks to offer an alternative to these two predominant trends by taking into consideration the more recent developments and methodological approaches suggested by scholars such as Wright and Treveri Gennari as well as traditional socio-historiographical theories in order to discuss how five films, released in what Pollard termed the age of “the new secularisation”⁵ (1958–1978), either uphold or challenge Catholic values with their narrative (considered to be the story, plot and characters) and style (considered to be the *mise-en-scène*, editing and sound). This analysis is also mindful of the films’ specific religious and cultural contexts as well as their critical receptions, with a focus on how the Catholic press received them. The presented approach aims to analyse the films selected “in their own right” as well as preserve and account for the particular nature of the religious question in Italy.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, I provide an overview of the existing methodologies and trends in the field of religion and film. In the second section, I address a number of problematic issues that characterise our current understanding of this body of knowledge. Finally, in the third section, I outline my approach to examining the question of religion and film that takes into account the particular nature of the Italian context.

1.0 Trajectories and Trends

As mentioned in the Introduction, the academic literature on the topic of religion and film has revolved around two main areas of interest. On the one hand, previous studies have investigated the history of the complex relationship between the Catholic Church and film industry, especially in the North-American context. In particular, a large proportion of these studies have focused on the Church’s attempts to control film production through censorship as well as by creating organisations tasked with safeguarding the morality of films.⁶ On the other hand, academics have extensively debated the best way in which to bring religion and film into dialogue and have outlined possible approaches, interpreting

⁵ John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics Since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008), 130.

⁶ The events leading to the creation of “The Formula,” “The Movie Picture Production Code” (commonly known as the “Hays Code”) and the “Legion of Decency” are explored in a large number of studies. See, for example, Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Andrew Quicke, “The Era of Censorship (1930-1967),” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden, 32–51 (London: Routledge, 2011). Relevant studies that concentrate specifically on the relationship between the Catholic Church and the film industry in Italy are discussed in a later section of this chapter, as well as Chapter Two of this thesis.

modes and responses.⁷ One of the first authors to address the question in a more systematic way was the French critic and theorist André Bazin. In his 1951 essay, “Cinema and Theology,” he acknowledges, “the cinema has always been interested in God.”⁸ He further identifies three types of religious films: the biblical colossal, or “catechism in pictures,” which is mainly concerned with “the spectacular aspects of the history of Christianity;”⁹ hagiographies, which “exploit above all the popular belief in miracles;”¹⁰ and the stories of priests or nuns, which employ “the myth of the ‘cool’ priest who loves sports and jazz.”¹¹

The beginning of a more systematic theoretical analysis in the field of religion and film can be traced back to the 1970s, when texts such as Hurley’s *Theology through Film* and Schrader’s *The Transcendental Style in Film* appeared.¹² To this day, however, there remains little consensus on the appropriate methods to study religion and film. Lyden observes that the presence of a wide range of methodological approaches and viewpoints makes it particularly challenging to define the parameters of the field of film and religion in terms of both methodology and subject matter. He acknowledges that:

This diversity is both a challenge and strength to the discipline of Religion and Film. It is a strength in that there exists such a wide array of knowledge and methodology to draw from, and this background has tremendously enriched the breadth of the field, as the range of contributors to this volume shows. It is also a challenge, however, because it is harder to synthesize conclusions about the field or summarize its direction and foci.¹³

A more in-depth analysis reveals that religion in films is generally approached from three perspectives: from a *substantial* point of view (i.e., the story narrated), from a *formal* point of view (i.e., the film style) and from a *functional* point of view. In particular, scholars have studied how religion “functions” in films in two ways. They have both considered the values that films encourage as well as their moral impact on viewers and analysed the

⁷ For a discussion of the different approaches identified by scholars in the field of religion and film, see Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 11-31; Clive Marsh, “Theology and Film,” in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. William L. Blizek (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2009), 62–68.

⁸ André Bazin, “Cinema and Theology,” in André Bazin, *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, ed. Bert Cardullo, trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹² Brent S. Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-creation of the World* (London: Wallflower, 2008), ix.

¹³ John Lyden, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

degree to which the audience views watching films as a religious experience. The high degree of interpenetration and contamination between these interpretations produces a rather eclectic outcome, however. For instance, Nolan groups current interpretations into “phenomenological or sacramental,” “cinematic theology or literary” and “anthropological” and combines the traditional anthropological approach that focuses on the question of liturgy as a medium of representation with the critical issues highlighted by the journal *Screen*.¹⁴ Based on this research stream, I arrange existing approaches into four categories according to their emphases, namely story-oriented, style-oriented, ethics-oriented and audience-oriented. These four approaches are not arranged according to chronological order, nor are they prioritised in a hierarchy of values; however, they do exist simultaneously.

1.1 The Narrative-Oriented Approach

The story-oriented approach is what Nolan calls “literary” or “cinematic theology.”¹⁵ Marsh, for example, observes that this interpretation is the “most dominant and obvious” and argues that in it, “film is seen to become part of theology’s resource-material in providing, in the form of moving pictures, the content of a theological outlook.”¹⁶ Deeply indebted to the work of Niebuhr and Tillich in methodology as well as content, this group of scholars has often elaborated on a typology of approaches to describe the relationship between religion and film. May points out that scholarship on the relationship between religion and literature has identified three theoretical approaches to the question, which also roughly coincide with historical stages: *heteronomy*, *theonomy* and *autonomy*.¹⁷ He clarifies that our understanding of these approaches rests on two factors, namely “On the recognition that literature and religion shared a common element—language—and on dissatisfaction with prevailing moralistic approach to their relationship—censorship.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Steve Nolan, *Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Religious Film Analysis* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 3 and 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ Marsh, “Theology and Film,” 62.

¹⁷ John R. May, “Visual Story and the Religious Interpretation of Film,” in *Religion in Film*, eds. John R. May and Michael Bird (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 24-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

May's preferred interpretation is the third approach, *autonomy*, which has been advanced by various theorists. This position advocates an autonomous stance for the disciplines, as they should be considered in their own right and not as ancillary to other fields of study.¹⁹

More recently, Telford and Johnston also determine a typology of approaches, but within the narrower field of theology and film. In his study "Through a Lens Darkly: Critical Approaches to Theology and Film," after providing a twofold definition of theology, first as an academic discipline and second as a spiritual exercise, Telford observes that the consensus reached by practitioners of theology and film is that the two disciplines should consider each other to be "conversation" or "dialogue partners."²⁰ He identifies four critical approaches to theology and film, each of which implies a different understanding of the relationship between the two. Films can in fact be approached evangelically, spiritually, sacramentally and redemptively.²¹

Johnston identifies five responses that have developed throughout history in chronological order: avoidance, caution, dialogue, appropriation and divine encounter. After a brief foray into the history of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Hollywood, Johnston sets out his case for choosing "dialogue" as his preferred methodological approach: "Those wishing for theological dialogue want theology to inform their film viewing and film viewing to inform their theology in a lively two-way conversation that is both ethical and aesthetic in nature."²² While Johnston, like May, quotes the works of T.S. Eliot and R.W.B. Lewis and embraces their positions in asserting the prominence of theology over literature—or, in this case, over film—he is also rather adamant that films be considered in their own right. He states, "[...] Christian moviegoers should first view a movie on its own terms before entering into theological dialogue with it."²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

²⁰ William Telford, "Through a Lens Darkly: Critical Approaches to Theology and Film," in *Cinema Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film*, eds. Eric Christianson, Peter Francis, and William Telford (London: SCM, 2005), 27.

²¹ The evangelical approach "looks at the ways in which discussing films can open surprising opportunities to build bridges and share faith." The spiritual approach "takes an actualising rather than a cognitive view of the relation between film and theology, who welcome the cinemas' treatment of human values, but who are not necessarily supporters of institutionalised religion." The sacramental approach can be found in the works of Schrader and Fraser, while the notion of Christian redemption is the dominant approach employed by Christopher Deacy. Ibid., 32–34.

²² Robert Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 56.

²³ Ibid., 64.

1.1.1 Jesus and Christ-figures

A rather conspicuous body of the literature analyses the presence of Jesus figures as well as Christ-like characters. Central to these studies is the distinction between the cinematic Jesus-figure and Christ-figure, which Malone summarises thus:

‘Jesus-figure’ refers to any representation of Jesus himself. ‘Christ-figure’ describes any figure in the arts who resembles Jesus. The personal name of Jesus (in line with contemporary spirituality, thought and practice) is used for the Jesus figure. The title “Christ”—the “Messiah,” or the “Anointed One”—is used for those who are seen to reflect his mission.²⁴

Baugh identifies eight different models of the Christ-figure in film: the saint, the priest, the woman, the extreme Christ-figure (the clown, the fool and the madman), the outlaw, the child, in a dramatic role, and the popular adventure hero.²⁵ Conversely, according to Reinhertz, Christ-like figures are those whose actions resemble or recall Jesus’s: “Christ figures can be identified either by particular actions that link them with Jesus, such as being crucified symbolically (*Pleasantville*, 1998), walking on water (*The Truman Show*, 1998) or wearing a cross (*Nell*, 1994; *Babette's Feast*, 1987).” However, she shows a tendency to over-interpretation, as she states: “Indeed, any film that has redemption as a major theme (and this includes many, if not most, recent Hollywood movies) is liable to use some Jesus symbolism in connection with the redemptive hero figure.”²⁶

More recently, Kozlovich identifies twenty-five structural characteristics of the Christ-like figure in film. The criteria elaborated on by Kozlovich span the “central” role played by the Christ-figure in the film, to characterisation (he is a simple, poor, generous person, always ready to sacrifice himself), to physical traits (he has blue eyes) and postures (at a certain point he assumes a cruciform pose), to holy exclamations.²⁷ The Christ-like figure is a “tangible” presence within the film, “divinely sourced and tasked,” surrounded by characters who can be reconnected to the twelve apostles, Judas or Mary Magdalene.²⁸

²⁴ Peter Malone, “Jesus on Our Screens,” in *New Image of Religious Film*, ed. John R. May (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 59–60.

²⁵ Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film* (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 210–225.

²⁶ Adele Reinhertz, *Scripture on the Silver Screen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 189.

²⁷ Anton Karl Kozlovich, “The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure.” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8, Fall (2004).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 53.

Against this, Deacy correctly points out how very few of the films actually cited by Kozlovich feature more than three or four characteristics, let alone all twenty-five. This is the result of a marked tendency displayed by academics in which a film is considered to be religious based on a set of structural similarities rather than actually analysed and considered in its specific qualities. In the words of Deacy:

there is a degree to which Christian symbolism and values are being imposed on films which are accordingly judged not qua film, and for the quality of such filmic properties as mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound, editing or direction, but solely for their structural and (all-too-frequently) alleged narrative convergences with Biblical passages.²⁹

1.1.2 Intertextuality

As mentioned in the Introduction, the five films analysed in this thesis make constant reference to elements of the Catholic tradition in a number of ways, including using direct quotes from the Scriptures, alluding to biblical passages and employing sacred music and references to Christian paintings. It follows that the study of intertextuality, iconography and iconology is central to the investigation. Intertextuality, an incredibly layered and complex concept, has been theorised by Bakhtin, Kristeva, Genette and Jameson, among others. By drawing on Bakhtin's formulations in her study "Word, Dialogue and Novel," Kristeva reflects that "[...] any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."³⁰ Obviously, films also present this feature, as pointed out by Guynn and Landy:

Because they are audio-visual texts, films may refer to other arts such as drawing, painting, and photography (e.g. *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915, offers "facsimiles" of photographs of famous Civil War scenes); they may include excerpts from classical music, jazz, or hip hop, as part of the musical score or as music whose source comes from within the story. They may refer to works of theater or literature (plays, novels, short stories), as in the film's adaptation a novel.³¹

²⁹ Christopher Deacy, "The Pedagogical Challenges of Finding Christ Figures in Film," in *Teaching Religion and Film*, ed. Gregory Watkins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 129.

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

³¹ William H. Guynn and Marcia Landy, "A Critical Dictionary: History, Theory, Technique," in *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, ed. William H. Guynn, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 193.

Such references can take different forms, from quotation, to parody, to remakes, to *collages*.³² The five films studied herein are certainly highly intertextual; they quote and refer to not only passages of the Scriptures, but other literary sources as well. *E venne un uomo* relies heavily on Giovanni XXIII's journal and other writings; *Galileo* makes use of acts from the actual scientist's trial; *Teorema* refers to books such as Arthur Rimbaud's *Ouvres* and Leo Tolstoy's novel *The Death of Ivan Ilych*; the second half of *Nel nome del padre* features a school play that cites the works of Alessandro Manzoni and Wolfgang Goethe; and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* depends on the works of early commentators of Francesco's life.³³ In addition, more could be said about their use of other intertextual elements such as other film genres (*E venne un uomo*'s own complex nature, in between documentary and fiction; *Teorema*'s prologue in a *cinema verité* style), arias from operas (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* in *Nel nome del padre*) and references to works of art (Francis Bacon's paintings in *Teorema*).

Within the narrower field of religion and film, the concept of intertextuality has been notably explored in relation to the association between the Scriptures and the films. In this sense, authors such as Jewett,³⁴ Kreitzer³⁵ and, more recently, Aichele and Walsh have made important contributions. In particular, Aichele and Walsh endorse a post-modern stance: a variety of multidisciplinary approaches to how films quote biblical texts, reproduce a biblical story and present it to contemporary audiences. Aichele and Walsh argue that films effectively translate biblical texts into a new medium, eventually transforming them.³⁶

³² Ibid. This definition is echoed by a number of dictionaries and important film theory guides. See, for example, Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 218–219; Roberta E. Pearson, "Intertextuality," in *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, eds. Roberta E. Pearson and Philip Simpson, (London: Routledge, 2001), 347–349.

³³ These aspects are explored in more detail in the chapters dedicated to the individual analysis of the films.

³⁴ Jewett attempts to relate St. Paul's theology to American culture. He elaborates on the "interpretative arch" model, which seeks analogies between ancient and modern texts. His chosen approach is that of "dialogue in a prophetic mode," in which he considers each film "in tandem with a specific biblical passage, treating both with equal respect, and bringing their themes and metaphors into relationship so that a contemporary interpretation for the American cultural situation may emerge." Jewett's methodology is, however, characterised by a strong moralising intent: he does not make a mystery of his bias towards religion in general and Pauline theology in particular. For more information, see Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle's Dialogue with American Culture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 7 and 11.

³⁵ In the book, he seeks to establish a conversation between biblical texts, works of literature and their cinematographic adaptations by reversing "the hermeneutical flow" and showing how such dialogue can be enriching for the parties involved. For more information, see Larry Kreitzer, *Pauline Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

³⁶ George Aichele and Richard G. Walsh, "Introduction: Scripture as Precursor," in *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections Between Scripture and Film*, eds. George Aichele and Richard G. Walsh (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), viii–ix.

In this sense, they rightly point out the extremely ideological quality of such an endeavour when they state, “The screening of Scripture is an act of translation; like every act of translation, it is profoundly ideological.”³⁷

1.1.3 Iconography

Several studies explore the role played by iconography in the relationship between religion and art. German art historian Erwin Panofsky famously identifies three levels of understanding of images: pre-iconographic, iconographic and iconological. While the pre-iconographic level is essentially a formal one,³⁸ the iconographic level is also concerned with the subject matter of the image as well as its meaning.³⁹ Finally, the iconological level is “interested in the connection linking the image’s form and content with information on the time and place of the image’s production and its author’s background.”⁴⁰ In this sense, as this research is concerned not only with the films but also with the social, cultural and religious contexts of their production as well as their directors’ backgrounds and relationships with Catholicism, images are considered not only at an iconographical level, but also at an iconological one, as understood by Panofsky.

Within the field of cinema, studies have often concentrated on the use of iconography in certain film genres such as the western and noir. In line with this tradition, Grant argues that iconography “refers to particular objects, archetypal characters and even specific actors” as well as “[...] the general *mise-en-scene* of a genre [...]”⁴¹ He then proceeds to highlight that, “Of course, while the icons of genre films may have culturally determined meanings, the interpretation or value attached to them is hardly fixed. Rather, the particulars of their representation in each genre film mark the relation of outer form to inner form, and are indicators of the film’s attitude and theme.”⁴² The example he offers is relevant to this thesis: “Although a crucifix in a horror film is an icon of Christianity and dominant ideology, the film itself may either critique or endorse that ideology.”⁴³

³⁷ Ibid., viii.

³⁸ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), 28.

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹ Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower, 2007), 12.

⁴² Ibid., 12–13.

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

Overall, much less has been written about the role of Catholic iconography in cinema.⁴⁴ Sitney attributes the scarcity of academic literature mainly to the adoption of the *modus operandi* imposed by American film criticism. He states, “This loss is vastly magnified by the distant optic of American criticism. Therefore, the best writers on this cinema have been the Italians themselves, and in America the elucidations of the professors of Italian language and literature have led the film specialists.”⁴⁵ There is, however, no doubt about the key importance of the use of Catholic iconography in Italian cinema. The reasons for such a large deployment of images are connected to the long history of the Catholic presence on the peninsula as well as the literary and painterly repertoire. Sitney explains:

By far the largest pool of such iconographic images has their sources in the painterly tradition of Italy. The conventional visual code of the Church prescribed the representation of Christ and the narrative events of the Gospel, distinguished the saints by metonymic signs (often the instruments of their martyrdom), and symbolised virtues and vices. The churches, civic buildings, monuments and the decorations of even the humblest homes in Italy continue to employ versions of this code. Italian poetry, especially Dante and the Renaissance epics, accumulates a vast treasury of iconographic images. Thus iconographical representation so permeates Italian life that it is not surprising to find it central to the native cinema.⁴⁶

One should just consider the incredible number of paintings, sculptures and buildings that illustrate or allude to episodes of the Old and New Testaments. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Piero della Francesca, Andrea Mantegna and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio have lent their artistic geniuses to the depiction of religious topics and biblical episodes, leaving to posterity an immense iconographic repertoire from which to draw.

⁴⁴ A scholar who has written extensively on the relationship between art and religion, particularly on iconography, is Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. Within the world of analogy, Apostolos-Cappadona identifies the three categories of the re-rendering of recognisable works of art, the intentional influence of the “ambiance” of recognisable works of art and *ekphrasis*, namely “the literary or poetic representation of a painting or sculpture in verbal form, either as a description of the work, or an illusion to its meaning, or a reference to a particular element.” For more information, see Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, “Iconography,” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2011), 458. Similarly, drawing her argument from the works of David Tracy and Andrew Greeley, Gaye Ortiz argues that the link between art and Catholicism is most evident in the three theological concepts of analogy, sacramentalism and incarnation. For more information, see Gaye Ortiz, “The Catholic Church and its Attitude to Film as an Arbiter of Cultural Meaning,” in *Mediating Religion. Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, eds. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 179–199.

⁴⁵ Paul Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

However, while this has always been a mark of Italian cinema, it is only in the post-war era that the iconographic repertoire began to be used provocatively. Again, in the words of Sitney: “One of the post-war Italian cinema’s primary gestures of opposition to the Church has been in reimagining and parodying its icons. Rossellini, De Sica, and Pasolini, the three filmmakers [...] who were the most ambivalent about the Church, tend to use its iconography most explicitly.”⁴⁷ Films such as Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome Open City*, 1945) or *Paisà* (1946); Vittorio De Sica’s *Ladri di Bicyclette* (*The Bicycle Thief*, 1948), *Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan*, 1951) or *Umberto D* (1952); and Pasolini’s *Accattone* (1961) and *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (*Hawks and Sparrows*, 1966) all make reference to traditional Catholic images, but taint them with provocative implications. Sitney continues:

For example, there seems to be a critical consensus that the shot of the dying Communist in *Roma, città aperta*, with his head bloodied and arms outstretched, invokes Christ on the Cross. A more controversial attribution would be to see in the sign “Partigiano” attached to the floating corpse of *Paisà* a variation of the cryptogram “INRI” attached to the Cross. The magical dove of *Miracolo a Milano* is a version of the Holy Ghost, while the brand name of the bicycle in *Ladri di biciclette*, “Fides,” identifies it as a symbolical instrument, much as the labels in medieval paintings identify symbols. (In a later film, *Umberto D*, De Sica uses the convention of Fides, the dog, as a similar element in his allegorical pattern.)⁴⁸

However, while a large number of Italian directors has indeed drawn images from the immense repertoire of the Catholic iconographic tradition, Pasolini was the first to do so throughout his career, from his cinematographic debut *Accattone* (1961), to the subsequent *Mamma Roma* (1962), *La ricotta* (Curd Cheese, 1963), *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (*Hawks and Sparrows*, 1966) and *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964) as well as the film analysed in this research, *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968).

1.2 The Style-Oriented Approach

While Marsh refers to the style-oriented approach as “theology through film,”⁴⁹ Nolan calls it “sacramental” or “phenomenological” and notes the studies of Bazin and Schrader in this regard.⁵⁰ This second group of scholars considers film to be a medium able to approach the divine and transcendental. From their perspective, aesthetics comes to the

⁴⁷ Ibid..

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12–13.

⁴⁹ Marsh, “Theology and Film,” 62.

⁵⁰ Nolan, *Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion*, 11–12.

foreground as the way in which the ineffable quality of the divine can be experienced. In the words of Marsh, “films become a medium through which divine reality is mediated directly in a way which cannot be achieved as easily or effectively by words.”⁵¹ Indeed, an elaboration on the aesthetics of film as a gateway to a transcendental experience can already be found in the work of Bazin. In the aforementioned “Cinema and Theology,” Bazin offers interesting remarks about what constitutes “filmic Protestantism.” Reflecting on the qualities of a religiously significant film, he denies any value to those works that are visually excessive. He states that,

Everything that is exterior, ornamental, liturgical, sacramental, hagiographic, and miraculous in everyday observance, doctrine and practice of Catholicism does indeed show specific affinities with the cinema considered as a formidable iconography, but these affinities, which have made the success of countless films, are also the source of religious insignificance of most of them.⁵²

He concludes that “almost everything that is good in this domain was created not by the exploitation of these patent affinities, but rather working against them: by the psychological and moral deepening of the religious factor as well as by the renunciation of the physical representation of the supernatural and of grace.”⁵³

Schrader famously seeks to determine the best cinematic expression of the holy, ultimately finding it in what he calls “the transcendental style.” According to the author, such a style finds particular resonance in the work of Robert Bresson and Yasujiro Ozu, and, to a lesser degree, in that of Carl Dreyer. It has little to do with the directors’ backgrounds or beliefs; “it is instead the result of two universal contingencies: the desire to express the Transcendent in art and the nature of the film medium.”⁵⁴ Schrader is adamant that we reject the idea that the transcendental style corresponds to the religious film.

⁵¹ Marsh, “Theology and Film,” 63.

⁵² Bazin, “Cinema and Theology,” 64–65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁴ Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 3.

The transcendental style, in fact, “is fundamentally just that, a style,”⁵⁵ and as such, it is not tied to any religious denomination, nor does it draw its inspiration from sacred representations or religious subjects. The transcendental style has developed its own recognisable aesthetics and it employs specific “temporal means” such as “camera angles, dialogue, [and] editing.”⁵⁶

Starting from the premise that “human works [...] cannot *inform* one about the Transcendent, they can only be *expressive* of the Transcendent,”⁵⁷ Schrader seeks to establish the features of the style and equates it with a sobriety and sparseness: “[The] transcendental style *stylizes* reality by eliminating (or nearly eliminating) those elements which are primarily expressive of human experience, thereby robbing the conventional interpretations of reality of their relevance and power.”⁵⁸ Arguing the ontological and cross-cultural quality of film, he seeks to validate his claim by analysing Ozu’s family-office cycle films, Bresson’s prison cycle films and Dreyer’s films. The works of these three directors, different in religious beliefs and culture, serve to illustrate the three movements of the *everyday*, *disparity* and *stasis*. Schrader defines the *everyday* as “a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplace of everyday living,”⁵⁹ *disparity* as “an actual potential disunity between man and his environment which culminates in a decisive action;”⁶⁰ and *stasis* as “a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it.”⁶¹ The first two movements are necessary and even propaedeutic to the third: in fact, *stasis* not only encompasses the other two, but it is also truly expressive of the transcendental.⁶² Schrader comments, “The static view at the close of Ozu’s and Bresson’s films is a microcosm for the transcendental style itself: a frozen form which expresses the Transcendent - a movie *hierophany*.”⁶³

Bird acknowledges his debt to Mircea Eliade and his concept of “hierophany.” He believes that a discussion on film as a manifestation of the sacred first needs to be inscribed into the broader conversation on art, culture and the transcendental. Not unlike

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁶¹ Ibid., 49.

⁶² It is important to note that stasis is formally connoted, as Schrader explains: “The everyday and disparity are experiential, but stasis is formalistic; it incorporates those emotions into a larger form.” Ibid., 51.

⁶³ Ibid., 86.

Bazin, Bird suggests the holy is best expressed within a realistic film style.⁶⁴ The author believes, as Schrader does, that such a style is characterised by universality: “It is this ‘spiritual realism’ as cinematic style that enables the religious film to go outside the parochial subject matter.”⁶⁵

Bird examines the works of realist theorists such as Bazin and Amédée Ayfre, concluding that, “In these realist statements, one finds something of a *creed* in which cinema’s technical properties become the vehicle of meditation. This creed requires a particular spiritual sensitivity in which the sacred is sought as the depth in reality itself.”⁶⁶

In an elaboration that closely resembles that of Schrader, Fraser argues for the existence of a “sacramental style” in film. He maintains that certain films offer a filmic mode that is experienced as a sacrament by the audience. He states: “In its enfleshment of a divine presence and subsequent liturgical offer of that presence through identification and assent, the mode approaches a sacramental experience.”⁶⁷ Similar to the three movements of *everyday*, *disunity* and *stasis* described by Schrader, Fraser believes that in religious films the main narrative is “disrupted” by a static moment that allows the introduction of the holy. Such a moment can either be a character or be a cinematic gesture. He states, “The essence of the mode is the incarnational gesture at the film’s centre, in which a primary narrative is disrupted and made ‘holy’. The introduction of the holy presence then typically transforms the narrative of the film into the most recognisable of all Christian narrative patterns: the Passion.”⁶⁸

1.3 The Ethics-Oriented Approach

As mentioned in the Introduction, a large part of the academic literature in the field of religion and film focuses on the relationship between the Catholic Church and film industry. In particular, many studies offer accounts of how the Church has attempted to control the production and reception of films through the creation of organisations such as the Legion of Decency.⁶⁹ In the Italian context, one of the most interesting and recent

⁶⁴ Michael Bird, “Film as Hierophany,” in *Religion in Film*, eds. John R. May and Michael Bird (New York: Routledge, 1998), 13–14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁷ Peter Fraser, *Images of the Passion: The Sacramental Mode in Film* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “The National Legion of Decency,” also known as “The Catholic Legion of Decency” was an organisation created in 1933 with the task “to create a pressure group that would call for the boycott of offensive films and would support self-

works is Liggeri's book *Mani di forbice (Scissor Hands)*, which describes the history of cinematographic censorship in Italy and discusses the laws and bodies overseeing it. Interestingly, Italian censorship is still regulated, albeit with a few changes, by Law n. 161 of 21 April 1962 on the "Revisione dei film e dei lavori teatrali" ("Revision of Film and Theatre Works"). The first article of this law explains that the public screening of films and their export abroad are subject to the "nulla osta," that is, the authorisation of the Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo ("Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment") and, since 1998, of the Dipartimento dello Spettacolo del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali ("Department of the Ministry of Heritage Entertainment and Culture"). The Ministry issues such authorisation after films have been examined by eight special commissions,⁷⁰ whose composition includes relevant figures (magistrates and university professors) in the field of law, pedagogy and psychology as well as representatives of the film industry. These commissions are tasked with deciding whether a film should be given the "nulla osta" for public screening.⁷¹

On the topic of censorship, another precious tool is the website *Italia Taglia* (<http://www.italiataglia.it/>), a project promoted by the former "Dipartimento dello Spettacolo del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali," now "Direzione Generale per il Cinema." Born out of the necessity to archive and categorise the mass of information available on censorship in Italy, the website aims to "trace the milestones of the *Revisione Cinematografica Italiana*, reconstructing the history and principles and trying to outline its objectives and effects."⁷² This database provides extremely useful information on works declared "VM18" or "unsuitable for children" such as *Galileo*, *Teorema* and *Nel nome del padre* as well as the reasons behind those decisions. It also states whether a film was cut, as in the case of *Galileo*, and whether restrictions were eventually lifted.

(cont'd)

regulation and conformity with the Production Code." For more information, see Quicke, "The Era of Censorship (1930-1967)," 35.

⁷⁰ Domenico Liggeri, *Mani di forbice: la censura cinematografica in Italia [Scissorhands: Cinematographic Censorship in Italy]* (Alessandria: Falsopiano, 1997), 21.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

⁷² "ripercorrere le tappe fondamentali della 'Revisione Cinematografica' italiana, ricostruendone storia, principi e provando a delinearne obiettivi ed effetti." For more information, see "Il Progetto," *Italia Taglia*, accessed 27 June 2016, <http://www.italiataglia.it/progetto>.

It is interesting, however, to note that some scholars also adopt an ethical posture in relation to film today by examining the ways in which films foster certain values and present a specific view of the world. Faber acknowledges this attitude and suggests the existence of two predominant ethical-related models in the domain of religion and film: *the censorship/rating model* and *the ideological criticism model*. She states,

Both models focus on ethical judgment as the cultivation of a critical ethical subjectivity, specifically in relation to film, as formative for social and political life. But whereas proponents of the earlier model sought to reform the movie industry into a more religiously palatable product, the later model is characterized by a critical engagement with a much wider range of films.⁷³

Marsh refers to the second category as “theology and film as dialogue partners” and states that in this case, “The balance has shifted from the director or the film to the space between the film and the viewer. A viewer’s (and a tradition’s) theology has the potential to be questioned or sharpened by a film or range of films.”⁷⁴ Wright, by contrast, considers this category to be a “functional” approach and argues that its practitioners focus “on the contribution religions make to meeting the essential prerequisites of society by fostering value consensus and group solidarity.”⁷⁵ Miles investigates the depiction of the social phenomenon of religion in Hollywood films released between 1983 and 1993 and the values that these films postulate. Underlining the crucial role of the media in contemporary society, Miles acknowledges the important function of films as tools for self-analysis and self-understanding. She states, “The purpose of paying serious attention to film is twofold. On the one hand, the ability to analyze filmic representations develops an individual’s critical subjectivity. On the other hand, films reveal how a society represents itself to itself.”⁷⁶ Miles claims that our worldview as well as our lifestyle is informed by the values represented in films. She states, “Hollywood films generate and maintain attitude towards religion that have far-reaching effects on American social political life.”⁷⁷ Since “meaning is negotiated between the spectator and the film,”⁷⁸ Miles suggests that attention should be shifted to spectatorial pleasure in response to a certain film. Acknowledging the function of emotion as a cognitive tool (“by producing visual

⁷³ Alyda Faber, “Religion, Ethics and Film,” in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. William L. Blizek (London: Continuum International Pub. Group), 49.

⁷⁴ Marsh, “Theology and Film,” 65.

⁷⁵ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 5.

⁷⁶ Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 10.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

pleasure, film communicates values”⁷⁹), she argues for a critical discussion of the feelings that films evoke in the audience. She states: “Our task is neither to deny nor to destroy visual pleasure in order to do the sober work of analysis, but to trust our pleasure as the primary tool of interpretation.”⁸⁰ Being wary of approaches that glorify films only for their entertainment role, Miles also rejects an understanding of films as icons to be emulated or objects to offer “ready-made solutions.” Her analysis seeks instead to understand films as cultural products, “informed by the perspectives, values, and aspiration of the makers.”⁸¹ She concludes that since “what films do best, then, is to articulate the anxieties of the change in society,”⁸² we can look at films as dialogue partners in attempting to answer the ever-burning question of “how we should live.”

1.3.1 Official Catholic Policies

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, the Catholic Church has relentlessly attempted to shape the film industry as well as the audience’s receptions of films through official documents as well as widespread pastoral activity. An analysis of official Vatican documents is therefore a precious hermeneutical tool, as these document not only are good indicators of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Italian film industry, but they also constitute a scale of Catholic values against which it is possible to measure films’ orthodoxy and compliance. The Vatican website proves to be a great online source, providing encyclicals, apostolic exhortations and instructions, and decrees, which, in the majority of cases, are presented both in their Italian and English versions. Recent and relevant studies of the topic include the three volumes of *Attraverso lo schermo (Through the Screen)* edited by Eugeni and Viganò, Treveri Gennari’s *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests and Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism and Power* edited by Daniel Biltereyst and Treveri Gennari. These works, as they are particularly relevant to this project, are explored in more depth in the last section of this chapter.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10–11.

⁸¹ Ibid., 193.

⁸² Ibid.

Traditionally, the academic literature on the relationship between the Catholic Church and film industry has largely focused on the Vatican's censorial attitude. Conversely, a smaller number of academics and critics such as Ortiz, Malone and Viganò have brought to the foreground the merits of the Catholic Church in acknowledging very early on the immense potential of cinema as a medium. According to these scholars, not only was the Catholic Church able to develop a critical attitude towards cinema, but also it also strongly encouraged audiences to do so. In particular, Ortiz maintains that the ambivalent attitude held by the ecclesiastical hierarchies towards film is inscribed into the larger vision of the Catholic Church, which sees the modern world and its cultural manifestations alternately as an occasion for positive engagement and a threat. In her opinion, this is due to a division within the Catholic world, ultimately resulting in the existence of two sections of the Church, namely "the traditional hierarchy which seeks to uphold 'Catholic values' and to prevent contamination from worldly ones, and the Church which, because of her identity within an incarnational and sacramental theology, sees her place in the midst of contemporary culture, seeking to read 'the signs of the times.'"⁸³ While this position has its merits, the analysis of official Vatican documents and acknowledgment of the widespread presence of the Catholic Church at grassroots level show how the Catholic Church has adopted and essentially maintained a rather reactionary attitude towards cinema over time.

1.4 The Audience-Oriented Approach

Finally, some studies have equated film watching with a religious experience such as churchgoing. This approach is what Nolan calls "anthropological."⁸⁴ Lyden rejects the two dominant approaches of theology and ideology in favour of a more audience-oriented analysis. By claiming that "film functions religiously in its own right,"⁸⁵ the author seeks to achieve a method of dialogue about film and religion that falls into the category of *autonomy* rather than *heteronomy*. His intent is "to free the interpretation of film [...] from some of the conditions that have been imposed on it such as limiting the dialogue of the film and religion to dialogue with a *particular* religious tradition."⁸⁶

⁸³ Ortiz, "The Catholic Church and Its Attitude to Film as an Arbiter of Cultural Meaning," 186.

⁸⁴ Nolan, *Film and Religion*, 10.

⁸⁵ John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

As a solution, Lyden suggests that a better understanding of the two disciplines would be obtained with “interreligious dialogue,” arguing that “if the practice of film viewing can be understood as religion [...] then the dialogue between ‘religion’ and ‘film’ is really just another form of interreligious dialogue.”⁸⁷

A similar position is taken by Plate, who highlights the analogies between religion and film, as they both create a world for their audiences. He states:

Religion and film are akin. They both function by recreating the known world and then presenting that alternative version of the world to their viewers/worshippers. Religions and films each create alternate worlds using raw materials of space and time and elements, bending each of them in new ways and forcing them to fit particular standards and desires.”⁸⁸

Plate argues that religion and film are part of a dialogue and constantly borrow from and influence each other. It follows that “by paying attention to the ways films are constructed, we can shed light on the ways religions are constructed and vice versa.”⁸⁹

Marsh combines his interest in the field of theology and film with strong attention to audience reception. Much like Lyden, he emphasises the “religion-like function of film.”⁹⁰ Marsh believes that a parallel can be traced between the two activities of film watching and churchgoing insofar as “cinema-going functions as an alternative to, or a replacement for, traditional religious activity.”⁹¹ Not unlike Miles, the author re-evaluates the role of the emotional response to film: “Theology would then function as a cognitive world in relation to which emotional responses to film would be structured.”⁹² He emphasises the need for studies that address how viewers consume films. He states, “Paying attention to audience reception in religion/theology and film means doing justice to what happens to those who actually watch films [...] not film critics or academics.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁸⁸ Plate, *Religion and Film*, 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁰ Clive Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film’s Challenge to Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), x.

⁹¹ Ibid., 6.

⁹² Ibid., 39.

⁹³ Clive Marsh, “Audience Reception,” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2011), 255.

1.5 Issues about the Field of Religion and Film

In the introduction to *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy*, Paul Coates asks, “Is the religious film definable as a genre?”⁹⁴ This question goes straight to the core of the controversial issue of religion and film. Have the four trends outlined above not yet uncovered an effective way in which to relate to the subject? Why is there no overall consensus about not only the best approaches to bring religion and film into dialogue but also a definition of religion in film? The question posed by Coates is enlightening insofar as it points out a crucial element: it is one thing to claim that a film presents “religious themes,” it is a wholly other thing to claim that the said work is “religious” insofar as it awakens religious sentiments and ideas in the audience, as practitioners of the sacramental, ethical and anthropological modes advocate. Leaving aside the question of *how* to measure these religious feelings, I believe the problem lies in the diffuse tendency to universalise personal and subjective experiences and notions. Not only is Schrader’s notion of “the transcendent” an extremely subjective assumption, but also the claim about the ontological transnational quality of film has rather problematic implications. In fact, as Deacy observes, “Nobody functions in a cultural vacuum, and there is no such thing as a definitive, normative or objective theological lens through which one may embark upon a theological conversation.”⁹⁵ Similarly, the invitation to pay attention to what happens to the audience by practitioners of the “anthropological” approach does not seem to take into account the obvious cultural, and what is worse, religious differences among and within countries. In response to these tendencies, Wright correctly argues that “a consideration of a film’s religious qualities, like that of its meanings more generally, is not something that an individual critic can determine once and for all.”⁹⁶ In agreement with Wright, and in line with an increasingly popular methodological position that emphasises the necessity for practitioners of film and religion to be able to engage film *qua* film, any examination of the question of religion and film needs to be *particular*, namely inscribed into a precise religious tradition and, within that, into a specific timeframe.

The literary approach has been criticised for its overdependence on the literary model as well as its reliance on the notion of *auteur*. In his work, May discusses the benefits of an *autonomous* approach as opposed to *heteronomous* and *theonomous* responses. He identifies “biography” as one of the heteronomous criteria since “it measures the film not

⁹⁴ Paul Coates, *Cinema, Religion, and the Romantic Legacy: Through a Glass Darkly* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 7.

⁹⁵ Deacy, “The Pedagogical Challenges,” 130.

⁹⁶ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 78.

on its merits as cinematic art but against the scale of ‘religious background’ or ‘expressed intention’.”⁹⁷ May then concludes that “the assumption is that intention or belief—or the lack of it—inevitably governs artistic achievement.”⁹⁸ However, he then goes against his own claim by offering two examples inscribed into an *auteurial* perspective, which also happen to be directly relevant to this thesis. In fact, he argues that

One need to think only of Pasolini’s *The Gospel According to St Matthew* to know how stunningly the personality of Jesus can be portrayed by a Communist, in a film that must rank with the very few successful lives of Christ that have been made. On the other hand, [...] even expressed intention yields ‘good fruit’ occasionally, as Zeffirelli’s *Jesus of Nazareth*, produced for television, proves. If one keeps in mind that no single Gospel attempts to give us the whole picture of Jesus [...] the carefully understated Nazarene of Zeffirelli’s ‘good news’ and even the dynamic urgency of Pasolini’s more limited Marxist Jesus cannot fail to bear genuine theological meaning.⁹⁹

If, however, “biography” and “expressed intentions” are unacceptable criteria, why does May measure the two films’ “theological genuineness” against the opposite ideological orientation of the two directors? Similarly, why are the examples offered by May all inscribed into an *auteurial* tradition? In the words of Nolan, “May betrays his expressed preference for autonomy insofar as a film’s suitability for theological criticism is determined by the director’s religious sensibility; in other words, the likelihood of finding something of the transcendent in his film.”¹⁰⁰ A good response to those who refuse to rely on the directors’ biographical information and intentions has recently been offered by Deacy, who argues that, “Unless attention is accorded to such wider questions as the motivations of the filmmakers in creating a film and whether, if it is indeed a satire, of what [...] and how successful have they been to this end, then there is clearly more work to be done.”¹⁰¹

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, academics that favour a “style-oriented approach” identify the presence of a religious or spiritual sense by using a sober style. Nolan analyses such an approach by arguing that “those who propose what amounts to a genre of cinematic sacramentalism ultimately expect too much of film.”¹⁰² According to the author,

⁹⁷ May, “Visual Story and the Religious Interpretation of Film,” 27.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Nolan, *Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion*, 21.

¹⁰¹ Deacy, “The Pedagogical Challenges,” 130.

¹⁰² Nolan, *Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion*, 15.

both Bazin and Schrader are at fault. However, while Bazin's "ontological realism" remains conscious of the representative function of cinema as a medium, Schrader's approach is erroneous in pursuing a "moralist agenda" as well as universalising his own experience of what constitutes a transcendent experience in film."¹⁰³ However, I believe that the point is not that, in the words of Nolan, sacramentalists "expect too much of film." After all, Schrader does provide the reader with a set of discernible characteristics that mark the transcendental style, thus making it easily recognisable. Moreover, the same criticism could be directed to those who maintain that film-watching is a highly transformative experience, or, in the words of Marsh, "an exercise in spirituality."¹⁰⁴ I believe that, while the sacramentalist approach is effective at outlining some of the features that mark a large number of films that deal with religion, the presence of religion in film cannot be reduced to specific stylistic choices. For example, the works of Olmi and Zeffirelli, while both stemming from a position of orthodoxy and compliance to Catholicism, employ incredibly different visual languages. While Olmi's works are characterised by a sober and ascetic atmosphere, Zeffirelli's style is often considered to be pompous and extravagant.¹⁰⁵

Other reoccurring issues emerge from scholarly discussion on the field of religion and film. One question that demands further investigation concerns the clear bias towards either religion (and theology) or film depending on critics' backgrounds and beliefs. In fact, not only do practitioners in the field of religion and film often favour one side of the conversation, but it also seems as though they are constantly trying to pit one discipline against the other, instead of exploring avenues of dialogue. Some critics tend to view film as ancillary to theology (or religion). This "theological imperialism"—to borrow an expression from Johnston¹⁰⁶—stems from the idea that just as popular films cannot sustain the weight of critical analysis, film as a medium cannot serve as a repository of deep meaning, let alone religious meaning. This notion is rooted in the works of academics such as Hurley, who states, "Movies are for the masses what theology is for an elite."¹⁰⁷ This stance was particularly popular in the 1970s when the idea of the secularisation of society was granted a privileged position in sociological debates and cinema and film were seen as agents of secularisation. Wright points out how this view of film finds its

¹⁰³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁴ Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film's Challenge to Theology*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ The styles of Olmi and Zeffirelli are examined in depth in the third and seventh chapters.

¹⁰⁶ Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ Neil Hurley, *Theology through film* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), ix.

antecedent in the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and their contention that film typifies the “culture industry.” She states that, “Its reliance on rationalistic, technocrat forms of organisation meant that it embodied the modern drive to system and unity—responsible for the death of ‘local mythologies’, and implicated in the advancement of totalitarian ideologies.”¹⁰⁸ For one reason or another, there remains a certain resistance to considering cinema to be—to borrow an expression from Deacy—“a contemporary site of religious activity.”¹⁰⁹ Critics and academics seem to prefer a theological reading of film, shirking away from an informed approach to its specific characteristics. As a result, a significant lack of theoretical attention is paid to cinema as a medium, and the approach to religion and film is often confined to a literary understanding of films. Indeed, Watkins ascribes this tendency to two reasons: “This is largely because work on film and religion has 1) tended to focus on what has come to be known as the theological approach, or 2) sees film as an important vehicle for cultural values broadly construed, and therefore of interest to theorists of religion generally.”¹¹⁰

By contrast, there is a marked propensity among film critics to divest religion of its importance as a key cultural dimension of our society. Despite the claims of famous philosophers and sociologists such as Jürgen Habermas and Peter L. Berger, who strongly assert the crucial role played by religion in the contemporary world, a large number of academics and critics fail to acknowledge its relevance. In this regard, Wright comments, “[...] contemporary film studies, with its roots in Marxism and psychoanalysis, often dismisses or devalues the place of religion in contemporary society.”¹¹¹ Miles takes the argument much further, affirming that

Marx’s maxim, “The critique of religion is the prerequisite of every critique” has filtered into a widespread scepticism about religion and its effects, which is apparent in Hollywood’s bias against religion. Marx’s distrust of religion has also been widely uncritically adopted by otherwise critical theorists. In academic as well as popular literature, religious belief is frequently characterized as slavish and irrational, based on foolish longings for transcendence or immortality.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Deacy, *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 1.

¹¹⁰ Gregory Watkins, “Religion, Film and Film Theory,” in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. William Blizek (London: Continuum, 2009), 82.

¹¹¹ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 23.

¹¹² Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, 12.

In addition, a large proportion of studies openly challenge the long-existing distinction between art-house and popular films by selecting what are considered to be Hollywood blockbusters as case studies.¹¹³ Their purpose is both to disprove the theory that blockbusters cannot be repositories of (religious) meaning and to demonstrate the versatility of their method. For example, Blizek admits, “It simply is fun to discover that a popular movie that seems to have nothing to do with religion may include elements that can be given a religious interpretation.”¹¹⁴ This line of thinking seems to represent the predominant *modus operandi* in the field of religion and film and explains why experts include analyses of films such as *The Matrix*, *Patch Adams* and *Lethal Weapon II*, effectively turning religion and film into a “catch-all category.” Then again, the danger of over-interpretation is always lurking, if the lack of consensus in the academic literature is anything to go by. For her part, Wright ascribes the confusion to the meaning-making function generally attributed to both religion and film. She states, “In simple terms, this diffuse approach seems to be underpinned by the assumptions that: (a) films are about ‘life’ and its meaning; (b) religion is about ‘life’ and its meaning; ergo (c) all films are ‘religious’, or are amenable to some kind of religious reading.”¹¹⁵ If the truth of such a syllogism is assumed, then virtually every film becomes susceptible to analysis. Again, in the words of Wright, “This position has its weaknesses. As a hypothesis, it is effectively meaningless—so broad that it can be neither proved nor disproved.”¹¹⁶ In response to Kozlovic’s contention that “innumerable Christ-figures and other holy subtexts are hidden within the popular cinema,”¹¹⁷ Deacy also notes a tendency towards over-interpretation, especially in relation to the cinematic Christ-figure. He states that

there is a degree to which Christian symbolism and values are being imposed on films which are accordingly judged not *qua* film, and for the quality of such filmic properties as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, sound, editing or direction, but solely for their structural and (all-too-frequently) alleged narrative convergences with Biblical passages.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ See, for example, the films selected by Deacy in *Screen Christologies* and Miles in *Seeing and Believing*.

¹¹⁴ William L. Blizek, “Religion and the Movies,” in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. William L. Blizek (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2009), 21.

¹¹⁵ Wright, *Religion and Film*, 16.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Anton Karl Kozlovic, “The Hidden Jesus within Popular Films: Christ-Figures as Sacred Subtexts.” *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* 85 (2004): 97–109.

¹¹⁸ Deacy, “The Pedagogical Challenges,” 129.

1.6 An Alternative: the Works of Miles, Wright and Treveri Gennari

In their works, Miles, Wright and Treveri Gennari acknowledge the importance of the historical and social context in which films that deal with religion are conceived and produced. While Miles is primarily concerned with the values circulated in films, and is as such characterised by a rather moralising tone, it is also one of the first works in the field of religion and film to emphasise the benefits of a cultural studies approach to the question. By acknowledging the importance of the works of theorists such as J. Hillis Miller and Richard Johnson, Miles argues that the strength of a cultural studies approach lies precisely in the more complete perspective that they are able to offer. She states,

Unlike a film critic, a culture critic is not solely, or even primarily, interested in studying the film as an independent ‘text’; rather, as a historian of contemporary society, she also studies the particular cultural moment in which they film originated. In contrast to methods of film criticism that think of films solely as texts - psychoanalytic, semiotic, Marxist, feminist, *auteur*, or genre criticism—a cultural study approach scrutinizes them as products of the culture’s social, sexual, religious, political, and institutional configurations.¹¹⁹

The project outlined by Miles is however tremendously ambitious, as it needs to address a huge number of areas. In fact, she states, “In concrete terms, then, a cultural studies approach requires information about the films finding and production; its distribution to theatres; the director’s intent, as described in interviews; the box office earnings; and the diverse critical perspectives given in reviews. It also analyses the screenplay, camera-work, narrative, and soundtrack.”¹²⁰ The magnitude of such a task is also implicitly recognised by the author herself, as she employs thematic lenses such as religious affiliation and normative categories in her analysis of popular Hollywood films.¹²¹

Wright strongly advocates the importance of a multidisciplinary approach. In fact, even if the past few years have witnessed a growth in the number of scholarly works dedicated to the subject of religion and film, few studies show a systematic and rigorous quality, prompting Wright to conclude that, “Without firmer foundations, particularly an ability to engage film *qua* film, the survival of religion (and theology) and film cannot be

¹¹⁹ Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, 23.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²¹ Miles examines the portrayal of religious values in fifteen popular Hollywood films released between 1983 and 1993, such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Thelma and Louise*, *The Piano* and *The Mission*. The first part of her analysis focuses on films that portray Jesus’s life and work, positions of strong Christian commitment and Judaism and Islamism within Christian society. The second part employs normative categories such as race, gender, sexuality and class. Interestingly, in the appendix, Miles provides a series of questions grouped around three aspects of film: film as “cultural product,” film as “text” and film as “cultural voice.”

assumed.”¹²² After a foray into existing trends in the field, with their biases and limitations, Wright suggests the best way in which to tackle the subject would be to bring cultural studies into the equation to allow “a balance between respect for film and film studies, *and* a regard for religious traditions and their adherents.”¹²³

Wright’s methodological approach addresses the four areas of film narrative (in terms of story, plot, characters), style, cultural and religious context, and reception. She concludes that,

The overall goal of this multi-dimensional approach is to offer a richer account of the films concerned, which develops an appreciation of the nature and function as film ‘texts’ operating within—and constructing—particular contexts. Looking at film in this way makes it possible to gain a sense of what ‘film’ is, both as a series of images projected onto the screen (large or small) and as a social artefact.¹²⁴

Following Wright’s example, I dedicate a large proportion of each chapter to examining the cultural and religious context of the film. While Wright prefers to address works of different religious traditions, I look at the approaches within *one* religious tradition to clarify the fragmentation characterising Italian Catholicism.

Very few works consider the influence of Catholicism on Italian cultural production. Among these, an incredibly small number actually engage with cinema. Among the exceptions to the rule are the works edited by Eugeni and Viganò, Treveri Gennari’s *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests and Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism and Power* edited by Biltereyst and Treveri Gennari. The three volumes of *Attraverso lo schermo* are one of the most complete works published on the topic of cinema and religion in Italy. Each of these three books covers a specific period of the history of Italian cinema: the first spans the birth of the medium until the advent of sound; the second one covers the 1930s to the late 1960s; and the third one focuses on the 1970s until the present day. Covering the discontinuity and alternating relations between the Church and cinema over the past century, the work brings out the key role of cinema as a medium capable of creating and defining a collective imagery and therefore one that carries considerable social and cultural implications.

¹²² Wright, *Religion and Film*, 22.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

However, the study is, at times, characterised by a rather moralising tone, with the editors revealing that the reason behind this ambitious project is “the will to contribute, *through the screen*, to a moral and civil growth of the Italian society and culture.”¹²⁵

As Treveri Gennari points out, the novelty of her work lies both in the content and in the methodology. She states that until the publication of her book, “No studies [...] have been produced which have shown the Vatican and American influences working together with the Italian film industry.”¹²⁶ By focusing on “[...] the cultural and ideological influences shaping the Italian cinema industry during the period 1945-1960,”¹²⁷ the book argues for the existence of a close bond between the Italian and American film industries, as the latter played a key role in the development of Italian cinema. This influence was especially prominent in the immediate post-war era, as the Italian film industry was being rebuilt and had to rely almost completely on the import of American films. In addition to analysing the political and cultural ideology of the United States and the bureaucratic aspects of legislation in the film industry, the study also explores the active role of the Catholic Church in dictating cultural policies and thus shaping the tastes of Italian audiences. As the author argues:

[...] the Vatican support of the Americanization of post-war Italy can be seen as an attempt to restore morality through the use of a certain type of Hollywood cinema. This was encouraged by a coalition of interests built by the Christian Democrats which not only allowed a cross-fertilization between American and Italian cinema as the main vehicle for Vatican propaganda, but also promoted indigenous films in order to fulfil the aims of the Vatican.¹²⁸

While the period studied by Treveri Gennari precedes the focus of this research by at least ten years, her analysis of the complex forces at play in post-war Italy remains relevant for any investigation into the role of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Italian film industry.

Together with Biltreyst, Treveri Gennari also recently edited the aforementioned volume *Moralizing Cinema*. This work is organised around the five areas of policies, leaders, technology and production, censorship and control, and exhibition, providing the most

¹²⁵ Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò, “Introduction,” in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia. Vol. I [Through the Screen: Cinema and Catholic Culture in Italy. Vol. I]*, eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2006), 11.

¹²⁶ Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema*, xvii.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, xix.

complete and rigorous overview of the topic of the “power, policies and practices of religious organizations in the cinematic sphere [...]”¹²⁹ As the editors explain in their introduction, while some English and North American studies have explored the relationship between the Catholic Church and Hollywood, few works have considered the relationship between Catholics and cinema in other countries.¹³⁰ Pointing out how the field of religion and film is dominated by narrative-oriented approaches (“religion *in* cinema”) and functional-sacramental approaches (“cinema *as* religion”), Biltereyst and Treveri Gennari argue for the necessity to pay more scholarly attention to “[...] the domain at the nexus of cinema and religion, namely the one dealing with the question of how religious organizations and their representatives make use of the film medium and try and influence the business which operates it.”¹³¹

Finally, the majority of studies investigating the presence of Catholicism in Italian cinema have focused on a single director’s relationship with religion. While more extensive work has been produced in the case of Pasolini,¹³² analyses of Cavani¹³³ and Bellocchio¹³⁴ have been limited to journal articles or short chapters in edited books. An analysis of a multiplicity of the coexisting religious approaches within the same country or period has generally been disregarded. However, two studies have recently chosen this direction: Surluiga’s essay “The ‘Fantastic’ Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema” and *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema* edited by Bradatan and Ungureanu.

¹²⁹ Daniel Biltereyst, and Daniela Treveri Gennari, “Catholics, Cinema and Power: An Introduction,” in *Moralizing Cinema: Film, Catholicism and Power*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³² See, among others, Gabriella Pozzetto, *Lo cerco dappertutto: Cristo nei film di Pasolini [I Look for Him Everywhere. Christ in Pasolini’s Films]* (Milan: Ancora, 2007); Tomaso Subini, *La necessità di morire: il cinema di Pier Paolo Pasolini e il sacro [The Necessity of Dying. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Cinema and the Sacred]* (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2007); Erminia Passannanti, *Il Cristo dell’eresia: rappresentazione del Sacro e censura nei film di Pier Paolo Pasolini [The Christ of Heresy. Representation of the Sacred and Censorship in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Films]* (Novi Ligure: Joker, 2009).

¹³³ See Mino Argenterì, “Il cattolicesimo di Liliana Cavani” [“Liliana Cavani’s Catholicism”], in *Lo sguardo libero: il cinema di Liliana Cavani [The Free Gaze. Liliana Cavani’s Cinema]*, eds. Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini, 130–134 (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1990).

¹³⁴ See Virgilio Fantuzzi, “Marco Bellocchio: tra sacralità e dissacrazione” [“Marco Bellocchio. Between Sacrality and Desecration”], in *Marco Bellocchio: il cinema e i Film [Marco Bellocchio. His Cinema and His Films]*, ed. Adriano Aprà, 70–91 (Venice: Marsilio, 2005); Clodagh J. Brook, “The Spectacle of the Unseen: Marco Bellocchio and Lure of the Catholic Church,” *Italian Studies* 68, no. 3 (2013): 399–410.

Surliuga's work focuses on the use of Catholic symbolism by Fellini, Bellocchio, Olmi and Pasolini and examines the extent to which such symbolism is used to achieve a sense of displacement and unease.¹³⁵ She identifies two distinct approaches. The first, namely that of Fellini and Bellocchio, "describe[s] the Catholic Church as a political institution whose mission involves the use of superstition and fantastic imagery to make the word of God understood in populist terms by non-elites."¹³⁶ The second, namely that of Pasolini and Olmi, "use[s] Catholic fantastic symbols to explain the occurrence of minor miracles in daily life."¹³⁷ Surliuga is categorical in attributing the directors' penchant to resort to fantastic elements in the portrayal of the Catholic Church to the failure of the ecclesiastic hierarchies to establish a true connection with the faithful.¹³⁸ It is only through the fantastic that the gap between a distant divinity and the people can somehow be bridged, albeit in the form of miracles and superstitions. She concludes: "The possibility of providing spiritual comfort has quickly been replaced by fantastic representations of superstition, and a magical belief that rituals will somehow tame all the fears and connect those who practice them to a divinity that has otherwise become remote and unknown."¹³⁹ While certainly an interesting work, Surliuga's essay still presents a number of problematic issues. Indeed, its scope prevents it from delving deeper into the subject matter and providing an exhaustive analysis of the seven films selected in her study. Further, while the interpretive lens of the Todorov concept of the "fantastic ensures thematic coherence,"¹⁴⁰ the questions of periodisation and historical framework remain rather problematic, as the films selected range from 1953 to 2007.

Religion in Contemporary European Cinema presents a number of case studies that centre on cinema and "religion in crisis." The many essays in the book focus on the independent, *auteurial*, non-Hollywood cinema of the likes of Lars Von Trier, Krzysztof Kieslowski and Michael Haneke and their representations of religious topics, which are approached "often in provocative, heretical or openly atheistic fashions."¹⁴¹ While I do not subscribe

¹³⁵ Victoria Surliuga, "The 'Fantastic' Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema," in *Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery*, ed. Regina Hansen (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 220.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Costică Brădăţan, "Introduction. Dealing (Visibly) in 'Things Not Seen,'" in *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema. The Postsecular Constellation*, eds. Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

to the sacramental and structural approach suggested by Bradatan in the introduction,¹⁴² I fully embrace the book's premise, that is "[...] the notion that religion cannot be simply dismissed from our lives as a useless remnant from the past. [...] the religious always returns; it keeps shaping our lives, informing our imaginary and dominating our thinking."¹⁴³ The main contribution of this volume is assessing a multiplicity of approaches to religion within a limited geographical area and a specific socio-historical juncture, that of post-secularism.

After having outlined the existing methodologies in the field of religion and film and identified Wright's approach as the most suitable for this research, I now move to a chapter of a similarly contextual nature, but with a different focus, namely the analysis of the official Catholic documents on film. Taking into account the suggestions of Biltereyst and Treveri Gennari, the next chapter provides an overview of the relationship between the institutional Church and cinema from its origins to the early 1970s.

¹⁴² Ibid., 2–4.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 6.

Chapter 2 Vatican Documents on Film from its Origins to the 1970s

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a large proportion of studies have concentrated on the analysis of the official documents promulgated by the Catholic hierarchies on the topic of cinema and the film industry. There is general consensus among scholars in crediting the Catholic Church with an early recognition of the potential of cinema. Since the birth of the medium, the Vatican has oscillated from benign curiosity to reverential fear and from patronising tolerance to open hostility. Nonetheless, it has never ceased to view cinema, first and foremost, as a vehicle for the spread of Catholic ideology. As Pratt points out regarding the case of the Catholic Church, “We are not in fact dealing with a static culture but with a process [...] this process can only be understood if we recognize the power dimension of cultural life: that the Church is constantly struggling to achieve and defend hegemony within Italian society.”¹ Since the very start, the Church’s not-so-secret agenda has been to create, in the words of Treveri Gennari, “a Catholic cinema for a Catholic country.”² This purpose has essentially remained unaltered through the years. In order to achieve its cinema-oriented goal, the Church has attempted to control both the production and the reception of films through a rather large *apparatus* of organisations and associations as well as through various kinds of publications.

In particular, the ecclesiastical hierarchy has often discussed cinema and the film industry, and even more so the means of social communication, through encyclicals, apostolic instructions, messages and speeches. In order to understand the Vatican’s position on motion pictures and how the Church has tried to influence the production and reception of Italian films, it is useful to analyse the most relevant documents compiled by the ecclesiastical hierarchy from its origins to the period considered in this research. Far from being a dull philological or hermeneutical exercise, the analysis of these documents allows us to uncover Catholic ideology in relation to the film industry. The encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* (*Vigilant Care*), promulgated by Pio XI in 1936, considers the implications derived from the advent and development of film. The two speeches known as *Il film ideale* (*The Ideal Film*) in 1955 and the encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* (*Wonderful Indeed*) in 1957 are

¹ Jeff Pratt, “Catholic Culture,” in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, eds. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 132.

² Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 12.

both testaments to Pope Pio XII's interest in cinema. The decree *Inter Mirifica (Among the Wonderful)*, issued by Paolo VI in 1963, also addresses the role of cinema as a "new medium" in modern society. The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope)*, one of the key documents of the Second Vatican Council, published in 1965, features an entire section on the relationship between the Catholic Church and culture, which proves enlightening insofar as it reaffirms the Church's instrumental view of contemporary culture. The Pontifical Council for Social Communication further expressed the Catholic view on the media through its pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio (Communion and Progress)* in 1971.³

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Initially, it seeks to give an account of the Church's ambivalent attitude towards cinema. On the one hand, it acknowledges the power and value of cinema; on the other, it assumes an extremely defensive position, constantly warning the faithful against the great dangers posed by the medium. This attitude is inscribed in the Church's broader attitude towards the arts, as they are seen alternatively as "interloper, competitor, handmaiden."⁴ Second, this chapter clarifies that the role that the Church attributes to cinema is mainly a didactic and informative one. In fact, the media, including cinema, are seen by the Church as primarily instruments that serve Catholic ideology, and it is this perspective that informed the relationship between cinema and the institutional Church throughout the twentieth century. The outcome of this investigation is important for understanding the ecclesiastical teachings or guidelines with which the films examined in this thesis agree as well as the Catholic values they uphold or critique.

³ In addition, both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* feature passages on the means of social communication. Interestingly, the observations of the media in the *Catechism* are grouped into a section that discusses the eighth commandment of "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." According to the Church, the means of social communication must first promote the conveyance of accurate and truthful information in accordance with the principles of human solidarity, equality and dignity. For more information, see Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), n. 531–533.

⁴ Terry Lindvall, "Silent Cinema and Religion: An Overview (1895-1930)," in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2011), 26.

From the Birth of Cinema to Vigilanti Cura

From the very beginning, the Church's stance on the film industry and cinema was characterised by a strong ambivalence, or by what Viganò describes as “double pedagogy,” namely the coexistence of supportive and concerned attitudes in relation to film.⁵ On the one hand, the Popes showed if not encouragement, at least tolerance, as both Leone XIII (1878–1903) and Pio X (1903–1914) gave permission to filmmakers to shoot some sequences in the Vatican;⁶ on the other, the Church took an openly adverse position through two decrees published in 1909 and 1918, which effectively forbade the clergy from attending any public screening.⁷

The Catholic Church started to develop a more systematic answer to the question during the early 1920s under the papacy of Pio XI (1922–1939), concurrent with the censorial measures taken in the United States by the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association guided by W. H. Hays.⁸ For example, the encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* (*That Wonderful Teacher*) published in 1929 prescribed “extended and careful vigilance” against books, radio and cinema, as “these most powerful means of publicity, which can be of great utility for instruction and education when directed by sound principles, are only too often used as an incentive to evil passions and greed for gain.”⁹

⁵ Dario E. Viganò, “The Roman Catholic Church, Cinema and the ‘Culture of Dialogue’: Italian Catholics and the Movies after the Second World War,” in *Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism and Power*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari (New York: Routledge, 2015), 36.

⁶ Lindvall, “Silent Cinema and Religion,” 26.

⁷ Gaye Ortiz, “The Catholic Church and its Attitude to Film as an Arbiter of Cultural Meaning,” in *Mediating Religion. Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, eds. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 183.

⁸ For an account of the events that led to the creation of the Hays Code and the Legion of Decency, see Gregory Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁹ Pio XI, “*Divini Illius Magistri*, Encyclical letter on Christian Education,” Vatican website, 31 December 1936, accessed 15 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri.html, sec. 90. Arosio underlines how *Divini Illius Magistri* already contains all the elements that characterise the later encyclical *Vigilanti Cura*, such as the condemnation of the profit motivation of the film industry, as well as the Church's extremely ambivalent attitude towards the medium. For more information, see Mario Arosio, “Cinema, comunicazione sociale e Magistero Ecclesiastico” [“Cinema, Social Communication and Ecclesiastical Teachings”], in *Cinema e cattolici in Italia [Cinema and Catholics in Italy]*, eds. Mario Arosio, Giuseppe Cereda, and Franco Iseppi (Milan: Massimo, 1974), 13.

However, the Church's attempt to control the production and reception of films was not limited to the publication of official documents. In addition to its official Vatican daily *L'Osservatore Romano* and, after 1968, to the Episcopal Italian conference newspaper *Avvenire*¹⁰ and to the ever-increasing number of parish cinemas,¹¹ the Church could count on an incredibly widespread network of organisations, associations and clubs with their publications, gatherings and meetings. This is indeed a characteristic of Catholicism in Italy, where a very large number of organisations operate at the grassroots level. In relation to this, Pratt points out,

Alongside the Church itself there exists a massive flanking of organisations for the direct mobilisation of the laity, such as Catholic Action, the organisations set up after Italian unification to counter the secularisation of society. These organisations make up what has been called the "Catholic World," and constitute a powerful structure which attempts to shape the culture of Italian society and maintain consent to the Church's authority.¹²

These organisations played a paramount role in spreading Catholic culture through publications, festivals, clubs (*cineforums*) and conferences. Two of the key Catholic organisations with regard to cinema were the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico (Catholic Centre for Cinema) and, on an international level, the OCIC. The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, which was established in 1935, was tasked with a number of different functions such as

[...] classifying films and distributing the classification throughout all Catholic institutions in Italy; publishing *La Rivista del Cinematografo*, official publication of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, with articles, reviews and comments on films; organising Catholic cinema clubs throughout Italy; setting up courses of history of cinema for priests; [and] producing films and documentaries.¹³

¹⁰ *Avvenire* was created in 1968 through the merger of *L'Avvenire d'Italia* and *L'Italia*. According to Sartori, in the 1960s *Avvenire* "established itself as the organ of the progressive wing of the Vatican Council." For more information, see Carlo Sartori, "The Media in Italy," in *No Markets and Myths: Forces for Change in the European Media*, eds. Anthony Wymouth and Bernard Lamizet (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 136.

¹¹ For more information on the role of parish cinemas in post-war Italy, see Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema*, 68–72; Viganò, "The Roman Catholic Church, Cinema and the 'Culture of Dialogue,'" 38–40; Daniela Treveri Gennari, "Moralizing Cinema While Attracting Audiences: Catholic Film Exhibition in Post-War Rome," in *Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism and Power*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari (New York: Routledge, 2015), 272–286.

¹² Pratt, "Catholic Culture," 132.

¹³ Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema*, 27.

The organisation's purpose was first to advise the Catholic public with regard to a film's morality and compliancy with Catholic principles through publications such as *Rivista del Cinematografo*,¹⁴ *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche* and the *Guida Cinematografica* as well as posts placed on church doors. In the words of Treveri Gennari, the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico "[...] sought to pronounce moral judgements on films that were coming out and to advise on those that were suitable to be screened or that could be if the appropriate cuts were made."¹⁵ It is certainly worth mentioning that a key figure in the period analysed in this research was don Francesco Angelicchio, who throughout the 1960s acted as Ecclesiastical Advisor for the Ufficio nazionale per le Comunicazioni Sociali and the Ente nazionale dello spettacolo.¹⁶ Not only was he able to accommodate and mediate between conflicting forces and positions within the Catholic world,¹⁷ but he also played a pivotal role in the genesis of Olmi's *E venne un uomo* and Cavani's *Galileo* as we see in Chapters Three and Four, respectively.

The power and influence of Centro Cattolico Cinematografico publications was enormous, as they could determine a film's success, or lack thereof, at the box office. Sorlin comments, "Reading the publications of the Catholic Centre for Cinema, especially its magazine *Cinematic Information*, one is struck by the overwhelming number of condemnations 'likely to provoke feelings of hate', 'absence of human feelings', 'devoid of any appreciable moral aim' are a few amidst hundreds of negative opinions."¹⁸ Arosio also emphasises the implications of the practice adopted by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, since it risked repeating the logic of the *index librorum prohibitorum*.¹⁹ The classification was organised in a number of different categories: film "per tutti" ("for everyone"), "per tutti con riserva" ("for all with reservation"), "per adulti" ("for adults"), "per adulti con riserva" ("for adults with reservation"), sconsigliabili ("inadvisable") and

¹⁴ For a more in-depth account of the role of *Rivista del Cinematografo*, see Marco Muscolino, "La 'Rivista del Cinematografo' dalla nascita al 1968" ["The 'Rivista del Cinematografo' from Its Birth to 1968"], in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia. Vol. II [Through the Screen. Cinema and Catholic Culture in Italy. Vol. II]*, eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2006), 181–196; Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian cinema*, 77–88; Viganò, "The Roman Catholic Church, Cinema and the 'Culture of Dialogue,'" 35–48.

¹⁵ Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema*, 28.

¹⁶ Tomaso Subini, "I cattolici e l'osceno: tra censura e revisione cinematografica" ["Catholics and the Obscene. Between Administrative Censorship and Cinematographic Revision"], *Arabeschi* no. 6 (2015): 65.

¹⁷ Paolo Fossati, "L'associazionismo Cattolico (associazioni, esercenti, cineforum)" ["The Catholic Associationism. Associations, Exhibitors and Cineforum"], in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia. Vol. II [Through the Screen. Cinema and Catholic Culture in Italy. Vol. II]*, eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2006), 326.

¹⁸ Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema: 1896-1996* (London: Routledge, 2002), 87.

¹⁹ Arosio, "Cinema, comunicazione sociale e magistero ecclesiastico," 26.

“esclusi” (“excluded”).²⁰ In 1968, the Commissione nazionale per la revisione dei film was created (now Commissione nazionale per la valutazione dei film, CNVF), under the direction of the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, the episcopal conference of the Italian bishops. Essentially, the Commissione took over the job of evaluating the morality of films.²¹ A new classification represented by Roman numerals from I (indicating a “positive film”) to IV (indicating “a seriously offensive film towards the Catholic doctrine or morality”) was created.²² The importance of the judgments expressed by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico and Commissione nazionale per la revisione dei film is reflected in the films’ receptions. For example, while *E venne un uomo* and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* were considered to be suitable for all, *Galileo*, *Teorema* and *Nel nome del padre* were classified, respectively, as for “Mature Adults” “Excluded” and “IV.”²³

Internationally, the OCIC played an important role. Established in 1928 following a Catholic International Congress on Cinema in The Hague, it aimed to connect Catholics working in the field of cinema.²⁴ It expanded during the 1930s, extending its membership to a growing number of countries. The Second World War brought this growth to a halt, however, as the Nazis invaded Belgium and Secretary General Father Jean Bernard was interned to Dachau.²⁵

Nonetheless, in the post-war era, the office began two projects, namely the creation of an international OCIC prize and the publication of an international cinematographic journal, the *International Film Review*,²⁶ allowing the OCIC to be strongly represented at film festivals. According to Malone, the criteria for an OCIC award were “quality filmmaking and positive values in harmony with the Gospel message. One early criterion was that a

²⁰ Ernesto G. Laura, “Il Centro Cattolico Cinematografico,” in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia. Vol. II [Through the Screen. Cinema and Catholic Culture in Italy. Vol. II]*, eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2006), 159.

²¹ Dario E. Viganò, “Il cinema: ricezione, riflessione, rifiuto” [“The Cinema: Reception, Reflection, Rejection”], accessed 26 June 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-cinema-ricezione-riflessione-rifiuto_\(Cristiani-d'Italia\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-cinema-ricezione-riflessione-rifiuto_(Cristiani-d'Italia)).

²² Ibid.

²³ The judgements expressed by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico in relation to *E venne un uomo*, *Galileo*, *Teorema*, *Nel nome del padre* and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* are considered in more detail in the analyses of the individual films.

²⁴ In 2001, the OCIC and Unda (International Catholic Association for Radio and Television) merged to form SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication. For more information, see Guido Convents, “Resisting the Lure of the Modern World: Catholics, International Politics and the Establishment of the International Catholic Office for Cinema (1918-1928),” in *Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism and Power*, eds. Daniel Biltreyest and Daniela Treveri Gennari, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 19–34; Peter Malone, “The Roman Catholic Church and Cinema (1967 to Present),” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2011), 59-64; “About Us,” Signis, accessed 26 June 2016, <http://www.signis.net/spip.php?rubrique6>.

²⁵ Malone, “The Roman Catholic Church and Cinema,” 53.

²⁶ Ortiz, “The Catholic Church and its Attitude to Film,” 183.

film coming from a communist country could not win an award but soon the films from Eastern Europe challenged that criterion and it was dropped.”²⁷ Ortiz underlines how “from the very beginning, the OCIC wanted to signal by the award that the organisation is not a censoring body.”²⁸ However, the OCIC created controversy by awarding the prize to Pasolini’s *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*) in 1964 and *Teorema* (*Theorem*) in 1968 as well as to John Schlesinger’s *Midnight Cowboy* in 1969.²⁹ The rewarding of *Teorema* caused a particularly bitter and long-lasting debate in the Catholic world, as explained in Chapter Five.

Vigilanti Cura

Vigilanti Cura (*Vigilant Care*) was published on 29 June 1936. According to Malone, “The title of the letter indicates the protective attitude against morally dubious material.”³⁰ In the introduction, the Pope praises the initiatives of the Legion of Decency, the main actor in the “holy crusade against the abuses of [...] motion pictures.”³¹ Indeed, the Legion had been able to hinder “the lamentable progress [...] of the motion picture art and industry in the portrayal of sin and vice.”³² While the first section of the letter refers to previous encyclicals and messages, the second section, named “The Power of Cinema,” focuses specifically on the burgeoning medium. This passage underlines the importance and significance of motion pictures as a modern form of recreation and their enormous value as an educational instrument. According to Pio XI, it is precisely this visual quality that makes cinema accessible and appealing to everyone, as “it speaks by means of vivid and concrete imagery which the mind takes in with enjoyment and without fatigue. Even the crudest and most primitive minds which have neither the capacity nor the desire to make the efforts necessary for abstraction or deductive reasoning are captivated by the cinema.”³³ The language employed here by Pio XI clearly highlights the low opinion in which the Vatican hierarchy holds cinema and those captivated by it.

²⁷ Malone, “The Roman Catholic Church and Cinema,” 59.

²⁸ Ortiz, “The Catholic Church and its Attitude to Film,” 183.

²⁹ The controversies surrounding *Teorema* and the OCIC are explored in greater depth in Chapter Five.

³⁰ Malone, “The Roman Catholic Church and Cinema,” 54.

³¹ Pio XI, “*Vigilanti Cura* Encyclical Letter on the Motion Pictures,” Vatican website, 29 June 1936, accessed 10 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_29061936_vigilanti-cura.html, Introduction.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., sec. “The Most Popular Form of Amusement.”

The encyclical continues by addressing the moral risks connected with the film industry, asserting that a tool as powerful and persuasive as cinema demands considerable moral guidance and close supervision. In fact, the danger films pose is great, according to the encyclical; not only are bad motion pictures “occasions of sin,”³⁴ but they can also go as far as upsetting the balance of society: “They are capable [...] of creating prejudices among individuals and misunderstandings among nations, among social classes, among entire races.”³⁵

Finally, the third and last section of the encyclical focuses on potential solutions to the danger posed by cinema and prescribes remedial measures. The Pope claims that “the problem of the production of moral films would be solved radically if it were possible for us to have production wholly inspired by the principles of Christian morality.”³⁶ However, the papacy is conscious of the enormous difficulties involved in establishing what would essentially be a new industry and rather directs its efforts to harnessing the production and reception of films:

But since We know how difficult it is to organize such an industry, especially because of considerations of a financial nature, and since on the other hand it is necessary to influence the production of all films so that they may contain nothing harmful from a religious, moral, or social viewpoint, Pastors of souls must exercise their vigilance over films wherever they may be produced and offered to Christian peoples.³⁷

The plan of action entails a joint effort of bishops and those Catholics working in the film industry to avoid “indecent topics” and encourage the production of Christian films as well as the creation of lists of existing appropriate Catholic films. In order to be able to rate films, bishops should create a national reviewing office composed of experts in the fields of both cinema and religion.³⁸

³⁴ Ibid., sec. “It Must Be Elevated.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., sec. “A Work for Catholic Action.”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Il film ideale

In 1955, Pope Pio XII (1939–1958) gave two speeches, only a few months apart, to representatives of the cinema world.³⁹ Known as *Il film ideale* (*The Ideal Film*), these speeches offered “a much more sophisticated analysis of the film industry and the role of cinema in modern society.”⁴⁰ In fact, they not only discussed extensively the “ideal film” and its characteristics, making this document arguably the most thorough and comprehensible Vatican text on cinema, but also offered considerations of the psychological effect on the audience.

The Pope pronounced the first of these speeches on 21 June 1955, one section of which focuses on the qualities of cinema and another in which he describes what constitutes the “ideal film.” De Berti comments, “In a sense, the Pontiff dedicates himself to dismantling the ‘cinematic machine’ in order to later propose its ideal use.”⁴¹ After recognising the status of cinema as the most powerful and influential art, with an “almost magical power of summoning in the darkness of its halls [...] crowds that are numbered by the billions,”⁴² Pio XII examined the characteristics of the medium in order to determine the origin of society’s fascination with films. According to his text, the attractive force of cinema derives from both its technical and its artistic qualities. However, in order to explain its enormous success, it is necessary to rely on psychological influences. The Pope argued that “it is necessary to take note of the important part played in it by the laws of psychology, either in so far as they explain how the film influences the mind, or in so far as they are deliberately applied to produce a stronger impression on the spectators.”⁴³

³⁹ Pio XII had previously stressed the importance of cinema in his speeches to members of the Motion Picture Executive Committee of Hollywood in July 1945 and to representatives of the American film industry in August 1945. In both cases, the Pope emphasised the social responsibility of the American film industry in both the United States and the world as a whole. For more information, see Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema*, 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴¹ Raffaele De Berti, “Dalla *Vigilanti Cura* al *Film ideale*” [“From *Vigilant Care* to *The Ideal Film*”], in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia Vol. II [Through the Screen. Cinema and Catholic Culture in Italy. Vol. II]*, eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2006), 95.

⁴² Pio XII, “Apostolic Exhortations to the Representatives of the Cinema World,” Vatican website, 21 June 1955, accessed 10 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-xii_exh_25101955_ideal-film.html, sec. I “The Art of Cinema—Its Importance.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The second part of the first speech identified three aspects under which the ideal film should be considered: in relation to the subject (the audience), object (the content) and community. The Pope addressed only the first of these considerations, stating that the ideal film should above all portray humans respectfully and in accordance with Catholic precepts. However, most importantly, the ideal film is discussed as having “a lofty and positive mission to accomplish,”⁴⁴ namely to guide and help humans in “maintaining and rendering effective [...] self-expression in the path of right and goodness.”⁴⁵ Further, although De Berti claims that “the conclusion of this first speech shows Pio XII’s extremely positive attitude towards cinema, which is not seen as a simple instrument of diversion and entertainment, but as a means to improve men with its ability to psychically involve the spectators,”⁴⁶ the Church’s view of cinema as a mere device to convey and deliver religious beliefs is still highly reductive.

The second speech was made to a selection of theatre managers and film distributors on 28 October 1955. The Pope commenced by acknowledging the fact that cinema “has become for the present generation a spiritual and moral problem of enormous importance.”⁴⁷ For this reason, Pio XII exhorted once again that industry representatives must safeguard the morality of films. The speech then illustrated the characteristics of the ideal film in relation to the content and community. In this regard, ideal films are divided into instructional and action films. Instructional films, which may be about nature, science, human history, arts or culture, derive their allure from communicating the truth to the audience, thereby contributing to increasing their knowledge. Moreover, owing to their educational content, instructional films “ought to be accurate, clearly intelligible, carried out by a perfect teaching method and artistic forms of a high order.”⁴⁸ By contrast, action films are more complex since they “represent and interpret the life and behaviour of men, their passions, longings and conflicts.”⁴⁹ Further, because they exert a profound influence on the audience, the film industry must exercise special vigilance to ensure their morality.

⁴⁴ Ibid., sec. “The Ideal Film in Relation to the Spectator,” subsec. (d).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ De Berti, “Dalla *Vigilanti Cura* al *Film ideale*,” 97.

⁴⁷ Pio XII, “Apostolic Exhortations to the Representatives of the Cinema World,” sec. “The Ideal Film—A Powerful Means of Mental Development, Education and Improvement.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., sec. “Instructional Films.”

⁴⁹ Ibid., sec. “Action Films.”

In particular, scrupulous care must be directed to action films on a religious subject: they must conform to truth and charity as well as show “considerable finesse and depth of religious sentiment and human tact.”⁵⁰ Action films that focus on the representation of evil are permitted, but only as long as they allow “a deeper understanding of life and its proper ordering, of self-control, of enlightenment and strengthening of judgement and action.”⁵¹

In the last section of this second speech, the papal exhortation focused on the relationship between cinema and community, considered in its fundamental units of family, state and Church. Treveri Gennari draws the reader’s attention to the terminology employed by the papacy while discussing the role of man and woman within family. She observes, “[...] the man was associated with expressions such as virile, firmly, loyalty, conjugal love, and women to wife, mother, irreproachable conduct, dedicated to the home and intimacy.”⁵² The focus placed by the Vatican on traditional gender roles is in line with its concern about promoting and maintaining social and political stability by safeguarding the family, “the vital cell of society.”⁵³

De Berti highlights Pio XII’s encouragement to produce films that, regardless of their content, can captivate and enthral the audience.⁵⁴ He claims that while *Vigilanti Cura* was more cautious, *Il film ideale*, despite warning against the possible moral risks, shows a positive attitude towards the film industry; cinema is in fact considered to be “an artistic instrument capable of contributing to the moral and social growth of people.”⁵⁵ However, while a shift in perspective is undeniable, the Vatican still fails to see cinema as a form of art detached from any moral or utilitarian function.

⁵⁰ Ibid., sec. “Films on a Religious Subject.”

⁵¹ Ibid., sec. “Films and Representation of Evil.”

⁵² Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian cinema*, 26.

⁵³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Catholic Social Doctrine* (London: Continuum Int. Publishing Group, 2004), 110–132.

⁵⁴ De Berti, “Dalla *Vigilanti Cura* al *Film ideale*,” 98.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 100.

Miranda Prorsus

The encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* (*Wonderful Indeed*) issued by Pio XII on 8 September 1957 consists of general instructions and specific considerations. Having stated that recent technical inventions are to be considered “gifts of God,”⁵⁶ Pio XII pays attention to cinema, radio and television, outlining the reasons for the interest of the Church in these new media. First, it is the duty of the Church to protect the faithful against anything morally dangerous, and the media seem to be just that. Second, these new means of communication allow the Church to fulfil its primary function, namely announcing the “message of eternal salvation.”⁵⁷ Once again, this argument attests to the Vatican’s cautious and suspicious attitude towards the media and its view of cinema as merely an instrument for the spread of religious ideas.

In the general section of the encyclical, the Pope focuses on the object of communication and the rules that regulate it. In other words, it concentrates on delivering “that news and those teachings which are really necessary or useful for the common good of human society.”⁵⁸ The Pope then maintains that the media should not be employed for propaganda or political ends. Rather than condemning the excesses of Fascism, however, the warning seems to express the Vatican’s growing fear about the spread of Communist ideology.⁵⁹ In addition, the Pontiff criticises advocates of aesthetics over content, stating that “approval cannot be given to the false principles of those who assert and claim freedom to depict and propagate *anything at all*.”⁶⁰ Pio XII then proceeds to highlight the vital role of the public authorities, which are encouraged to consider motion pictures not only from a political point of view, but also from a moral one. Once again, the papacy states that the true purpose of communication is “to serve truth and virtue”⁶¹ in the fields of information, education and show business. On the issue of mass education in particular, the Pope underlines the necessity of giving people the tools with which to evaluate the role and function of the media.

⁵⁶ Pio XII, “*Miranda Prorsus*, Encyclical Letter on Motion Pictures, Radio and Television,” Vatican website, 8 September 1957, accessed 8 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_08091957_miranda-prorsus.html, Introduction.

⁵⁷ Ibid., sec. “Reasons for The Church’s Interest.”

⁵⁸ Ibid., sec. “True Freedom of Communication.”

⁵⁹ In 1949, Pope Pio XII published a decree against Communism, which excommunicated anyone affiliated with Communist organisations. For more information, see Peter Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 242.

⁶⁰ Pio XII, “*Miranda Prorsus*,” sec. “Errors Concerning Freedom of Communication.”

⁶¹ Ibid., sec. “Sight and Sound Communication.”

Finally, the section on cinema reiterates the sentiments the *Vigilanti Cura* and *Il film ideale*. The Pope appeals to the sense of moral duty of those who work in the media and stresses the crucial role of the clergy in monitoring the work of producers, directors and actors: “It is the duty of the Bishops to admonish them, and, if necessary, to impose appropriate sanctions.”⁶² The most interesting initiative, however, is the establishment, together with prizes and awards for Catholic films, of the “World Social Communications Day.”⁶³

Inter Mirifica

On 4 December 1963, Pope Paolo VI (1963–1978) promulgated *Inter Mirifica*, a document dedicated entirely to the world of communications. The decree reaffirms the previously established principles relating to the media. In the first chapter, after underlining the importance of such new means of social communication as movies, radio and television, the Pope warns against the moral danger posed by the media and exhorts the audience to “learn moderation and discipline in their use of them.”⁶⁴ Paolo VI then urges “authors” to turn their creativity into a means for spiritual elevation and public education. He also invokes civil authorities “[...] to ensure, equitably and vigilantly, that public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered through the misuse of these media.”⁶⁵ In addition, the Church once again attributes potentially provocative and revolutionary qualities to the media and suggests that their “misuse” could lead to the breakdown of society.

The second chapter of the decree focuses on the pastoral activity of the Church. Priests and laypersons are urged to form and support public opinion in accord with Catholic teachings and guidelines, by promoting and contributing to virtuous films and supporting them with encouraging reviews and acknowledgements. The chapter also suggests sponsoring theatres owned or operated by Catholics. For this purpose, Paolo VI established the Secretariat for the Supervision of Publications and Entertainment, which was sustained by national offices and international Catholic organisations. The secretariat

⁶² Ibid., sec. “Producers and Directors.”

⁶³ The first World Social Communications Day was held on 7 May 1967, and this event continued through the papacies of Paolo VI (1963–1978), Giovanni Paolo (1978–2005), Benedetto XVI (2005–2013) and Francesco I (2013).

⁶⁴ Paolo VI, “*Inter Mirifica*, Decree on the Media of Social Communications,” Vatican website, 4 December 1963, accessed 8 November 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_04121963_inter-mirifica_en.html, sec. 10.

⁶⁵ Ibid., sec. 12.

was designed to guide both the authors and the audience of the new media as well as examine the quality of productions. Allum reminds us that “it is well known that Gramsci discussed the Catholic Church as an ideological apparatus with its own institutional grassroots structure (parishes and dioceses) and cadres (clergy) whose task was to guide and instruct the faithful about their place in the world.”⁶⁶ By the time *Inter Mirifica* was published, the Catholic Church was already able to count on numerous groups and institutions in the film industry. Indeed, these organisations continued to proliferate over time, strengthening and broadening the Catholic network.

Gaudium et Spes

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope)* was published in 1965, in the final phase of the Second Vatican Council. The second chapter of the second part of the constitution, entitled “The Proper Development of Culture,” is dedicated to the role of culture in the contemporary world. After defining culture as “everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions,”⁶⁷ the document emphasises the momentous changes taking place in the contemporary world and the need for the Church to address them. While at first stating that the Church and culture should be autonomous, the document then underlines the latter’s ancillary function. It states,

Culture is to be subordinated to the integral perfection of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole society. Therefore it is necessary to develop the human faculties in such a way that there results a growth of the faculty of admiration, of intuition, of contemplation, of making personal judgment, of developing a religious, moral and social sense.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Percy Allum, “Catholicism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 97.

⁶⁷ Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” Vatican website, 7 December 1965, accessed 10 November 2015, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, sec. 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, sec. 59.

In relation to this, Ortiz comments, “The Fathers recognise difficulties and challenges in contemporary culture, such as balancing dynamic cultural change with tradition, and the hostility to religion that secularism may bring. However, it affirms an approach to culture that is less elitist and offers a recognition of the diversity in social structures and cultures.”⁶⁹

Communio et Progressio

The pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio* (*Communion and Progress*) was issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communication in 1971 by order of the Second Vatican Council. Its first part aimed to combine the role of the media with Christian principles. The Pontifical Council begins once again by underlining the importance of cinema, radio and television, stating that “they inform a vast public about what goes on in the world and about contemporary attitudes and they do it swiftly,” thereby ensuring the “smooth functioning of modern society.”⁷⁰ Their purpose is also to encourage interaction and unity among humankind as well as share information and creativity, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of community and goodwill. The instruction then outlines “sincerity, honesty and truthfulness” as the essential requirements of communication.⁷¹

The second part of the instruction takes into account the contributions of the media to human progress. Not only do they allow interaction and collaboration among humans and thus make for “greater understanding and closer unity,”⁷² they also play a large role in eradicating illiteracy and helping developing countries. In this sense, they are essential to human progress. The text then proceeds to discuss the necessity of a thorough formation for both communicators and recipients in order to guarantee suitable social communication. Finally, the Council encourages collaboration between citizens and civil authorities as well as between nations and all Christians and believers.⁷³

⁶⁹ Ortiz, “The Catholic Church and its Attitude to Film,” 186.

⁷⁰ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, “*Communio et Progressio*, Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communications,” 23 May 1971, accessed 10 November 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.htm, sec. 6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, sec. 17.

⁷² *Ibid.*, sec. 20.

⁷³ The link between *Communio et Progressio* and the Second Vatican Council becomes especially clear here. Indeed, fostering a spirit of unity and collaboration was one of the Council’s main objectives, as attested to by the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (*Restoration of Unity*) on ecumenism of 1964. For more information, see Second Vatican Council, “*Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism,” 21 November 1964, accessed 10 November 2015,

The third part of the instruction addresses the commitments of Catholics in the media. While the first two of the four chapters point out the need for proper training for representatives of the Church, with an explicit call to both religious and laypeople to participate actively and competently in the diffusion of the media, the third chapter focuses on the different modes of communication: print, cinema, radio and television and theatre. The section on cinema reiterates its importance as well as the benefits derived from its use and its technical progress over time. Furthermore, Catholic organisations are encouraged “to plan, produce, distribute and exhibit films imbued with religious principles.”⁷⁴ In addition, films are discussed as being able to contribute a great deal to the eradication of illiteracy: “In regions where there is illiteracy films can make a very effective contribution to the provision of basic education. The illiterate are profoundly affected by images and can readily grasp the facts and ideas presented through them.”⁷⁵

Finally, the fourth chapter examines the structures, personnel and organisation of social communications, indicating the competent authorities for the implementation and supervision of the media. In particular, it is established that the body responsible for cinema is the OCIC.

Conclusion

What emerges from the analysis of Vatican documents on cinema is a coherent and cohesive system of thought in which connections are tightened and implications clarified by the constant references to earlier documents and policies. While this clearly accounts for internal coherence, it leaves very little space for anything beyond a monolithic and dogmatic ideology. In fact, all the documents, starting with *Vigilanti Cura*, seem to be structured in a similar fashion. First, the papacy recalls previous encyclicals, speeches, messages and instructions relevant to the topic. Second, it openly acknowledges the significance and power of cinema. Finally, it formulates a detailed plan for Catholics to become more actively involved in the film industry. This plan, however, shows the defensive attitude prevailing in the Catholic world. The media in general and cinema in particular are treated with cautious reverence and a hint of admiration, typical of an attitude of suspicion and fear. This aspect becomes clear when we pay closer attention to

(cont'd)

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

⁷⁴ Pontifical Pontifical Council for Social Communications, “*Communio et Progressio*,” sec. 145.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, sec. 146.

the language used in the documents. Cinema is often referred to as a “problem” and associated with words such as “power” (in the case of *Il film ideale* even a “magical power”), “influence,” “force” and “importance.” It is something that requires “vigilance,” “careful watching” and “scrupulous care” and it warrants plans for counteraction. The purpose of the Catholic plan of action is ultimately to create, in the words of Treveri Gennari, “a Catholic cinema for a Catholic country,”⁷⁶ or at least for a Catholic audience. Moreover, while a “production wholly inspired by the principles of Christian morality,” as worded in *Vigilanti Cura*, is the Vatican’s ultimate scope, the papacy also shows a more pragmatic attitude, directing its educational efforts both to those who work in the media and to the audience. However, while the appeals to the media are essentially of a moral nature, the audience is urged to develop critical skills. The papacy remains suspicious of the media’s intentions and focuses on preparing and educating the public on what is acceptable from a Catholic point of view.

While there is no doubt that the Catholic Church was indeed able to develop a more sophisticated approach towards cinema over the years and that, in the words of Ortiz, it “recognises cinema as an arbiter of cultural meaning,”⁷⁷ the Vatican’s position on the film industry is overall a reactionary one, as its main concern is to perpetuate the political and social status quo. In this sense, the Church’s attitude towards cinema is clearly symptomatic of its position in relation to modernity and the secular world. It is dedicated to a worldview that privileges tradition over change and only reluctantly engages with contemporary culture in a constructive way. In fact, all of the documents on cinema that span the 1920s to the 1970s confirm the Church’s constant efforts to take control of at least some aspects of Italian cultural and artistic life. This stance has left readers wondering whether, in the eyes of the Vatican, cinema will ever be relieved from this ancillary and utilitarian function.

The next sections of this thesis analyse the individual films. Chapter Three, in particular, focuses on Olmi’s *E venne un uomo*. The film, released in September 1965, just mere months before the closing of the Second Vatican Council in December of the same year, is an admired and orthodox portrayal of Pope Giovanni XXIII.

⁷⁶ Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema*, 12.

⁷⁷ Ortiz, “The Catholic Church and its Attitude to Film,” 187.

Chapter 3 Olmi's *E venne un uomo*

(*A Man Named John*, 1965)

If one film concretises the Catholic guidelines for cinema discussed in the previous chapter, it is Olmi's *E venne un uomo* (*A Man Named John*, 1965).¹ For its respectful treatment of the religious subject matter and scrupulous attention to Catholic principles and values, this admired and reverent narration of the life of Pope Giovanni XXIII, born Angelo Roncalli, could in fact be the embodiment of the “ideal film.” Based on the Pope's own diary *Il giornale dell'anima* (*Journal of a Soul*) and other writings, the film traces Roncalli's journey to his election to the papal throne. It begins with his childhood in the peasant village of Sotto il Monte and later depicts his admission to the seminary and his diplomatic career. Rather surprisingly, however, it leaves out what is considered to be his greatest achievement: the summoning of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Born out of the director's declared desire to avoid a merely hagiographic depiction,² while at the same time showing the utmost respect for the recently deceased Pope,³ *E venne un uomo* is a stylistically ambivalent film. A cross between a documentary and a work of fiction, the film mixes original newsreels and archival footage with fictional images. Similarly, it features both amateur actors and American star Rod Steiger in the dual role of the “spectator” and “mediator” of the Pope's actions and thoughts.

By focusing on Olmi's orthodox employment of Catholic themes and symbolism in the film, I intend to examine the director's personal approach to religion, thereby validating Gramsci's contention of the existence of a plurality of Catholic tendencies in Italy. In particular, the trajectory of Giovanni XXIII's life provides the perfect platform for Olmi to illustrate his idea of true Catholicism: one that is concerned with the gospel message of social justice, solidarity and equality for the poor and underprivileged, but which simultaneously chooses obedience and respect for authority as its highest values. It is a type of Catholicism that is mostly at home in the peasant world, a world that relies on and acknowledges the sanctity of nature; a world populated by simple, honest people with strong moral principles.

¹ This analysis is based on the Italian version of the film published in 2005 by Multimedia San Paolo. For more information, see *E venne un uomo*, directed by Ermanno Olmi (1965; France, Great Britain and Italy: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, and Multimedia San Paolo, 2005), DVD.

² Indeed, his stylistic choices might be considered to have resulted from his wish to try something different than hagiography, as he once declared in an interview. For more information, see Morando Morandini, *Ermanno Olmi* (Milan: Il castoro, 2009), 48.

³ Pope Giovanni XXIII died in June 1963.

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, I model my approach on the methodology suggested by Wright.⁴ Therefore, this chapter is organised around the following four areas of narrative, style, cultural and religious context, and reception. I begin by providing an overview of the papacy of Giovanni XXIII and the Second Vatican Council in order to highlight their strong impact and significance. The second and third parts examine the film's narrative and style, respectively, considering how they help construct a deeply respectful, almost hagiographic representation of the Pope and his world of origin, the peasant world. Finally, the fourth part illustrates how it was precisely this genuine reverence that turned the film into a rather stiff and sentimental product, prompting its tepid reception both inside and outside the Catholic world.

3.1 Cultural and Religious Context

Given the strong documentaristic flavour that characterises *E venne un uomo*, the relationship between the events of the time and the film's subject matter is not only extremely close, but also particularly relevant. *E venne un uomo* was conceived, shot and released during one of the most significant junctures in Italian Catholicism. Understanding the situation in Italy at that time helps explain the implications of such a pivotal event. Post-war Italy had been characterised by the strong uniformity of the political interests of the Catholic Church and the Christian Democracy (DC). Indeed, from 1946 to 1992, the DC was the plurality party in all general elections, inaugurating a political monopoly that lasted almost fifty years.⁵ At the same time, the widespread networks of parishes and dioceses as well as the existence of numerous Catholic organisations such as *Azione Cattolica*⁶ allowed the Catholic Church to permeate Italian society.⁷ In the words of Treveri Gennari: "Politics, economy and culture were in different ways under the sphere of influence of the Catholic Church and Pius XII's plan of 'Christian re-conquest' of Italy

⁴ Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 29.

⁵ The DC was finally dissolved in January 1994. For more information, see Gianfranco Baldini, "Christian Democracy. The Italian Party," in *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, eds. Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), kindle edition, 263-280.

⁶ *Azione Cattolica Italiana (Italian Catholic Action)* is the oldest and most popular lay Catholic organisation in Italy. For more information, see Danilo Veneruso, "L'Azione Cattolica," in *La nazione cattolica: Chiesa e società in Italia dal 1958 a oggi [The Catholic Nation: Church and Society in Italy from 1958 up to Now]*, ed. Marco Impagliazzo (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2004), 237-250; Ernesto Preziosi, ed. *Storia dell'Azione Cattolica: la presenza nella Chiesa e nella società italiana [History of the Catholic Action. Its Presence in the Italian Church and Society]* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008).

⁷ Percy Allum, "Catholicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104.

spread in all different areas of society [...]”⁸ The Catholic Church was virtually omnipresent; it was not only a matter of moral and spiritual ascendancy over the Italian population, but of actual political power. The alliance between the Vatican and the DC was cemented by the growing fear of communism. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) in Italy had, in fact, become an increasingly strong force nationally, even evolving into the largest communist organisation in the west.⁹ It was in this ideologically polarised context characterised by a momentous transformation of the social and cultural landscapes that the Catholic Church under the charismatic guidance of Pope Giovanni XXIII began to acknowledge and even respond to contemporary social issues.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected Pope on 28 October 1958. His intention to break with tradition was clear from the very start; not only did he choose the name “Giovanni,” which had not been used in centuries, within the first three months of his papacy he also announced his intention to convene an ecumenical council, the first in almost a hundred years.¹⁰ As Olmi observed, “Giovanni XXIII shook the drowsiness of a church that relied more on the ‘liturgy of the rite’ than the ‘liturgy of life.’”¹¹ The contrast with his predecessor Pio XII was stark. Pio’s austere presence commanded deference; Giovanni’s jovial attitude made people feel at ease. His peasant origins and likable personality quickly earned him people’s affection and he became known as “Il Papa buono,” or “the good Pope.” Throughout his papacy, Giovanni XXIII displayed an open attitude towards other religions and ideological beliefs. His time spent in Bulgaria as an apostolic delegate made him adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards communism and he was on good terms with the Soviet leaders, cultivating friendly relationships with them and even receiving them in private audiences.¹² At the same time, the PCI was attempting to redefine its political identity, developing an “Italian way to socialism.”¹³ In light of the brutal Soviet

⁸ Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema: American intervention, Vatican interests* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21.

⁹ In 1949, Pope Pio XII (1939–1958) issued a decree in which he officialised the excommunication of Catholics affiliated with communist organisations. For more information, see Peter Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 242.

¹⁰ The First Vatican Council was held in Rome in 1869–1870. Among other things, it defined the dogma of papal infallibility. For more information, see Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Council: Conciliar Movements, Religious Practice, and the Papacy from Nicaea to Vatican II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 192–193.

¹¹ Ermanno Olmi, *Lettera a una Chiesa che ha dimenticato Gesù* [*Letter to a Church That Has Forgotten Jesus*] (Milan: Piemme, 2013), 10.

¹² The Pope received an audience with Khrushchev’s son-in-law, Alexis Adzhubei. For more information, see John W. O’Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 297.

¹³ Norman Kogan, “Italian Communism, the Working Class, and Organized Catholicism,” *The Journal of Politics* 28, no. 3 (1966): 536.

repression of the revolt in Hungary in 1956, Togliatti¹⁴ carefully distanced himself from the most extreme communist fringes. Khrushchev's public condemnation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union encouraged the various national parties to seek a more autonomous path. Moreover, during the latter years of his life, Togliatti developed a more positive attitude towards the Catholic Church. He started to emphasise the need for collaboration between Catholic and communist forces, maintaining that anti-clericalism was a bourgeois, middle-class phenomenon rather than a working-class one.¹⁵ On 20 March 1963, Togliatti expressed his wish that Catholics and communists develop "a reciprocal understanding, a reciprocal acknowledgment of value."¹⁶ Finally, in his memorial to Khrushchev, written at Yalta in August 1964 just before his death, he appealed to communist forces to relinquish the "old atheistic propaganda" and pursue an effective collaboration with the Catholic world.¹⁷

Giovanni XXIII believed that the role of the Pope was that of a "good shepherd" and he thus made pastoral activity his highest priority.¹⁸ Unlike his predecessors, he unashamedly favoured his pastoral responsibilities in his diocese of Rome. Pollard observes that no Pope had visited Roman parishes for almost sixty years (from 1870 to 1929), including neither of John's predecessors.¹⁹ In addition to attending Roman parishes, Roncalli also visited the Roman jail Regina Coeli as well as the children's hospital.²⁰ Furthermore, his social concern was highlighted by his two encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* (*Mother and Teacher*, 1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*, 1963). *Pacem in Terris* was dedicated to examining the social problems of the contemporary world interpreted in light of Catholic doctrine and the tradition of Catholic social teachings. The main novelty of the encyclical lay in the fact that it was addressed not only to the clergy and the faithful, but also "to all men of good will."²¹

¹⁴ Palmiro Togliatti was one of the founders and leader of the PCI until his death in 1964. For more information, see Aldo Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti. A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

¹⁵ Kogan, "Italian Communism," 533.

¹⁶ "una comprensione reciproca, un reciproco riconoscimento di valori." Palmiro Togliatti, "Il destino dell'uomo" ["A Man's Fate"], in Palmiro Togliatti, *Opere. Vol. 6, 1956-1964*, ed. Luciano Gruppi (Editori Riuniti: Roma, 1984), 697.

¹⁷ Kogan, "Italian Communism," 541.

¹⁸ O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 295.

¹⁹ John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008), 134.

²⁰ O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 295.

²¹ Giovanni XXIII, "Pacem in Terris Encyclical Letter of Pope Giovanni XXIII," Vatican website, 11 April 1963, accessed 10 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html, sec. 1, title.

Moreover, Giovanni XXIII urged the Catholic Church to discern “the sign of the times,”²² by which he meant addressing the momentous changes taking place in modern society and re-evaluating the Church’s position in relation to such changes.

This endeavour was addressed during the Second Vatican Council, which opened on 11 October 1962 in St. Peter’s Basilica and closed on 8 December 1965 under Pope Paolo VI. More than two thousand cardinals, patriarchs and bishops from around the world met in Rome for four consecutive autumns.²³ For the first time, the Council was opened to Latin American and African churches and it welcomed representatives from Orthodox and Protestant churches as observers. In this sense, it was deeply “ecumenical;” in the words of Faggioli, it was “the first truly global council.”²⁴ Traditionally, ecumenical councils were convened to discuss theological matters.²⁵ However, the Second Vatican Council was born out of the need for a long overdue *aggiornamento* (updating).²⁶ Ginsborg explains that the Pope “had an acute sense of how fast the world was changing, and how important it was for the church to understand this change and adapt to it.”²⁷ In fact, between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, Italy went through radical economic, social and cultural transformations that had tremendous impacts on the habits of the population, including their relationship with religion. In particular, technological and scientific discoveries played a crucial role in questioning key Catholic concepts such as the existence of the soul and the possibility of an afterlife. They also prompted a change in sexual behaviours (e.g., contraception, abortion, chastity) and, more generally, a reassessment of many ethical issues such as euthanasia and celibacy. These changes contrasted sharply with traditional Catholic values, pushing the Church to reconsider its own position in this new ideological and ethical context, lest it lose authority not only within the public sphere, but also within the spiritual realm.

²² Ibid., sec. 126.

²³ Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Historically, ecumenical councils have been epoch-making events, from the First Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., which laid the foundations of the unity of Christianity, to the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which addressed the issues of the Church after the schism of the Protestant Reformation. The First Vatican Council was a brief and reactionary affair. It emphasised the Pope’s primacy in church governance, his infallibility, and his condemnation of rationalism, materialism and atheism among other things. For more information, see Tanner, *The Church in Council*, 185–195.

²⁶ The word *aggiornamento* was first used by Pope Giovanni XXIII in a speech on 25 January 1959. For more information, see John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 9.

²⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 260.

The Council maintained its pastoral quality under the papacy of Giovanni XXIII. In a radio message on 11 September 1962, a month before the beginning of the Council, the Pope stated, “The church presents itself to underdeveloped countries as what it really is, and wants to be: the Church of Rome, and particularly of the poor.”²⁸ Alberigo notes the enormity of this statement in that it both drew attention to the situation of third world countries and also encouraged more serious reflection on social justice and equality: “John XXIII was affirming the church’s commitment to embodying the message of the Gospel among these peoples as well, with special attention for the least advantaged.”²⁹ While the Catholic Church had always shown a strong interest in the poor and encouraged solidarity with the underprivileged, it was only on this occasion that this cause took the form of a shared and acknowledged project. Allum observes, “Church identification with poverty was not intended just as a matter of personal choice for single Catholics or whole Christian communities, but as a recognition that the Gospel message had once again to be as relevant for the poor, the neglected and the powerless, as it had been in the early Church.”³⁰

By the end of the Council’s first period, the Pope’s health condition was rapidly deteriorating. Although somewhat expected, his death on 6 June 1963 still came as a shock.³¹ Not only were people mourning the loss of the most beloved Pope in history, but they also feared the Council would end. Alberigo explains, “In addition to the sadness felt at the death of a man who had lived profoundly his role as father and teacher, some anxiety emerged over whether or not the Council would continue [...] There was no hiding the fact that the Council had many powerful opponents.”³²

To replace Giovanni XXIII, the Conclave elected the Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini, who chose the name Paolo VI. Montini had a monumental task ahead of him: not only did he have much to live up to as the new Pope, but he also needed to take the Council in hand. He immediately reassured the faithful that the Council’s works would

²⁸ “In faccia ai paesi sottosviluppati la Chiesa si presenta quale è, e vuol essere, come la Chiesa di tutti, e particolarmente la Chiesa dei poveri.” For more information, see Giovanni XXIII, “Radiomessaggio a tutti i fedeli cristiani ad un mese dal Concilio,” Vatican website, 11 September 1962, accessed 10 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19620911_ecumenical-council.html, sec. “A servizio dell’uomo reso figlio adottivo di Dio.”

²⁹ Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 15.

³⁰ Percy Allum, “Uniformity Undone: Aspects of Catholic Culture in Postwar Italy,” in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Robert Lumley (St. Martin: New York, 1990), 90–91.

³¹ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 300–301.

³² Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, 35.

resume in the upcoming autumn, “a decisive act that showed he gave no ear to the voices urging that the council be suspended ‘for a while,’ to be resumed at some unspecified date in the future.”³³ However, the transition was not entirely seamless as “he later announced modifications in council procedures and held an important meeting with all the members of the curia in which he gently but firmly told them to expect changes in their mode of operation.”³⁴ Under his guidance, the Council continued until 1965, albeit in a less progressive direction.

Overall, the Council was able to introduce a large number of significant reforms, as attested to by the sixteen documents issued during the four-year session.³⁵ The work of the bishops and theological *periti* (“experts”) addressed both doctrinal matters and the internal organisation of the Church.³⁶ For example, it was clarified that the Pope and episcopal college shared joint leadership of the church, dispelling the notion that the bishops were simply the pontiff’s “delegates.”³⁷ Other parties focused on the liturgy, notably with the introduction of Mass in vernacular languages to encourage greater participation.³⁸ Furthermore, the central role of the Scriptures was once again highlighted. In what was considered to be a Christocentric shift, more emphasis was also placed on the Gospel message of solidarity with the poor and underprivileged.³⁹

³³ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 305.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Many studies have discussed these documents in detail. See, for example, Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012); Edward Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007).

³⁶ In their study, Gaillardetz and Clifford identify the following four main areas of concern for the Second Vatican Council: the foundation of the Church, the external relations of the Church, the mission of the Church and the people of God. The foundation of the Church rests on four pillars: the liturgy, the church, the revelation and the role of the Church in the world. These major topics are discussed in the four Constitutions. The liturgical question is addressed in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium (Holy Council, 1963)*; the Church is addressed in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium (Light of the People, 1964)*; the Revelation is addressed in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation—Dei Verbum (Word of God, 1965)*; and the role of the Church in the world is addressed in the *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope, 1965)*. For more information, see Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 11-73.

³⁷ Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 123.

³⁸ Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 18–19.

³⁹ Jeff Pratt, “Catholic Culture,” in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, eds. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 137.

Arguably, the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*, 1965) was the most important and innovative document because it “originated from John XXIII’s concern that one of the Council’s principal tasks should be to respond to the world’s problems and hopes: poverty, liberation, and peace.”⁴⁰ Further, the Pastoral Constitution also addressed the role of culture in the contemporary world, as already mentioned in Chapter 2.

Theologians and scholars have extensively debated the significance of the Second Vatican Council. While the progressive forces in the Church argued that the Council represented a true moment of change and renovation, the more conservative wing of the Curia claimed that it was ultimately a continuation of Catholic tradition.⁴¹ Regardless of these various interpretations, the Council represented a crucial moment not only in the life of the Catholic Church, but also in the evolution of western society. For the first time in history, the Catholic Church, traditionally entrenched in defensive positions, sought to update its relationship with the world, taking into account contemporary social and political issues and adopting a more tolerant attitude towards different religious and ideological beliefs. In relation to this, Dillon states, “The strong consensus among sociologists, historians, and theologians is that Vatican II redefined the church from a rigidly hierarchical, authoritarian, imperialist, antimodern institution to one that has become more relevant to and engaged in the modern world.”⁴²

However, despite its enormous impact on society, the Council still failed to address some of the most pressing issues of the time such as clerical celibacy, birth control, the reform of the Roman Curia and the Synod of Bishops.⁴³ In particular, “the strongest resistance of Vatican II and official church teaching since has been to one important aspect of the modern social revolution—the emancipation of women.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Allum, “Catholicism,” 107.

⁴¹ For an overview of these different positions, see Kristin Colberg, “The Hermeneutics of Vatican II: Reception, Authority, and the Debate Over the Council’s Interpretation,” *Horizons* 38, no. 2 (2011): 230–252; Kristin Colberg, “Continuity and or Discontinuity at Vatican II? Examining the Council in the Context of the ‘Long Nineteenth Century,’” *The Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 6 (2012): 929–942.

⁴² Michael Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 47.

⁴³ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 6.

⁴⁴ Linda Woodhead, “Christianity,” in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, eds. Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami, and David Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 185.

Interestingly, these issues were becoming increasingly relevant, and they would prove to be a fertile ground for the birth and growth of social movements such as feminism, the labour movement and student protests as well as constituting the battlefield on which both political and popular alliances would be decided.⁴⁵

3.2 Narrative

Olmi's extremely edifying portrayal of Roncalli is achieved through a number of narrative choices. First, the director constantly likens Giovanni XXIII to Jesus by underlying their biographical and character similarities. Both born to poor but loving families, they display acute social awareness and their selfless and generous disposition prompts them to dedicate their lives to the less fortunate. They are also intolerant of the corruption that plagues their societies and they strive to rectify that. Olmi further underlines Roncalli's orthodoxy through references to biblical quotes, Catholic values, symbols, sacraments and devotional practices. Through the portrayal of the Pope and his family, Olmi also sanctifies the peasant world, the bedrock of the most genuine form of Catholicism, and highlights its deep respect for nature, reverential and devout attitude and strong work ethic.

Plot and Structure

E venne un uomo is constructed in a rather peculiar fashion. The film begins with an eleven-minute black and white prologue showing archival footage and images of Giovanni XXIII, his collaborators, the clergy and the faithful cheering him in Piazza San Pietro as a voiceover (Rod Steiger in the English version and Romolo Valli in the Italian version) provides a commentary. The first part of the prologue focuses on the Pope's achievements, while the second illustrates rather programmatically the film's intent and reasons behind the stylistic choices employed. During the first part, the voiceover touches on four aspects of Roncalli's papacy: first, his amicable personality (his jovial character, his disregard for official protocol, his simplicity and his devotion to his parents); his visits to the Roman prison Regina Coeli and the children's hospital; his travels and meetings with people of different religious and political beliefs; and his summoning of the Second Vatican

⁴⁵ This aspect is explored in greater detail in Chapters Four and Six.

Council, “a prodigy of intuition and goodwill.”⁴⁶ This section of the prologue, already somewhat pedantic in its didactic nature, also appears rather confusing: the strong emphasis of the voiceover on Roncalli’s genuine and accessible personality contrasts sharply with the images appearing on screen, which portray the pontiff in official situations (**Image 3.1**) during formal meetings and ceremonies and therefore diverge from the intimate portrait the film claims it wishes to offer.

After this introductory section, the voiceover begins to address the audience directly, stating the film’s intention as well as the stylistic and narrative means employed to actualise this intention. In what appears to be some sort of disclaimer, it is explained that the desire is to pay respectful homage to Pope Giovanni XXIII “without tricks or disguises.”⁴⁷ Such an endeavour, the commentator observes, will be pursued by having Steiger play two roles: in the first part, he will act as a spectator by visiting the places of Roncalli’s childhood and witnessing the events of his early life. In the second part, he will play the role of the “mediator” between the Pope and the audience, interpreting the former’s words and actions. In particular, in his role as a mediator, Steiger will not be dressed as Roncalli, nor will he be wearing any makeup. Indeed, any attempt to make Steiger resemble the Pope would be both distasteful and disrespectful.

⁴⁶ “Un prodigio di intenzione e buona volontà.” All translations of Italian dialogue from the five films selected are my own, unless otherwise specified.

⁴⁷ “Senza trucchi nè travestimenti.”



Image 3.1 An archival image of Pope Giovanni XXIII employed in the film's prologue

The narrative follows the events of the Pope's life chronologically. Interestingly, the film maintains a simple timeline, choosing a contemporary setting instead of recreating the events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, although we follow events spanning more than seventy years, we never really leave the 1960s. A large part of the film is dedicated to Roncalli's childhood in Sotto il Monte, including his Catholic upbringing under the watchful care of his loving parents and Uncle Zaverio; his service as an altar boy to Don Pietro, the village priest; his religious calling; and his education in the seminaries of Bergamo and Rome. Subsequently, we witness the evolution of Roncalli's distinguished career, including his ordination and first important job as Secretary to Bishop Radini Tedeschi of Bergamo and his diplomatic missions as an apostolic delegate, which took him first to Bulgaria and then to Turkey, Greece and France. Finally, the film focuses on Roncalli's last office as Patriarch of Venice before his election to the papal throne in 1958. After that, the narration is interrupted: the epilogue shows the archival footage once again, giving the impression of circularity, while the voiceover provides comments on the Pope's death.

Giovanni XXIII as a Christ-like Figure

Filmic Christ-like figures, according to Baugh, are embodied in different forms including saints or priests.⁴⁸ Giovanni XXIII is both: an ordained priest and, since April 2014, a saint.⁴⁹ The priest as a Christ-like figure, Baugh explains, is “a character who through ordination is an *alter Christus*, who represents Christ in the celebration of the sacraments and who in his mission represents the pastoral teaching and guiding activity of Christ.”⁵⁰ In relation to the saint, Baugh observes, “Evidently, the Christian saint fulfills this challenge to a particularly high degree, and thus is more clearly an image or figure of Christ.”⁵¹ He also warns the reader about the perils of overemphasising the character’s good qualities, which is exactly what happens in *E venne un uomo*. He states,

Sometimes the treatment of the saint is so devotional-sweet that the salt of the authentic imitation of Christ disappears. As in the case of the Jesus-film, sometimes the style of the saint-film—the presence of major stars, the choice of the epic or spectacular approach, an overpowering music score, a particular historical or ideological bias—distracts from the theme of sainthood as an *imitatio Christi* and renders the protagonist less incisive, less authentically a Christ-figure.⁵²

As the film’s intention is to draw a parallel between Jesus and Giovanni XXIII, the entire account of Roncalli’s life can be considered to be a Catholic narrative. The analogies, many of which are biographical, are numerous. First, both Giovanni XXIII and Jesus were born to poor families of humble origins. In particular, the scene of Angelo’s birth echoes the nativity as described in the Gospel. Although his birth does not take place in a manger,⁵³ but rather in a rather small bare room, Roncalli’s family is as poor as Mary and Joseph were. Moreover, in Catholic iconography, the nativity scene has often depicted animals, particularly a donkey and an ox. Similarly, animals are also a constant presence in *E venne un uomo*, perhaps because, as O’Malley explains, Roncalli “grew up in a household where the ground floor was occupied by six cows.”⁵⁴ In relation to Christian

⁴⁸ Lloyd Baugh. *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film* (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 110.

⁴⁹ On 27 April 2014, Giovanni XXIII was canonized alongside Giovanni Paolo II by Pope Francesco I. For more information, see Francesco I, “Holy Mass and Rite of Canonization of Blesseds John XXIII and John Paul II,” Vatican website, 27 April 2014, accessed 10 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140427_omelia-canonizzazioni.html.

⁵⁰ Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 216.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Lk 2:7 (All the quotes in this thesis are based on the English Standard Version of the Bible).

⁵⁴ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 293.

symbolism, Apostolos-Cappadona observes that the ox is usually associated with docility and physical strength: “As a powerful animal which voluntarily bore the yoke to plow the master’s fields, the ox was a symbol for Christ as the Redeemer who worked and suffered for the good of humanity.”⁵⁵ Further, the ox is also associated with the Evangelist Luke, “whose Gospel emphasized the sacrificial and redemptive aspect of the life and death of Christ.”⁵⁶ Moreover, Owens notes how Angelo’s birth in the film is “announced” by a storm in the same way that the death of Christ was followed by one.⁵⁷

Second, Giovanni XXIII and Jesus share certain psychological traits; for example, both feel a strong sense of indignation at the prevailing corruption of their respective societies. In the “Cleansing of the Temple” narrative, Jesus famously expelled moneychangers from the temple and condemned their greed.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, in the film, Roncalli similarly denounces both the corruption of the clergy and the hierarchical centralism of the Catholic Church. As Baugh explains, “Another motif typical of the Christ-figure is that of the commitment to justice. The protagonist of the film often enters a community or a situation in which injustices are being perpetrated against the people, and one aspect of his mission is to free the people from this yoke.”⁵⁹

Finally, the archival footage shows Roncalli’s visits to Regina Coeli and the children’s hospital (**Image 3.2**). The film emphasises his solidarity with the poor and oppressed as well as his love for children, which are both Christ-like characteristics.⁶⁰ As Kozlovich points out, “The Christ figure’s sacrifice and/or death is specifically for others based upon higher principles, and it is usually done with honesty, sincerity and nobility (i.e., not trite, selfish or deluded reasons). Those saved are usually of ‘lesser’ worthiness, ability, talent, power, etc., than the Christ-figures themselves.”⁶¹ Clearly, by focusing on these particular episodes in the life of Giovanni XXIII and on some of his psychological traits, the film takes the Christ analogy even further. Hence, Roncalli’s story is inherently Catholic, not only because of its Catholic imprinting, but also because of its biographical elements.

⁵⁵ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 263.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 263–264.

⁵⁷ Charlie Owens, *Ermanno Olmi* (Rome: Gremese, 2001), 55.

⁵⁸ Mk 11:15–19; Mt 21:12–17; Lk 19:45–48; Jn 2:13–16.

⁵⁹ Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 206.

⁶⁰ Mt 19:14; Lk 18:16.

⁶¹ Anton Karl Kozlovich, “The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8, Fall (2004), para. 50.



Image 3.2 An archival image from the prologue, showing Pope Giovanni XXIII during his visit to the children’s hospital

Biblical Quotes

E venne un uomo quotes a large number of biblical passages. As Morandini points out, even the film title itself comes from the Gospels: “E venne un uomo, mandato da Dio, il cui nome era Giovanni” (“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John”).⁶² This passage highlights the revolutionary impact of Giovanni XXIII’s papacy and reinforces Roncalli’s image as a “man sent from God.” Another passage from the Scriptures occupies a prominent place in the film. Instead of a traditional bedtime story, Uncle Zaverio reads the following excerpt from the Gospel of Matthew to young Angelo:

(29) Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.⁶³

⁶² Morandini, *Ermanno Olmi*, 47. See Jn, 1:6.

⁶³ Mt 24: 29–31.

This passage can be interpreted as a reference to Roncalli's accession to the papal throne. After the hardships ("the tribulation") of the Second World War and the Cold War, Giovanni XXIII ("the Son of a Man") was elected Pope and endowed with "power and great glory." Moreover, he announced his intention ("he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call") to convene an ecumenical council, gathering bishops and patriarchs ("his elect") from across the world ("from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other"). Once again, the film employs Catholic elements to enhance the parallelism between Giovanni XXIII and Jesus.

"Obedientia et Pax"

On the way to his first assignment in Bulgaria, Roncalli explains that he has chosen the Latin formula *obedientia et pax* ("obedience and peace") as his episcopal motto. He writes in his diary: "These words represent my story and my life a little."⁶⁴ Certainly, Roncalli's life (as well as that of his family) as portrayed in the film really does seem to adhere to these values—and we could go as far as arguing that they are also the north in Olmi's own moral compass. The characters in *E venne un uomo* are softly spoken, polite and respectful and they endure hardship in silence, accepting their poor and underprivileged conditions without complaint let alone protest. Indeed, the only episode of rebellion in the film, i.e., the striking factory workers in the small village of Ranica near Bergamo, still manages to convey a message of compassion and solidarity. The film shows Bishop Radini Tedeschi being understanding and collaborative: in addition to helping the workers get food, he openly expresses his solidarity and condemns those who are withholding it by reminding them that "the Church [...] does not intend to be at the service of any political party, nor of any prejudice."⁶⁵ Ginsborg mentions the episode as a key moment in Roncalli's personal and spiritual growth: "[...] Roncalli followed the lead of his bishop, Mgr Radini Tedeschi, in supporting a strike by textile workers in the Bergamasco [...] As Roncalli wrote later, 'at stake was the fundamental principle of the liberty of Christian workers to organize themselves in the face of the powerful organization of capital.'"⁶⁶

⁶⁴ "Queste parole sono un po' la mia storia e la mia vita."

⁶⁵ "La chiesa [...] non vuole essere la serva di nessun partito, di nessun pregiudizio."

⁶⁶ Ginsborg, *A History of Italy*, 259.

The film also strongly emphasises Roncalli's profound respect and immense gratitude towards his parents, in accordance with the fourth commandment of "Honour thy father and mother."⁶⁷ Shots and close-ups of members of his family are intercut throughout the film, while Steiger repeatedly voices his appreciation and admiration for the values instilled in him by his loved ones, conveying his fondness and nostalgia for the simple yet upstanding world in which he was raised. However, although his recollections are fuelled by genuine sentiments, his words cannot help but sound patronising: "After I left home, around ten years of age, I read many books and learnt many things that you could not teach me. But the few things I learnt from you are still the most precious and important."⁶⁸ Such a statement, coupled with the montages of country life in *Sotto il Monte* and close-ups of his smiling relatives, often results in rather contrived and saccharine situations.

This acceptance of all forms of authority is also central to Catholicism. After all, the first commandment prescribes absolute obedience and selfless devotion: [2] "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" and [3] "You shall have no other gods before me."⁶⁹ In the film, these principles are clearly demonstrated by the patriarchal structure of the family. After giving birth, the mother immediately asks Uncle Zaverio for his opinion on the baby as though he is the only one whose approval is worth seeking. To understand the film's message of acceptance and obedience, one sequence in the film is particularly significant. When young Angelo steals a pumpkin from the landowner's property and takes it home (**Image 3.3**), Uncle Zaverio refuses to let him in and orders him to give it back immediately. Angelo is seen here to have violated both the seventh commandment of "Thou shalt not steal"⁷⁰ and the ninth commandment of "Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbour's."⁷¹ Their poverty is no excuse, and the fact that the landowner might not have noticed is hardly relevant.

⁶⁷ Ex 20: 1–17.

⁶⁸ "Quando sono uscito di casa, verso i dieci anni di età, ho letto molti libri e imparato molte cose, che voi non potevate insegnarmi. Ma quelle poche cose che ho appreso da voi in casa sono ancora le più preziose e importanti."

⁶⁹ Ex 20: 1–17.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.



Image 3.3 Young Angelo carrying the stolen pumpkin

Catholic Sacraments and Devotional Practices

Olmi's film refers to the Catholic sacraments of baptism, holy orders and the anointing of the sick. The sacraments, detailed in both the Gospel and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, essentially function as temporal and spiritual marks of Christian life.⁷² For example, the scenes of Roncalli's baptism and ordination signal, respectively, his "[...] gateway to life in the Spirit"⁷³ and the mission entrusted to him by Christ.⁷⁴ It is worth noting the importance that Angelo's baptism, in particular, holds for this entire family. As soon as he is born, after concluding that he is healthy and in no immediate danger, Uncle Zaverio is quick to suggest the following: "In any case, it would be better to baptise him - that is always a good thing to do"⁷⁵ (**Image 3.4**).

⁷² Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), n. 1210.

⁷³ Ibid., n. 1213.

⁷⁴ Ibid., n. 1536.

⁷⁵ "Ad ogni buon conto, sarebbe bene farlo battezzare, che quella è sempre una cosa ben fatta."



Image 3.4 Angelo's baptism

According to Catholic doctrine, children are also born “with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin,”⁷⁶ making it necessary for them to be baptised in order for their souls be saved. It follows that children dying before having been baptised were a terrifying prospect, one to be avoided at any cost in order to ensure the salvation of their souls:

As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children [...] allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.⁷⁷

In another sequence, Roncalli decides to reduce his daily quantity of food and wine, drawing parallels with Jesus fasting for forty days and forty nights in the desert.⁷⁸ Finally, a rather long scene is dedicated to the illness and death of Bishop Radini Tedeschi. Previously known as “extreme unction,” the anointing of the sick has the main function of

⁷⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1250.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 1261.

⁷⁸ Mk 1: 12–13; Mt 4:1–11 and Lk 4:1–13.

forgiving sins and preparing to pass over to eternal life.⁷⁹ By recreating the administration of these sacraments, Olmi demonstrates the conformity of Roncalli's upbringing to Catholic teachings as well as the depth of his faith and the strength of his commitment to Catholicism.

A large number of devotional practices such as celebrations, processions and prayers can be found in *E venne un uomo*. As explained by *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium (Sacred Council)*, the spiritual life of the faithful is not limited to participation in the liturgy, but also relies on devotional practices.⁸⁰ Strongly encouraged by ecclesiastical hierarchies, these practices were recently collected in the *Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy*,⁸¹ issued in 2001 under the papacy of Giovanni Paolo II. In the film, we witness the Roncalli family reciting the rosary together led by Uncle Zaverio, the only family member that knows a little Latin (**Image 3.5**). The scene serves to illustrate their religious zeal and dedication as well as their faithful adherence to the ecclesiastical guidelines.



Image 3.5 Uncle Zaverio leading the rosary while holding young Angelo in his arms

⁷⁹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1532.

⁸⁰ Paolo VI, “*Sacrosanctum Concilium* Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” Vatican website, 4 December 1963, accessed 10 November 2015, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, sec. 12.

⁸¹ For more information, see Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, “*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*,” Vatican website, December 2001, accessed 10 November 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html.

In another sequence, the film portrays a religious procession in Sotto il Monte. Angelo, sitting contently on his father's shoulders, watches the ceremony in awe. The scene rhymes with a later episode in the film when Roncalli attends an orthodox procession during his diplomatic mission in Bulgaria, thereby allowing him to reflect on religious tolerance and ecumenism (**Image 3.6**). In fact, the orthodox priest warns Roncalli as follows: "It says in the Gospel that God forgives every sin, but, nevertheless, one sin will not be forgiven either on this earth or in Heaven. What is this sin? Isn't it by chance the sin of divisions within the Church?"⁸² In relation to this, the *Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy* underlines the communal nature of processions: "The faithful feel united with each other, and intent on giving concrete expression to their Christian commitment throughout the journey of life."⁸³



Image 3.6 Roncalli kissing the sacred book during an orthodox procession in Bulgaria

⁸² "Si legge nel Vangelo che Dio perdona tutti i peccati, ma che, tuttavia, un peccato non sarà perdonato né su questa terra, né in cielo. Qual è questo peccato? Non sarà forse il peccato delle divisioni nella Chiesa?"

⁸³ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, "Directory of Popular Piety and Liturgy," sec. 245–247.

Finally, another long sequence in the film is dedicated to the Feast of the Assumption, which is celebrated on 15 August every year and is “deeply imbedded in popular piety.”⁸⁴ Despite its theological relevance—it anticipates the resurrection of the body—the practice is especially significant because of its communal nature. In the film, the entire village takes part in the preparations with great enthusiasm. The feast represents an occasion for the people of Sotto il Monte to express their faith and reinforce the feeling of unity and harmony in the community. As in the works of Pasolini, as we see in the fifth chapter of this thesis, the peasant world holds a spiritual primacy for Olmi.

Nature as a Lost Paradise: The Peasant World

In Olmi’s eyes, the lifestyle of the peasantry is symbolic of Catholic purity, honesty and integrity; their lives revolve almost exclusively around work and devotion in line with the monastic rule of *Ora et Labora* (“Pray and Work”). Interestingly, Olmi’s view that the peasant existence is the highest expression of a true Catholic life finds validation in the Catholic tradition. In fact, Catholicism has always expressed an interest in the peasant and rural worlds. Allum explains,

For the Roman Catholic, rural society represented a fundamental point of reference for the identification of ethico-religious and political values (Man–God–Nature). It has been argued that the Popes transposed the Enlightenment myth of the ‘noble savage’ into the ideology of the ‘noble peasant’—last refuge of healthy customs and the true faith.⁸⁵

In Olmi’s films, peasants are portrayed as simple, good-hearted people who lead modest, quiet lives. They do not indulge in frivolous activities, and whatever free time they have is spent at church or praying together. There are no trivialities, no distractions and no complaints. With their “ingenuous and instinctive wisdom,”⁸⁶ to borrow an expression from Gramsci, they can offer insights and moments of deep and profound reflection that would have escaped more educated minds. As a result, and as arbitrary as it may seem, Olmi establishes a relation between poverty of means and spiritual richness.

⁸⁴ Ibid., sec. 181.

⁸⁵ Allum, “Uniformity Undone,” 83.

⁸⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume II*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 121.

This extremely positive view of the peasantry is accompanied by an equally romanticised portrayal of rural spaces. In *E venne un uomo*, as in all his works, Olmi constructs an idyllic image of a world that is pure and uncorrupted in sharp contrast to urban life in 1960s Italy. He insists on a natural rhythm marked by the succession of the seasons, tranquillity of the countryside and simple joys of the peasants and their hard work. Keates argues that in Olmi's films, "Rusticity is not romanticised yet viewed nevertheless as something whose components and rhythms are desirable alternatives to the mechanistic lifelessness surrounding modern urban areas."⁸⁷ In this respect, one of the first sequences of *E venne un uomo* is particularly significant. Steiger, while driving from the city to Sotto il Monte, comes across a car accident. The scene is incredibly hectic: cars are speeding and constantly overtaking each other against a background of loud noises producing a strong sensation of danger. The change in scenery provides relief as the peaceful atmosphere of the countryside replaces the frenetic pace of the city.

This contrast between city and countryside is a recurring feature of Olmi's work. Young observes, "This becomes a key theme in films like *One Fine Day* (1968), where the values of rural society disintegrate in his portrait of a Lombard industrialist who accidentally runs over a man in his car, and *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*, which poignantly sings the swan song of an Eden-like harmony between man and nature."⁸⁸ Young notes that this attitude has ultimately been detrimental to the director's reception, as critics have accused him of being an "apologist for an unchanging natural world and an enemy of modernity."⁸⁹ However, the practice of juxtaposing an idyllic pastoral setting with a corrupted, wasted urban one was characteristic of cinema of the time. In fact, as Sorlin explains, "Films shot in actual locations, and intent on respecting the characteristics of the filmed areas, offered highly contrasting interpretations of Italian landscapes. On the one hand, there was the desert, urban or industrial, a Nature ruined by modernism. On the other, there was idyllic scenery."⁹⁰

Binde identifies three attitudes towards nature within Catholicism. The first and more traditional attitude considers nature to be material and mundane, essentially in contraposition to the spiritual. The second attitude views nature as related to God, a reflection of His greatness and perfection and as such worthy of love and respect. Finally,

⁸⁷ Jonathan Keates, "In the Cascina," *Sight and Sound* 58, no. 1 (n.d.): 29.

⁸⁸ Deborah Young, "On Earth as It Is in Heaven," *Film Comment* 37, no. 2 (2001): 57–58.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹⁰ Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema: 1896–1996* (London: Routledge, 2001), 139.

the third considers it to be the realm in which supernatural forces are concentrated.⁹¹ Of the three, the second appears more consonant with Olmi's own view. As Binde explains, "According to this position, humankind's rule over nature must contain a moral element and be governed by reason and respect [...] Nature is part of God's creation and has a specific purpose in his plan for mankind and the world, therefore nature should be respected."⁹²

This view also explains, at least in part, the Catholic glorification of peasants.⁹³ In fact, as Binde observes, "If God has a certain presence in nature, then the peasant who lives and works in the countryside, would, logically speaking, be closer to God than people dwelling in the city."⁹⁴ People in the countryside, however, are also more exposed to the natural elements and the forces of nature, which explains the necessity to seek protection through religious rituals and worshipping a plethora of saints and wonder-working figures.⁹⁵ That said, in *E venne un uomo* as well as in Olmi's other films, the peasants, although certainly devout, are far from superstitious. In fact, they seem to believe that the most valid and secure form of protection towards hardship is honesty and hard work combined with genuine faith; while their religious zeal cannot prevent calamities or rectify wrongdoings, it certainly helps the peasants accept them.

3.3 Style

Just like its narrative, the film's *mise-en-scène* is essential in portraying an edifying image of Giovanni XXIII and the peasant world. Possibly aware of the necessity to counterbalance the strong hagiographic flavour, Olmi attempted to give the film a realistic quality: he inserted newsreel footage, filmed on location and employed non-professional actors to play the peasants of Sotto il Monte. On the other hand, his deep respect for Giovanni XXIII and desire to endow the figure of the Pope with authority and charisma translated into the casting of Steiger as the protagonist, an extremely atypical move for

⁹¹ Per Binde, "Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition," *Anthropological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 16.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹³ On the topic of the Catholic Church's privileged relationship with "the rural civilization" and its ability to gain and maintain consent within this social group, see Gustavo Guizzardi, "The 'Rural Civilization' Structure of an 'Ideology for Consent,'" *Social Compass* XXII, nos. 2–3 (1976): 197–220.

⁹⁴ Per Binde, "Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition," 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21–22. On the same topic, see also Michael Carroll, *Madonnas That Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 33–35.

Olmi, particularly in the early stages of his career.⁹⁶ The director's creative choice to split Steiger's role into the spectator and mediator as well as his reliance on monologues to convey the Pope's spiritual ascendance were similarly designed.

Realism and Authenticity

E venne un uomo situates itself at the intersection of drama and history, making it a type of "docudrama,"⁹⁷ a film genre that is as complicated as it is overlooked. Its very nature—in between fiction and documentary—leads to a number of theoretical issues and raises questions about faithfulness and authenticity.⁹⁸ For his part, Olmi described the film style as "journalistic,"⁹⁹ suggesting that he believed the genre to be a highly objective way of presenting the account of Roncalli's life.

Olmi's first feature-length films reflect both his past as a documentary filmmaker and his neorealist heritage. In particular, the neorealist legacy becomes evident in his choice to cast non-professional actors, film on location and insert newsreel footage into his works, the latter being a particular trait of post-war Italian cinema. Sprio states,

Many techniques from documentary were used (for example the use of original newsreels in the work of Rossellini) and the poor quality black and white film stock (which was of variable gradations due to the actual film stock that the directors had access to during and after the War), all added to the presumed authenticity of the films being produced.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Olmi later cast Rutger Hauer and Anthony Quayle in *La leggenda del santo bevitore* (*The Legend of the Holy Drinker*) 1988, Bud Spencer in *Cantando dietro i paraventi* (*Singing Behind Screens*) 2003, Raz Degan in *Centochiodi* (*One Hundred Nails*) 2007, and Michael Lonsdale in *Il villaggio di cartone* (*The Cardboard Village*) 2011.

⁹⁷ For a definition of "docudrama," see Alan Rosenthal, "Introduction," in *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), viii-xxii. In his interview with Morandini, Olmi referred to some of his earlier documentary works as "docu-fiction." For more information, see Morandini, *Ermanno Olmi*, 12.

⁹⁸ In the introduction of *Why Docudrama?*, Rosenthal, after dismissing other descriptions as too simplistic or too vague, comes up with his own definition of the genre: "[...] docudrama covers an amazing variety of dramatic forms, bound together by two things. They are all based on or inspired by reality, by the lives of real people, or by events that happened in the recent or not too distant past. Furthermore, they would seem to have a higher responsibility to accuracy and to truth than does fiction." For more information, see Rosenthal, "Introduction," xv.

⁹⁹ "giornalistico." For more information, see Owens, *Ermanno Olmi*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Margherita Sprio, "Filmic Performance—Authenticity and the Apple," *Wide Screen*, no. 1 (2009): 1.

Indeed, the technique of incorporating newsreels into film was famously first employed by Roberto Rossellini in *Paisà* (1946), which was also organised into different fragments and made use of a voiceover. However, in *Paisà* the newsreels were interwoven with other segments shot in such a way that it was hard to distinguish between the original and the new footage,¹⁰¹ making the passage between fact and fiction rather fluid in comparison with *E venne un uomo*.

In an interview with Cardullo, Olmi explained the reasons behind his aesthetic choices in terms of lighting and editing as well as the benefits of shooting on location and using non-professional actors.¹⁰² However, these principles were only partially applied in *E venne un uomo*. On the one hand, by employing photographs, archival films, newsreels and quotes from the Pope's own diary, letters and other writings, the film remains faithful to the story of Roncalli's life. On the other hand, Olmi takes more than a few liberties in relating the account. For example, the story is set in the 1960s rather than in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Further, Steiger and the other characters look and speak directly into the camera, breaking the "fourth wall." Finally, and most importantly, Steiger plays two roles, dispelling any cinematic illusion and actively discouraging identification.

Although casting non-professional actors was one of Olmi's trademarks, he stated that a professional actor such as Steiger could provide more authority over the audience,¹⁰³ once again testifying to the director's desire to persuade spectators about Giovanni XXIII's nobility. In the first part of the film, Steiger purposely puts distance between himself, the characters and the audience. In the second part, he interprets the Pope's thoughts and actions. In this sense, *E venne un uomo* enters potentially dangerous and ethically charged territory. In fact, the film not only tells the story of a real man, it does so by quoting his own writings. Sprio reflects on the ethical implications of performing the "real person":

¹⁰¹ Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 65; Peter Brunette, "Rossellini and Cinematic Realism," *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 1 (1985): 40.

¹⁰² Bert Cardullo, "Reflecting Reality —and Mystery: An Interview with Ermanno Olmi," in *After Neorealism. Italian Filmmakers and Their Films; Essays and Interviews*, ed. Bert Cardullo, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 103–108.

¹⁰³ Owens, *Ermanno Olmi*, 55.

Performing the real person, as opposed to the assigned character, could be interrogated in all sorts of additional ways when one considers the impact of adaptation from book to film, or indeed from screenplay to film. The politics of this practice implies all kinds of ethical dilemmas about the wider arts that are of relevance to the idea of outsourcing performance, which scholarship needs to consider. This begs the question, what do re-performing experiences, that had previously been actually lived, tell us about the world.¹⁰⁴

In an interview with Cardullo, when asked about the manipulative aspect of filmmaking, Olmi answered,

Everything is manipulated in a sense, everything: not only the cinema but the economy, religion, any of man's activities can be corrupting—or saving. It really depends on the moral basis upon which you do these things, both in producing and in consuming them [...] But it's real if *you* are real in front of what you are shooting, if the things that you are filming have an authenticity of their own.¹⁰⁵

This quote clearly demonstrates that historical accuracy and authenticity are matters of moral integrity to Olmi. He later concluded as follows: “So unmasking the illusion is fine, if that's what it takes to keep realism from degenerating into artifice. For, clearly, resemblance to reality is not reality. This is obvious—or it should be.”¹⁰⁶

However, as Steiger is always dressed in a suit and tie, wears no makeup in order to replicate the appearance of Giovanni XXIII and, together with other characters, looks and speaks directly into the camera (**Image 3.7**), the audience remains conscious of the artifice. The director defended his choice, arguing that the role of mediator is a typical literary and dramatic device, employed by the likes of Dante Alighieri and Bertolt Brecht.¹⁰⁷ In particular, Brecht's epic theatre with its *Verfremdungseffect* (distancing effect) seems to have inspired Olmi in this film.

¹⁰⁴ Sprio, “Filmic Performance,” 3.

¹⁰⁵ Cardullo, *After Neorealism*, 108–109.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Owens, *Ermanno Olmi*, 52.

In his essay “A Short Organum for Theatre,” Brecht famously argues that in order to achieve the effect of alienation, “the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays.”¹⁰⁸ He continues by clarifying, “At no moment must he go so far as to be wholly transformed into the character played [...] He has just to show the character, or rather he has to do more than just get into it.”¹⁰⁹



Image 3.7 A close-up of Rod Steiger looking into the camera in his role as the mediator

Analysing the case of *Paisà*, Brunette observes thusly: “The result is that we tend to see the film as more like ‘real life’—that is, disjointed, multiple, always finally exterior to the Other—precisely because it refuses to let us dissolve into an easy Coleridgean suspension of disbelief.”¹¹⁰ *E venne un uomo* does not achieve the same result, nor does the film translate into a quality product. Overall, in fact, it seems to be torn between realism and fiction, between authenticity and invention. On the one hand, Olmi presents Roncalli as a familiar figure and a personal friend; on the other, he repeatedly stresses his singularity and uniqueness. Indeed, while Roncalli was a cultivated, capable diplomat, one of his strongest and most popular attributes was his down-to-earth, unpretentious and pragmatic

¹⁰⁸ Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for Theatre,” in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willet (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), 193.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Brunette, “Rossellini and Cinematic Realism,” 40.

nature, which made him relatable and accessible. Further, while Steiger's role as the mediator establishes a feeling of mutual trust between the actor and audience, his actions as the spectator distance him both from the characters and the audience, forbidding any identification. As a result, *E venne un uomo* constantly oscillates between the opposite poles of documentary and hagiography, leaning heavily towards the second without really committing to either of the genres.

Silence and Power

It is Brook's contention that Olmi portrays speech-silence as positive by associating it with deep emotions, "especially profound feelings of love and intimacy, forms of wonder that verge on mysticism, and peasant simplicity."¹¹¹ *E venne un uomo* is no exception in that it privileges other forms of speech such as monologue and voiceover over dialogue. Interestingly, not only is the portrayal of the city characterised by loud, unpleasant sounds (sirens blasting, tyres screeching, car horns honking), but there is quite a difference in the distribution of speech between the first part of the film—set in the peasant world—and the second part in which Roncalli leaves the rural world behind and begins his career. Brook reads this discrepancy in relation to power:

The voices of the women, children, and peasants are almost entirely silent. Of the thirty silent scenes, more than two-thirds are shot in the village and countryside [...] As the film develops, the speech-silence that initially dominates is increasingly replaced by speech, as Roncalli [...] grows up and attains the vestments of power. Once Roncalli has been ordained and sets off for his first important mission in Bulgaria, there are no further wordless scenes.¹¹²

Moreover, Brook analyses the use of dialogue and monologue in relation to gender, observing that the only female voice in the film is that of Roncalli's mother. According to Brook, she represents "the peasant voice of concreteness and day-to-day existence, pronounced in dialect; the voice of the countryside, of the past, of dialogue rather than monologue."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Clodagh J. Brook, "Beyond Dialogue: Speech-Silence, the Monologue, and Power in the Films of Ermanno Olmi," *The Italianist* 28, no. 2 (2008): 270.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 274.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Therefore, an ulterior polarisation characterises the film: not only country and city, but also female and male: “The almost complete absence of voice on the part of female characters in this film is pitted against the male voices of abstraction, of theology, and moral deliberation, the voices, ultimately, of power. In ... *E venne un uomo* narration and monologue is male; silence (and minor dialogue) is female.”¹¹⁴

There is, however, another reason for the speech-silence in *E venne un uomo*. Olmi, always concerned with realism and authenticity, knows that it is unlikely that the illiterate members of the peasant family would launch into long, eloquent speeches. Nevertheless, the peasants’ silence is more than the sheer inability to articulate complex concepts; it is an inclination, an inner disposition, even a vocation. Olmi’s hardworking peasants have neither the time nor the desire to engage in lengthy conversations. There is a certain suspicion towards the excess of spoken words; words can trick and deceive, they can blur the lines between truth and lie. This attitude resonates with a certain Christian perspective that sees the abundance of words as essentially dishonest and misleading. In particular, in the New Testament, this is associated with the figures of the scribes, the men responsible for the preservation of the Scriptures, and the sect of the Pharisees. More preoccupied with preaching the traditions than being true to the spirit behind them, thus they are constantly engaged in hypocritical behaviours,¹¹⁵ prompting Jesus to famously elicit a warning in his *Sermon on the Mount*: “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”¹¹⁶

E venne un uomo makes rather interesting use of other forms of speech beyond dialogue, from the voiceover dubbed in Italian by Romolo Valli to the commentary provided by Steiger in his spectator role and the long quotes taken from the Pope’s diary that are related as monologues. Brook reflects on the nature of the monologue, observing how it is positively connoted and associated with power: “[...] the monologue-speakers of some of his films provide an alternative to silence, a *via affermativa* which permits the use of language in the revelation of the transcendent.”¹¹⁷ It follows that “those who recite monologues are invested with the power to profess ‘truths’ about the divine.”¹¹⁸ The narrating voice is thus characterised by a higher level of wisdom and understanding: it

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Mk 7:1–13 and 12:38–40.

¹¹⁶ Mt 5:37.

¹¹⁷ Brook, “Beyond Dialogue,” 275.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

establishes an ultimate, undisputable truth. As a result, it takes on an almost theological quality, suggesting an omniscient and omnipotent figure. The same truthful quality can be associated with the voiceover in the prologue and epilogue of the film. The voice, in fact, is not confined to any specific body; it comes from an unidentified location outside of the diegesis, possibly even outside of time and space.¹¹⁹ Its radical otherness, as well as the fact that it is not localised, thus allows it to sidestep any criticism, once again validating the film's claim of the sainthood of Giovanni XXIII.

3.4 Reception

E venne un uomo, which was distributed by Paramount, was officially presented in Italy at the 26th Venice Film Festival out of competition.¹²⁰ Previously, a private screening had been organised especially for Pope Paolo VI, who reportedly greatly appreciated it.¹²¹ Despite winning the *Timone d'oro del centro italiano per le relazioni umane* award,¹²² the film generally received negative comments from critics, who cited its overly hagiographical spirit and the employment of the narrative device of the mediator among the film's principal faults.¹²³ Even the Catholic press, while commending Olmi's orthodoxy and his genuine faith, could not shy away from pointing out at least some of the film's many shortcomings.¹²⁴

Despite being presented at the Venice Film Festival, it received relatively little attention. Greater focus was placed on other national and international names present at the festival such as Akira Kurosawa, Carl Theodor Dreyer and Federico Fellini. Articles were titled after and dedicated especially to the works of these directors, while *E venne un uomo* was

¹¹⁹ For an analysis of the use of voice in cinema and how this relates to the notion of space, see Mary Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980): 33–50.

¹²⁰ Morandini, *Ermanno Olmi*, 48.

¹²¹ V. "Il Papa assiste al film sulla vita di Giovanni XXIII" ["The Pope Attends the Film on the Life of John XXIII"], *La Stampa Sera*, 24 August 1965, 5.

¹²² Morandini, *Ermanno Olmi*, 48.

¹²³ See, for example, Guglielmo Biraghi, "Finalmente un buon film: 'Barbarossa' di Kurosawa" ["Finally a Good Film: Kurosawa's 'Barbarossa'"], *Il Messaggero*, 1 September 1965, 7; Sauro Borrelli, "Documento di un bersaglio mancato" ["Document of a Missed Target"], *L'Unità*, 23 November 1965, 8; Leo Pestelli, "... E venne un uomo' di Olmi. L'atteso film su Giovanni XXIII" ["'A Man Named John.' The Anticipated Film on John XXIII"], *La Stampa*, 1 September 1965, 7; Aggeo Savoli, "Giovanni XXIII in stile parrocchiale" ["John XXIII in Parochial Style"], *L'Unità*, 1 September 1965, 5; Aldo Scagnetti, "Kurosawa: una conferma. Debole il film di Olmi" ["Kurosawa: A Confirmation. Olmi's Film (is) Weak"], *Paese Sera*, 1 September 1965, 13; P. Z. "Il film su Papa Giovanni non è piaciuto ai critici ma il pubblico ha applaudito" ["The Critics Did Not Like the Film on Pope John but the Public Did"], *La Stampa Sera*, 1-2 September 1965, 8.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Gian Battista Cavallaro, "Il film su Papa Giovanni a Venezia" ["The Film on Pope John in Venice"], *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 1 September 1965; Giacinto Ciaccio, "E venne un uomo chiamato Giovanni..." ["A Man Called John..."], *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 September 1965, 3.

frequently relegated to the second part of reviews.¹²⁵ In particular, the controversy between the festival president Luigi Chiarini and Federico Fellini, who at the very last minute did not present his work *Giulietta degli Spiriti* (*Juliet of the Spirits*, 1965), came to occupy a prominent place in the press.¹²⁶ Moreover, when Olmi's film did appear in the articles' titles, it was rarely in a good light. While Scagnetti titles his article in *Paese Sera* "Kurosawa: una conferma. Debole il film di Olmi" ("Kurosawa: A Confirmation. Olmi's Film [is] Weak"),¹²⁷ Savoli and Borrelli in *L'Unità* go further. Savoli titles his piece "Giovanni XXIII in stile parrocchiale" ("John XXIII in Parochial Style"),¹²⁸ while Borrelli prefers "Documento di un bersaglio mancato" ("Document of a Missed Target").¹²⁹ Nevertheless, "Il film su Papa Giovanni non è piaciuto ai critici ma il pubblico ha applaudito" ("The Critics Did Not Like the Film on Pope John but the Public Did") in *La Stampa* seems to suggest that the general public appreciated the offering, reinforcing the often cited idea that Olmi might have been the victim of intellectual prejudice.¹³⁰

Aside from the titles, an analysis of the content of the reviews reveals that the criticisms were consistent and well argued. Grazzini, in his article in *Corriere della Sera*, writes that the film is "perplexing for its hagiographic spirit and fragmented style, but it is a moving testimony of faith."¹³¹ Pestelli also commends the director for the respect shown to the historical figure of the Pope, but similarly criticises the film for its fawning quality.¹³² Savoli, while certainly more blunt in his analysis, hits the mark when he states that "Even on a hagiographic level, *E venne un uomo* [...], instead of tapping into pure simplicity, fades into a disarming twentieth-century parish style."¹³³

¹²⁵ See, for example, Biraghi, "Finalmente un buon film;" Ivano Davoli, "Una lezione di cinema" ["A Cinema Lesson"], *Paese Sera*, 31 August 1965, 7; Gian Luigi Rondi, "Kurosawa fa centro con il suo Barbarossa" ["Kurosawa's Barbarossa Hits the Mark"], *Il Tempo*, 1 September 1965, 7; Scagnetti, "Kurosawa: una conferma," 13.

¹²⁶ See, for example, "Chiarini polemizza con Fellini per la partecipazione al festival" ["Chiarini Argues with Fellini for the (Film's) Participation to the Festival"], *Il Messaggero*, 1 September 1965, 7; "Le difficoltà di 'Giulietta'" ["'Giulietta's' Difficulties"], *Paese Sera*, 1 September 1965, 13; Fulvio Fasolo, "Fellini temporeggia, ma il film resta a Roma" ["Fellini is Stalling, but the Film is Still in Rome"], *La Stampa Sera*, 2 September 1965, 8.

¹²⁷ Scagnetti, "Kurosawa: una conferma," 13.

¹²⁸ Savoli, "Giovanni XXIII in stile parrocchiale," 5.

¹²⁹ Borrelli, "Documento di un bersaglio mancato," 8.

¹³⁰ P. Z., "Il film su Papa Giovanni," 8.

¹³¹ "E venne un uomo lascia perplessi per il suo spirito agiografico e il suo stile frammentario, ma è una commossa testimonianza di fede." For more information, see Giovanni Grazzini, "Il cinema rende omaggio alla memoria di Papa Giovanni" ["The Cinema Pays Homage to the Memory of Pope John"], *Corriere della Sera*, 1 September 1965, 12.

¹³² Pestelli, "... E venne un uomo," 7.

¹³³ "Anche sul piano agiografico, *E venne un uomo* [...] invece di attingere a una casta semplicità scade in un disarmante stile da parrocchia novecentesca [...]." For more information, see Savoli, "Giovanni XXIII in stile parrocchiale," 5.

The use of the mediator caused much perplexity among critics, with both Scagnetti and Pestelli defining it as an “artificial operation.”¹³⁴ This observation is frequently linked with the vast gap in quality between the first and second parts of the film. While the early stages of the film set in rural Sotto il Monte are particularly accomplished, as we follow the adult life of the future Pope, the film loses its vividness and imagination, turning into a rather pedantic product.¹³⁵ Biraghi ascribes this imbalance to the authenticity of Olmi’s faith, stating that it is ultimately his deep respect and devotion for Pope Giovanni XXIII that prevents him from reaching a good result. Intimidated, even uneasy when confronted with such elevated subject matter, the director was clearly unable to approach it in any other way than hagiographically.¹³⁶

Borrelli raises another interesting point in the aftermath of the release of the edited volume of *E venne un uomo*, which contains the screenplay, essays by the likes of Pasolini and letters that chronicle the film’s genesis. After reading the book, Borrelli concludes that too many “interests” had played a role in the film’s creative process. Many actors and parties, including Harry Saltzman, the Canadian producer of the James Bond film series, Don Francesco Angelicchio, a key figure within the Ufficio Nazionale dello Spettacolo, and screenwriter Vincenzo Labella, had intervened “[...] with the sole intention of harnessing within precise limits a matter, which could have otherwise taken different forms and shapes.”¹³⁷

Borrelli’s argument is as suggestive as it is well founded. In fact, while it is impossible to precisely establish the extent of the artistic freedom that Olmi enjoyed while shooting *E venne un uomo*, the epistolary exchanges in the edited volume show that the director was only involved in the project at a later stage and had to be able to juggle and satisfy different demands and impositions.¹³⁸ Further, according to Kezich, because Olmi usually worked alone, having to deal with a “real” producer (Saltzman), a “real” actor (Steiger) and a “real” cameraman (Pietro Portalupi) resulted in long discussions, endless arguments

¹³⁴ “un’operazione [...] piuttosto artificiosa.” For more information, see Biraghi, “Finalmente un buon film” and Pestelli, “... E venne un uomo,” 7.

¹³⁵ Biraghi, “Finalmente un buon film,” 7. On the same topic, see Ciaccio, “E venne un uomo chiamato Giovanni...,” 3; Pestelli, “... E venne un uomo,” 7.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ “[...] col solo intento di imbrigliare entro limiti ben precisi una materia che avrebbe potuto assumere forme e contorni ben altrimenti significativi.” For more information, see Borrelli, “Documento di un bersaglio mancato,” 8.

¹³⁸ Giacomo Gambetti, and Claudio Sorigi, eds. *E venne un uomo [A Man Named John]* (Milan: Garzanti, 1965), 58–61.

and a fair share of compromise.¹³⁹ Although assuming a much more diplomatic position on the topic, Olmi did admit that he would not have shot the film if it had not already been commissioned.¹⁴⁰ Regardless, it seems reductive to ascribe the film's shortcomings to the lack of freedom that comes with commissioning a film. As we see in the next chapter, the Italian State Television's commissioning of Cavani's *Galileo* (1968) did not intimidate or prevent the director from approaching the subject matter in a critical and personal way, thus distancing herself substantially from the (explicit or implicit) official guidelines.

Interestingly, and rather surprisingly, Pasolini is among those who appreciated the film. In his interview with Owens, Olmi explained that the intellectual reached out to him after seeing the film and said he had been deeply touched by it.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere, Olmi stated that Pasolini praised the first sequences of the film that portray Roncalli's birth and death.¹⁴² Unlike most critics, he also commended Olmi's employment of the mediator, which he argued is only apparently contradictory and actually lends the film clarity and simplicity. The film's only true fault, according to Pasolini, is Olmi's rather one-dimensional and flat portrayal of the Pope: while the director's loyalty to Catholicism and utmost respect for Giovanni XXIII could have hardly produced any other outcome, "there cannot be sainthood without contradiction and scandal."¹⁴³ This remark, I believe, is worthy of reflection. The word "scandal" comes from the Greek "skandalon" and is often translated as "stumbling block."¹⁴⁴ Aside from its literal meaning, it is also used in the Scriptures to describe the shock provoked by the sheer novelty of Jesus's preaching,¹⁴⁵ as explained by Swiss theologian Hans Küng:

¹³⁹ Tullio Kezich, *Ermanno Olmi: il mestiere delle immagini. Diario in pubblico di un'amicizia [Ermanno Olmi. The Profession of Images. A Public Diary of a Friendship]* (Alessandria: Edizioni Falosopiano, 2004), 81.

¹⁴⁰ Owens, *Ermanno Olmi*, 60.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴² Morandini, *Ermanno Olmi*, 48.

¹⁴³ "Non c'è santità senza la contraddizione e lo scandalo." For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, "E venne un uomo," in *E venne un uomo [A Man Named John]*, eds. Giacomo Gambetti and Claudio Sorgi. (Milan: Garzanti, 1965), inside front cover.

¹⁴⁴ Walter W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Perigee Books, 1993), 466.

¹⁴⁵ For this use of the word "scandal" or "stumbling block," see 1 Pt 2:8 and 1 Cor 1:23.

Skandalon: a small stone over which one might stumble. Jesus in person, with all that he said and did, had become a stumbling stone, a continual scandal [...] For the silent majority he was too noisy and for the noisy minority he was too quiet, too gentle for the strict and too strict for the gentle. He was an obvious outsider in a critically dangerous social conflict: in opposition both to the prevailing conditions and to those who opposed them.¹⁴⁶

Ultimately, Jesus's message of equality, solidarity and even the subversion of the established values cannot but be revolutionary. Again in the words of Küng: "If by 'revolution' we mean a fundamental transformation of an existing state of affairs, then the message of Jesus was certainly revolutionary."¹⁴⁷ I believe that Pasolini uses the word "scandal" exactly in the sense outlined by Küng, that is, to allude to the "transformational" quality that characterised the papacy of Giovanni XXIII, which unfortunately Olmi failed to convey in his film.

Finally, with regard to the official Catholic reaction to the film, the assessment of the Commission of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico published in the *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche* is worth noting:

The film, which avoids any conventional reconstruction, can draw the personality of the great Pope in his inner evolution in an indirect but highly suggestive way. Particularly valuable are the photography and setting. MORAL JUDGEMENT: The work, which is a moving tribute to the noble figure of John XXIII, is positive, both as a general approach and in detail. For everyone.¹⁴⁸

This positive opinion was echoed both by Pope Paolo VI, as mentioned earlier in this section, and by the Vatican's official newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*. In his article, Ciaccio writes that, "Olmi, tackling the subject with great humility, has overcome most of the problems, creating a work that touches the depths of the heart, [a work] of human and spiritual significance."¹⁴⁹ The film was highly anticipated by *L'avvenire d'Italia*.¹⁵⁰ However, after its screening in Venice, both Cavallaro and Guidotti could not help but

¹⁴⁶ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 278.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴⁸ "Il film, che evita ogni convenzionale ricostruzione, riesce a definire in modo indiretto, ma altamente suggestivo, la personalità del grande Papa nel suo interiore evolversi. Particolarmente pregevoli sono la fotografia e l'ambientazione - GIUDIZIO MORALE: Il lavoro, che è un commosso omaggio alla figura nobilissima di Giovanni XXIII, è del tutto positivo, sia come impostazione generale che nei particolari. Per tutti." For more information, see Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche. Volume LVIII-1965* (Rome: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1965), 241.

¹⁴⁹ "Olmi, affrontando l'argomento con grande umiltà, ha superato buona parte dei problemi in questione dando vita a un'opera che tocca nel profondo del cuore, di significazione umana e spirituale." For more information, see Ciaccio, "E venne un uomo chiamato Giovanni...", 3.

¹⁵⁰ Giorgio Sora, "Il punto sulla mostra" ["The Festival So Far"], *L'avvenire d'Italia*, 21 August 1965, 5.

agree with their colleagues in pointing out the film's many flaws, while at the same time applauding the director for his commitment and honest effort.¹⁵¹ Guidotti, in particular, appears to conduct a sort of meta-analysis, trying to justify the negative reactions by ascribing them to the nature and practices of the film festival:

The mistake was “psychological”: the film was shown late at night. Some critics' reception [of the film] was certainly not the most enthusiastic—rather the opposite; [the screening] provoked demonstrations of dissent that perhaps would have been avoided at another time. (It is also worth noting that there is a habit, during the Venice Festival, of criticising every film only to later change one's mind).¹⁵²

Regardless of the split reception that characterised the Catholic opinion, the fact that *E venne un uomo* was not awarded any prizes by Catholic organisations does appear rather odd. This oversight is even more bizarre if we consider the Vatican guidelines discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, as we have seen, the ecclesiastical hierarchies have stressed the need to create a production wholly inspired by Catholic principles since the first encyclical on cinema, *Vigilanti Cura*, in 1936. In spite of its conformity, however, the film failed to leave a lasting impression.

Conclusion

In *E venne un uomo*, Olmi attempts the incredibly difficult operation of striking a balance between showing his admiration and respect for the recently deceased Pope and avoiding the didactic and preachy nature typical of documentaries on religious figures. Trying to offer a more intimate, relatable portrait of the pontiff, the director focuses heavily on Roncalli's childhood and relationship with his family, the man's struggles as related in his own writings, his disregard for Vatican protocols and his amicable personality. On the other hand, however, Olmi's orthodoxy and sincere belief compelled him to juxtapose it with a more official and formal depiction of Giovanni XXIII, which is achieved through the employment of archival images and voiceover commentary as well as the constant highlighting of Roncalli's commitment to Catholicism. Indeed, through the use of Catholic iconography and biblical quotes, references to Catholic sacraments and devotional practices as well as a strong focus on the similarities between the Pope and

¹⁵¹ Cavallaro, “Il film su Papa Giovanni a Venezia,” 5; Mario Guidotti, “Olmi: lo rifarei così” [“Olmi: I Would Do It Again”], *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 1 September 1965, 5.

¹⁵² “L'errore è stato ‘psicologico’: il film è stato proiettato tardi di notte. L'accoglienza di alcuni critici non fu certo delle più entusiaste, anzi: si registrarono delle manifestazioni di dissenso che forse in un'altra ora sarebbero state risparmiate (va poi notato che alla mostra di Venezia vale l'abitudine di dire male di tutti i film salvo poi smentirsi).” For more information, see Guidotti, “Olmi: lo rifarei così,” 5.

Jesus, Olmi turns Roncalli into the ultimate Christ-like figure. The overall result is a rather tedious, reverential portrait, unresolved both narratively and stylistically. As such, the film was heavily criticised by reviewers, and its orthodoxy did little to save it from a tepid reception in the Catholic world.

The analysis of *E venne un uomo* provides an insight into Olmi's Catholicism, thereby offering a great starting point for the analysis of the coexistence of different religious attitudes in Italy as described by Gramsci. The director's approach to religion in the film is strongly influenced by the Catholic values of obedience and deep respect for authority, which is a constant in his work. From his early films set in Lombardy, which portray the daily life of both blue- and white-collar workers, the characters accept their social subordination with quiet fatalism, never entertaining the possibility of a change in their economic and social status. Indeed, it is precisely in the quiet acceptance of their exploited condition that Olmi seems to see the most complete adherence to the teachings of the Gospel. This applies to the young employee of *Il Posto* (*The Job*, 1961) and to the peasants of *L'albero degli zoccoli* (*The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, 1978). In *E venne un uomo*, every character, from the protagonists to the minor roles, moves in the space to which he or she has been assigned, obeying the will of God or His representative on Earth, convinced that only in this way could they fulfil their duty as Catholics.

Olmi's view is embedded in a long Italian tradition, of which Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni is one of the main representatives.¹⁵³ Manzoni, famous for his widely studied novel *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*), strongly promotes the idea of "Divine Providence" in his work.¹⁵⁴ In his analysis of the novel, Dombroski observes that, "From the perspective of Manzoni's seventeenth-century Christian setting, history is seen to unfold in a way consonant with the order of Divine Providence [...] Man in the novel relies in almost everything he does on some form of external authority and ultimately on the meta-authority of God."¹⁵⁵ He continues, explaining that, "From the Christian

¹⁵³ Alessandro Manzoni (1795–1853) is widely regarded as the most important Italian novelist of the nineteenth century. He was also a poet and playwright, but he is mostly known for his historical novel *The Betrothed*, which tells the story of the tormented engagement of two young workers from Como, Renzo and Lucia, during the Spanish domination of Lombardy in the seventeenth century. For more information, see Gaetana Marrone, Paolo Puppa and Luca Somigli, eds. *Encyclopaedia of Italian Literary Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1132–1139.

¹⁵⁴ "Divine providence," although a rather complicated concept, is crucial to the analysis of Catholic thought. A brief overview is offered in Chapter Seven in relation to Franco Zeffirelli's religious attitude.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Dombroski, "The Seicento as Strategy: 'Providence' and the 'Bourgeois' in *I Promessi Sposi*," *MLN* 91, no. 1 (1976): 87. For further reading on this topic, see also Robert Dombroski, "The Ideological Question in Manzoni," *Studies in Romanticism* 20, no. 4 (1981): 497–524 and Luciano Parisi, "Il tema della Provvidenza in Manzoni" ["The Providence Theme in Manzoni"], *MLN* 114, no. 1, *Italian Issue* (Jan., 1999): 83–105.

viewpoint of Manzoni's characters, universal Providence is an undeniable reality, a positive operational force that ensures the divinely ordained ends of human action."¹⁵⁶ This is also the case for *E venne un uomo*, where the characters incarnate with something akin to resignation the roles they have been assigned by the inscrutable will of God, relying on the design of Providence without ever considering the possibility of rebellion. The journey that they must travel during their existence has been decided from their very arrival in the world when they were assigned to a certain historical period and social class. Their only option is to comply with their fate with humility and obedience, following the indications of the Church, which has always been rather hostile to the ideas of social mobility and the class struggle.

Interestingly, Manzoni was famously criticised by Gramsci for his rather condescending view of the lower classes. The Italian Marxist wrote, "It should also be pointed out that in *I promessi sposi* every single character from the lower echelons is made fun of [...] they are represented as, at best, pitiful beings lacking an inner life. Only people of high social status have an inner life."¹⁵⁷ This critique, albeit valid in the case of Manzoni, certainly cannot be applied to Olmi's admirable portrayal of the peasant world, which, as we have seen, he holds in the highest regard. However, Olmi's *Weltanschauung* is also not without problematic implications. The fact that he thinks positive qualities and spiritual depth are an exclusive prerogative of the lower classes translates into not only an incredibly ideologically polarised reading of society, but also a rather static one. Furthermore, the principle of obedience to authority foregrounded by Olmi in his films is hard to reconcile with another key Catholic principle, that of the Gospel message of solidarity with the less fortunate. Indeed, an appreciation of the ideals of social justice and equality expressed in the Gospel would also imply a desire to transform the status quo and even overturn the established order, a sentiment that seems instead to be completely absent in Olmi's work. Avoiding provocative or openly critical tones, the Bergamasque director limits himself to representing disparities and injustices, without suggesting a solution or advocating change. It must, however, be pointed out that Olmi's view of the institutional Church certainly changed over the years, and the director has become increasingly critical of the greed and indifference displayed by the Catholic hierarchies. Such a perspective is particularly evident in the aforementioned *Il villaggio di cartone* as well as in his 2013 book *Lettera a una chiesa che ha dimenticato Gesù* (*Letter to A Church That Has Forgotten Jesus*), a

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵⁷ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume II*, 121. On the same topic, see also Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume III*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 196.

heartfelt message and harsh critique of the Church for its betraying of the original Gospel values of solidarity, equality and tolerance.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in 1965 Olmi, not unlike a large part of Italian Catholics, was enthusiastic about Pope Giovanni XXIII and the Vatican Council and optimistic about the Church's engagement with contemporary society.

The next chapter focuses on Cavani's *Galileo* (1968). Released three years after *E venne un uomo*, *Galileo* also offers a reinterpretation of the life of a historical figure and his interaction with the society and Church of his time. Nevertheless, the two approaches to the subject matter, as well as the final products, could not be more different. Far from embracing Olmi's hagiographic approach, Cavani's film unapologetically exposes the repressive quality of the Catholic Church of the seventeenth century, while at the same time drawing a parallel with contemporaneity, offering another example of the different approaches to Catholicism in Italian cinema.

¹⁵⁸ For more information, see Ermanno Olmi, *Lettera a una Chiesa che ha dimenticato Gesù* [*Letter to a Church That Has Forgotten Jesus*] (Milan: Piemme, 2013).

Chapter 4 Cavani's *Galileo* (1968)

Compared with *E venne un uomo*, Cavani's *Galileo* (1968)¹ provides more insight into the fragmented nature of Italian Catholicism. The film follows the life of the Italian scientist Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), his discoveries and his conflict with the Catholic Church, which forced him to abjure his beliefs under the threat of being sentenced to death. Focusing on the themes of dialogue and conflict between freedom of conscience and obedience to authority, between science and dogma and between progress and reaction, the film powerfully illustrates the obtuse prejudices and fear of progress that characterised the seventeenth-century Church and Italian society, while establishing similarities with the post-conciliar Church and Italian society of the late 1960s.

By addressing Cavani's narrative and stylistic choices in *Galileo*, particularly her use of Catholic themes and symbolism, I seek to examine her attitude towards Italian Catholicism. The only female director examined in this thesis, Cavani reveals both her concern for controversial, complex topics and her anthropological interest in religion. She succeeds in making a film that simultaneously heavily criticises the climate of fear and oppression promoted by the Catholic hierarchy while respecting the genuine believers in the Church.

I first examine the film's religious and cultural contexts. The subject matter of *Galileo* situates the film at the intersection of three highly relevant topics: religion, education and the status of women. Specifically, I analyse the parallels between the post-conciliar Church of the 1600s and 1900s, the academic world portrayed in the film and its ties to the Italian student protests of the late 1960s and the filmic portrayal of women and their actual conditions in 1960s Italy. I then take into account how Cavani uses the film's narrative and stylistic elements to convey an image of the Catholic Church as a repressive institution.

¹ This analysis is based on the Italian version of the film. For more information, see *Galileo*, directed by Liliana Cavani (1968; Italy-Bulgaria: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

Finally, I concentrate in great detail on the film's intricate journey after its release. In fact, more than any other film studied in this thesis, *Galileo* reveals the complexities and mechanisms regulating religious, political and cultural life in Italy, evidencing not only the splintered nature of Catholicism but also its frequent, harmful association with political power, as becomes apparent in the last section of this chapter.

4.1 Cultural and Religious Context

While *Galileo* portrays the Catholic Church as a frightening institution, even more fearsome is its privileged legal instrument of the time: the Inquisition.² Operating with clinical precision, coldness and efficiency, the Inquisition does not limit itself to containing possible threats through intimidation and censorship but seeks to eliminate them as swiftly as possible. To grasp the reasons behind this situation, one must consider the religious context of Italy in the 1600s. The Protestant Reformation³ and subsequent schism within Christianity had taken its toll on the Catholic Church, which reorganised and responded through the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Mayer identifies four consequences of the Council, which had direct impacts on the handling of the Galileo affair. First, the primacy of papal power was reasserted, transforming the Vatican into the “first ‘absolutist’ monarchy in Europe.”⁴ Second, the Council highlighted the importance of the literal interpretation of the Scriptures. Third, the already existing division of confessionals within Europe was exacerbated by the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). Finally, the Council revitalised religious orders, particularly the Dominicans and Jesuits.⁵ Against the backdrop of high religious, social and political instability, the Catholic Church responded strongly, reasserting its dogma through a number of conciliar and disciplinary decrees and beginning a revival known as the Counter-Reformation.

² For an in-depth account of the Roman Inquisition, see Christopher Black, *The Italian Inquisition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Thomas F. Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition on the Stage of Italy, c. 1590-1640* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

³ A key point of the Protestant Reformation was the personal right to interpret biblical passages, to which the Catholic Church reacted by reasserting its absolute authority on the matter. As Ernan McMullin so convincingly explains, adherence to the Scriptures was crucial here. It was not that Galileo endorsed the Copernican system, evicting the earth and therefore humankind from the centre of the universe, a position they had occupied for thousands of years. It was not even that he had effectively introduced a new cosmology trumping the models of Aristotle and Aquinas. It was that he had challenged the supreme authority of the Church to interpret the Scriptures. For more information, see Ernan McMullin, “Galileo on Science and Scripture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Galileo*, ed. Peter Machamer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 272–273.

⁴ Thomas F. Mayer, “Introduction,” in *The Trial of Galileo, 1612-1633*, ed. Thomas F. Mayer (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

The fortress mentality of the Catholic Church during this time is well illustrated in the film by the unyielding, rigid, even aggressive attitude displayed by the Catholic hierarchy. An important sequence portrays an exchange between Pope Paolo V, Cardinal Bellarmino and another prelate. The prelate questions the Catholic hierarchy's use of violence, wondering whether it contrasts with the Christian precept of charity. The Pope asks if there is any alternative: 'Would you want a weak, defeated, dying Church?'⁶ Bellarmino comments: "Sometimes even wars are necessary, as necessary as the cuts made by a good surgeon."⁷ This intransigent, unforgiving attitude characterises high-ranking members of the Catholic Church throughout the film as they stubbornly refuse to enter into dialogue first with Giordano Bruno and later with Galileo.

In response to a November 1967 letter from Italian film critic Morandini, Cavani reflects on the inflexibility and narrow-mindedness of Galileo's context: "Galileo's drama is born out of this: his contemporaries had a low level of propensity for dialogue, while he was a born-dialogist. Culture as an exchange of ideas, as continual exchange of ideas, [that] was Galileo's idea of culture."⁸ She concludes by establishing a parallel with the present time, notably the contemporary lack of a propensity for discussion: "It is not necessarily true that we are better than Galileo's contemporaries, as it seems to me that we think of dialogue as a concession, as a discovery, as a thing that you can do and also not do. Therefore, Galileo is a very contemporary story in its mechanism."⁹ It is essential to keep in mind that Cavani, not unlike Galileo, operated in a post-conciliar atmosphere. As mentioned in the previous chapter, different readings and narratives emerged soon after the Second Vatican Council, prompting many outside and within the Church to wonder whether the spirit of the Council had been betrayed and the progressive efforts by Giovanni XXIII erased by the more conservative papacy of Paolo VI.¹⁰ In particular, one should remember that it was in 1968, amidst one of the strongest phases of the student, feminist and labour protests, that the Pope published the controversial encyclical

⁶ "Vorreste una Chiesa debole, sconfitta, morente?"

⁷ "A volte anche le guerre sono necessarie. Necessarie come i tagli di un buon chirurgo."

⁸ "Il dramma di Galileo nasce da questo: i suoi contemporanei avevano uno scarso livello di propensione al dialogo e lui invece era un dialoghista nato. Cultura come scambio di idee, come ricambio continuo di idee, era il tipo di cultura di Galileo." For more information, see Liliana Cavani, "Letter to Morandini," ASSC, FLC, Materiale Relative a Galileo, Schedatura D, doc. N. 6.

⁹ "Non è detto che siamo migliori dei contemporanei di Galileo poichè mi pare che pensiamo al dialogo come una concessione, come una scoperta, come una cosa che si può fare e anche non fare. Perciò Galileo è una storia molto contemporanea nel suo ingranaggio." Ibid.

¹⁰ One of most critical voices on this matter is that of Swiss theologian Hans Küng. For more information, see Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City: Image Books, 1984); Hans Küng and Leonard Swidler, eds., *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

Humanae Vitae reconfirming the Church's intransigent position on birth control. The document was criticised by a number of theologians and members of the clergy such as Leo Joseph Suenens, Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, Bernard Häring and Charles Curran. Cardinal Suenens even asked "[...] whether moral theology took sufficient account of scientific progress, which can help determine, 'what is according to nature.'"¹¹ For this reason, he begged his brothers to "[...] let us avoid a new 'Galileo affair.' One is enough for the Church."¹²

In this sense, it is virtually impossible to fail to see in the film's extremely bleak portrayal of the Catholic Church of the seventeenth century an explicit reference to the post-conciliar Church of Paolo VI. Just as the medieval Catholic hierarchy blindly refused to acknowledge any change or accept any criticism, barricading itself behind what are considered to be unassailable truths, the post-conciliar Church betrays the tolerant and open spirit that had begun to characterise Catholicism under the papacy of Giovanni XXIII.

The Critique of the Academic World

Like Bellocchio's *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972)—as we see in Chapter Six—*Galileo* is highly critical of the educational system. As pointed out by Gasparini, *Galileo* expresses Cavani's view of higher education in Italy, which is aligned with the popular criticisms of the late 1960s.¹³ The academic world in which Galileo moves is fearful and suspicious of new ideas and discoveries, entrenched in millennia-old beliefs and theories. The opening sequence is highly revealing of this attitude. After witnessing an autopsy, most professors still stubbornly refuse to accept the evidence before their eyes, preferring to hold onto anachronistic notions and to support the infallibility and authority of Aristotelian theories. Galileo tries to make them see reason: "When a dress doesn't fit anymore, don't you get another one? The same happens in science: we use a theory until we realise that it has become too tight, and it can't meet our needs anymore."¹⁴ This pattern recurs in a later sequence when Galileo discusses his

¹¹ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 394.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Caterina Gasparini, "Dentro Galileo: ricostruzione storiografica di un film" ["Inside Galileo. A Film's Historiographical Reconstruction"], in *Liliana Cavani*, eds. Giacomo Martini, Piera Raimondi Cominesi, and Davide Zanza, (Alessandria: Falsopiano, 2008), 67.

¹⁴ "Quando un vestito vi è diventato più stretto, non ve ne fate un altro? Lo stesso avviene nella scienza: una teoria la usiamo finché non ci accorgiamo che è diventata troppo stretta e non si adatta più alle nuove esigenze."

findings at a university lecture. While some audience members are excited and enthusiastic, others are outraged by his sheer audacity at making claims against those affirmed by Aristotle and approved by the Catholic Church.

The film's critique of the academic world's embrace of anachronistic knowledge resonates with the student protests of the late 1960s in Italy. The student movement was the main driver of *Il Sessantotto* ('68), a complex historical and social phenomenon that took place during a wave of social unrest at that time. Although not the exclusive monopoly of the student movement—the labour movement, active from the start, heavily increased its participation in 1969—*Il Sessantotto* remained first and foremost associated with young Italians and their “ethical revolt.”¹⁵ Ginsborg identifies material and ideological causes that converged to create the student movement of 1967 and 1968.¹⁶ The discontent found its material basis in the education reforms of the early 1960s. The introduction of compulsory secondary education until age fourteen and the abolition of university admissions examinations caused an exponential increase in the number of students, which, in turn, revealed the inadequacies of the Italian education system. These deficiencies included overpopulation, professor absenteeism, an incredibly high unemployment rate and a lack of adequate infrastructures and properly trained teachers.¹⁷ This practical set of problems was matched by a strong sentiment of anti-authoritarianism and mounting ideological concerns in reaction to consumerism and the standardisation of mass society, which characterised Italy after the economic boom.¹⁸ At the same time, young people experimented with alternative behaviours in their personal lives and in familial and gender relations.¹⁹ Inspiration was drawn from international events and movements: the protests against the Vietnam War and the fight for civil rights in the United States, the 1966–67 Cultural Revolution in China and the liberation movement in South America, which was ideologically linked to the liberation theology.

Cavani felt strongly about this cause, as demonstrated by a letter to the director of Italian journal *Civis* responding to an article by Antonio Bruni asking Italian Catholics to refrain from joining the student protests. Cavani laments the inability of some, such as Bruni, to

¹⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 301.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 298–302.

¹⁷ Stuart J. Hilwig, *Italy and 1968: Youthful Unrest and Democratic Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12–19.

¹⁸ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 304–307.

¹⁹ Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 70–72.

understand the reasons for the protests. According to Cavani, the revolt had many justifications: the status of research in Italian universities, the lack of appropriate space for studying and research, the use of old, obsolete books and study manuals and the indifference of politicians towards culture and school.²⁰ In addition, she emphasises the absence of experimental research methods recommended by Galileo: “The upper secondary education here is still at a pre-Galilean level because it is never based on direct experience.”²¹ In the film, Galileo constantly argues for the importance of collecting evidence to support a thesis and repeatedly verify the results—this method, after all, is what distinguishes him from Bruno—and urges his contemporaries to rely on their observation and reasoning skills rather than on supposedly infallible yet unfounded doctrines.

A Man’s World

Given that Cavani, along with Lina Wertmüller, was one of the few female directors in Italy at this time, it is rather disconcerting that little room in the film is reserved for the exploration of female characters. This tendency appears especially odd given that the 1960s was a key decade for women and the struggle for civil rights. In this period, the foundations were laid for pivotal moments such as the legalisation of divorce in 1970²² and abortion in 1978. Many feminist groups were arising throughout Italy, especially in the largest cities, spurred on by the awareness that real life did not reflect the values of equality proclaimed in 1968 by students, the labour movement and leftist parties.²³ These movements were also characterised by a different focus: whereas from the late nineteenth century into the first half of the twentieth century, the first feminists demanded equality and participation in the male world, feminists in the 1960s proudly stressed their gender-related differences. This new feminism, promoted by groups such as Movimento per la Liberazione della Donna (“Movement for the Liberation of Women”) and Rivolta Femminile (“Female Revolt”) identified the roots of women’s social discrimination in the biological and sexual differences that, for centuries, had relegated them to subordinate

²⁰ Liliana Cavani, “Letter to the Director of *Civis*,” ASCC, FLC, Materiale Relative a Galileo, Schedatura D, doc. N. 5.

²¹ “L’insegnamento secondario superior da noi è ancora a livello pregalileiano perchè non si fonda mai sull’esperimentazione diretta.” For more information, see Cavani, “Letter to the Director of *Civis*.”

²² The battle for the approval of legislation on divorce in Italy lasted a decade. From the first timid attempts to introduce a divorce bill in 1965 to the abrogative referendum in 1974, a heated debate split the country, as progressive and liberal forces contended with those more conservative. For more information, see Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics, and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 69–85.

²³ Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 313.

positions in both society and culture.²⁴ It is not clear what compelled Cavani to render such a flat and reductive portrayal of the feminine world in *Galileo*. One thing, however, is certain: *Galileo*—a work otherwise cleverly in tune with the cultural, religious and social spirit of its time—is not reflective of the epoch-making changes introduced by the women’s movement.

Indeed, although women in the seventeenth century were relegated to subordinate positions inside and outside the household, two characters could have permitted the film to escape this limitation: Galileo’s long-time partner and the mother of his three children, Marina, and his daughter Virginia, who, after becoming a nun, adopted the name Maria Celeste. In relation to this observation, Buscemi notes that the strong erotic charge characterising much of Cavani’s work is absent in both *Francesco d’Assisi* (*Francis of Assisi*, 1966) and *Galileo*. The figures of Chiara in *Francesco d’Assisi* and Marina in *Galileo* are not only secondary but also inconsequential to the film’s development.²⁵ Marina appears in only three sequences, and all present her in the role of mother and faithful companion. In the first scene, she bathes Galileo while lamenting that “he never takes her anywhere fun.” Then, she announces her third pregnancy and complains that he has not married her. In the second sequence, Galileo tests his telescope by pointing it at her from his window. Surrounded by her children in the garden, Marina hangs laundry on the clothesline. Looking through his telescope, Galileo discovers that a neighbour is also watching her lustily, confirming her status as an object of male desire. This viewpoint is somewhat surprisingly a common feature of Cavani’s cinema. Cottino-Jones observes that the director displays an interest in “representing women as erotic objects that become the focus of the camera and consequently of their spectators’ voyeuristic attention.”²⁶ While Cottino-Jones refers especially to Cavani’s later works such as *Portiere di Notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974) and *Interno Berlinese* (*The Berlin Affair*, 1985), this claim is also applicable to *Galileo*. Finally, in the third scene, Marina teeters on the verge of a nervous breakdown and is shown throwing books at Galileo after learning that he plans to leave her to move to Tuscany to further his studies.

²⁴ Rivolta Femminile, “Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile,” in Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti* [*Let’s Spit on Hegel and Other Writings*] (Milan: Etal Edizioni, 2011), ebook edition.

²⁵ Francesco Buscemi, *Invito al cinema di Liliana Cavani* [*Invite to Liliana Cavani’s Cinema*] (Milan: Mursia, 1996), 129.

²⁶ Marga Cottino-Jones, *Women, Desire, and Power in Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 169.

Galileo's eldest daughter Virginia seems to fare somewhat better in the film's narrative. Appearing in four sequences, she is portrayed in the first three as an obedient, caring daughter interested in her father's work, although not considered to be sufficiently intelligent to understand it. When she bluntly asks Galileo to explain his theories to her, he simply sighs, points to his work and says, "Eh, it's difficult. Look at the size of that book!"²⁷ Virginia is also extremely naïve and seems to unwittingly embody the contrast between her father's theories and the dogma represented by the habit she wears lightly. For instance, when her father expresses his concerns about his meeting with the Pope, she reassures him that Urbano VIII has good intentions: "He is still your friend. You'll see. Do not worry, Dad. Trust him."²⁸ In the last scene, however, she takes on a more active role and becomes Galileo's accomplice in burying his book under a tree.

As mentioned, seventeenth-century society was hardly a hospitable place for women. Moreover, the historical Galileo is not without blame in his treatment of his partner and daughters. In addition to refusing to marry Marina, he acknowledged his only son Vincenzo but did not grant the same privilege to his two daughters, which, in Galileo's opinion, rendered them unsuitable for marriage and destined them to religious vocations.²⁹ Even given these historical and biographical considerations, the image of femininity constructed by the film is incredibly weak. Both Marina and Virginia could have been compelling, unconventional characters, powerful and empowering. In life, Marina refused to conform to social norms, defying social and religious expectations. For her part, Virginia, who adopted the name Celeste "in a gesture that acknowledged her father's fascination with the stars,"³⁰ remained devoted to her father throughout her life, displaying a keen interest in his scientific discoveries and an extraordinary intellect in her own right.³¹ Cavani, however, not only refused to grant the two more prominent roles in the film but also portrayed them as stereotypically dependent and submissive. In an analysis of Cavani's films, Cottino-Jones concludes that

²⁷ "Eh, è difficile. Guarda che librone!"

²⁸ "E' ancora tuo amico, vedrai. Non ti preoccupare, Papà. Fidati di lui."

²⁹ Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love* (New York: Walker & Co., 1999), kindle edition, chapter one.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

In the case of this important female director, [...] we must admit that the signifying tactics of her films are unable or unwilling to propose women in any other way but as erotic objects, thus revealing the unshakeable influence that patriarchal ideology still maintains even in the late twentieth century on Italian women and on Italian directors.³²

While this claim is only partially true of *Galileo*, the film nevertheless reinforces the too-frequent cinematic portrayal of women as subordinate to and dependent on men, mere background figures whose sole purpose is to give the male protagonist an object against which to react.

Overall, Cavani's interpretation of Galileo's story cannot but feel particularly timely in the context of late 1960s Italy. In particular, while obviously not as overtly persecutory and repressive as the Church of the Counter-Reformation, the post-conciliar Church of Paolo VI still revealed a high degree of narrow-mindedness and bigotry. Similarly, the conservatism and lack of propensity for dialogue characterising the academic circles in which Galileo moved strongly resonated with issues plaguing the Italian educational system and that provoked the student protests. However, and quite disappointingly, *Galileo* fails to reflect contemporary issues in one crucial respect, namely the centrality of women, as it relegates female figures to the background.

4.2 Narrative

Cavani's narrative choices are particularly effective in delivering a critique of the Catholic Church as an obscurantist and repressive institution. A key element in this sense is the centrality in *Galileo* of the figure of Bruno, a philosopher excommunicated by the Church for his heretic theories. Not only did Cavani manipulate the story's timeline in order to include his encounter with Galileo, but she also dedicated a large part of the film to the exploration of his character and ideas, his trial and his execution. In particular, the depiction of this ceremony, together with Galileo's sentence, highlights both the Church's penchant for the spectacle and theatricality and the ability of Cavani to reflect this characteristic cinematically. Further, the director's characterisation of Galileo as a profoundly Catholic man, whose intent is not to deny the very notion of God but rather to suggest a necessary separation between science and religion, serves to further underline the Church's inflexibility and dogmatism.

³² Cottino-Jones, *Women, Desire, and Power*, 195.

Finally, the portrayal of Galileo's trial brings to light the paradoxical nature of religious power—ubiquitous and elusive, fanatical and indifferent—suggesting a substantial vacuity under its cold, unblemished exterior.

Plot and Structure

Galileo tells the scientist's story from his first attempts to build a telescope to his public abjuration of his thesis. Inaccurately, and quite significantly, Cavani set the date of the beginning of the film as 1592, instead of 1608 or 1609, as these are the years in which Galileo dedicated himself to astronomy and began to perfect the telescope.³³ Such temporal manipulation answers the necessity to incorporate into the storyline the figure of Bruno, who was famously executed in 1600, and his relationship with Galileo and especially with the Church of the time, further highlighting the institution's ruthlessness in persecuting those who refused to conform to its dogma. Instead of portraying the entire life of the Italian scientist, the film focuses on a few significant episodes—or “numbers” to borrow a term from Marrone³⁴—between 1592 and 1633: Galileo's invention of the telescope and development of his theories, his encounter with Bruno and the philosopher's trial and execution, and Galileo's troubles with the Inquisition. More than half of the film focuses on his conflict with the Catholic Church, from his first warnings to his arrest, trial and abjuration.

The opening sequence quickly presents many of the themes that characterise the film. In a university room in Padua, academics observe an autopsy conducted by Girolamo Fabrici d'Acquapendente, an Italian anatomist and surgeon. The results of the examination clearly discredit both Aristotle's theory, which holds the heart, not the brain, is the source of nerves, and Galen's theory, which posits that three spirits regulate the human body. These findings provoke a heated debate among those in the room. Medic Paolo Sarpi and philosopher Cesare Cremonini argue about the discrepancies between the theories. Surely, contends Cremonini, such theories as those elaborated on by Aristotle cannot be anything but infallible. Galileo, played by Irish actor Cyril Cusack, intervenes and argues for the importance of empirical evidence. This sequence also presents another key event: Sarpi gives Galileo a rudimentary telescope from Holland. Galileo sets out to perfect the

³³ For more information, see Cristina Olivotto and Antonella Testa, “Galileo and the Movies,” *Physics in Perspective* 12, no. 4 (2010): 384–385.

³⁴ Gaetana Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth: The Cinema of Liliana Cavani* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 43.

instrument with the encouragement of his friend Giovanni Francesco Sagredo and the aid of a servant. The process is long, and Galileo refrains from making any public statements or discussing his discoveries until he can gather more proof.

During a stay in Venice, Galileo has the opportunity to meet Bruno (Georgi Kaloyanchev), a philosopher and former member of the Dominican order excommunicated for his theories who has come under the protection of Venetian nobleman Giovanni Mocenigo. Fighting against the idea of anthropocentrism, Bruno argues for the perfection and infiniteness of the universe. Galileo, who at first appears uncomfortable with Bruno's bold statements, decides to meet the ex-friar. They discuss their theories and agree on many aspects. However, Bruno claims that his ability to reason is the only proof he needs, whereas Galileo expresses his desire to find evidence to support his thesis. Soon after their encounter, Mocenigo denounces Bruno, leading to his arrest by the Inquisition.

The next few sequences focus on Bruno and Galileo's opposite but related paths. Galileo's tentative steps to build a working telescope and his success and subsequent discoveries alternate with scenes portraying Bruno's trial, death sentence and eventual execution in Campo dei Fiori in Rome. According to Gasparini, Bruno's execution marks the turning point of the film.³⁵ However, this episode takes place only thirty minutes into the film, so it seems more apt to consider it to signify the transition between the first and second acts; originally, the film was supposed to be aired on television in three episodes.³⁶ In addition, Bruno's execution is echoed by a similar episode approximately two-thirds of the way through the film. During this sequence, a Dominican friar—the same religious order to which Bruno once belonged—publicly and violently denounces Galileo's work before a large crowd gathered in front of the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence. The episode effectively signals the beginning of the third and final act.

Meanwhile, Galileo starts to disseminate his theories after finally collecting sufficient evidence for his claims that the sun is the centre of the universe and that the Earth and other planets revolve around it. His ideas begin circulating in academic and ecclesiastic circles until they reach the ears of the Catholic hierarchy. After deciding to relocate to Tuscany, Galileo travels to Rome to meet with Cardinal Ballarmino of the Inquisition, who advises him to tread carefully.

³⁵ Gasparini, "Dentro *Galileo*," 79.

³⁶ Giacomo Martini, "Interview with Liliana Cavani," in *Liliana Cavani*, eds. Giacomo Martini, Piera Raimondi Cominesi, and Davide Zanza (Alessandria: Falsopiano, 2008), 246.

Galileo's *Dialogo* receives the *imprimantur*, or authorisation, to be printed in 1633 and enters wide circulation. Pope Urbano VIII (Piero Vida), once a protector of Galileo when he was Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, turns against Galileo. The book is seized and placed on the *Index of the Forbidden Books*, and Galileo is forced to appear in front of the Inquisition on suspicion of heresy. There, he is convicted and, facing a possible death sentence, abjures his thesis.

The Inclusion of Bruno

Cavani's inclusion of Bruno in *Galileo* not only serves as an unprecedented feature at the film's release—Giuliano Montaldo's film on the philosopher would in fact make its appearance in 1973³⁷—but also attests to the director's audacity in tackling sensitive issues. Bruno was an extremely controversial figure for the Catholic Church. After spending many years abroad, he returned to Italy where he was tried and condemned by the Inquisition with the charge of "obstinate and pertinacious heresy."³⁸ A strong defender of Copernican heliocentrism, he believed that the universe was infinite and contained innumerable worlds.³⁹ Unlike Galileo, Bruno was never rehabilitated; throughout the centuries, the Vatican has hardly made official comment on the topic.⁴⁰ Certain actions have, however, spoken louder than words, such as the canonisation of Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino, a key figure in the trials of Bruno and Galileo.⁴¹ Even when the silence was finally broken, on the occasion of the four-hundredth anniversary of the philosopher's execution, it was simply to reaffirm the Church's condemnation of his doctrine. Indeed, on 18 February 2000, while expressing his regret for Bruno's death, Pope Giovanni Paolo II maintained that the philosopher's theories could not be rehabilitated, as they were "incompatible with the Christian doctrine."⁴²

Cavani's characterisation of Bruno is a crucial element, as he is, to all intents and purposes, Galileo's complement and counterpart. While there is no actual historical record of an encounter between the Nolan philosopher and Pisan scientist, the two theorists are

³⁷ Italian director Giuliano Montaldo dedicated his film *Giordano Bruno* to the figure of the Nolan philosopher.

³⁸ Ingrid Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008), 5.

³⁹ Michael White, *The Pope and the Heretic: The True Story of Giordano Bruno, the Man Who Dared to Defy the Roman Inquisition* (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2002), 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

⁴² "incompatibili con la dottrina cristiana." Luigi Accattoli, "Giordano Bruno, ecco il Mea Culpa del Papa" ["Giordano Bruno, Here is the Pope's Mea Culpa"], *Corriere della Sera*, 18 February 2000, 35. On this topic, see also Rowland, *Giordano Bruno*, 6–7.

very likely to have met at some point in their lives. As Marrone observes: “These men represent complementary curves of the same lens: they both see beyond the *limina* of their time, one as a philosopher, the other from the perspective of mechanics, geometry and mathematics.”⁴³ Both are blessed with an extraordinary intellect and compelled by an immense thirst for knowledge, they differ in their methodological approaches. Galileo is a scientist through and through: he relies on proof and evidence; on the other hand, Bruno’s approach is essentially theoretical and speculative. He is a “visionary,” as a member of the clergy scornfully defines him during his trial. What truly distinguishes the two, however, is exactly how far past those *limina* they decide to go. Indeed, even when faced with the very real possibility of a death sentence, Bruno refuses to abjure his convictions. His strenuous defence of his ideas attests to his moral integrity and intellectual coherence: he is, ultimately, braver than Galileo. The line—historically accurate according to sources⁴⁴—he delivers during his trial is certainly a testament to that: “I think your fear in pronouncing the sentence against me will be greater than mine in hearing it.”⁴⁵

Punishment as a Spectacle

One of the film’s most compelling—and dramatic—scenes is Bruno’s execution in Campo dei Fiori. Against the backdrop of a sinister musical score combining violins, church bells and a choir, the philosopher is first tied to a wooden cross by black-hooded figures and then lifted and placed on the stake. A large crowd gathers in the square, among them a surprisingly high number of children. The camera focuses on a nun holding a young child in her arms (**Image 4.1**). The boy, easily impressionable, turns his head away from the scene. The nun grabs his face and turns it back, forcing him to watch the execution. “Look!”⁴⁶ she urges him. Evidently, there is a lesson to be learnt here, and the boy will benefit from watching a man burnt alive. Meanwhile, on the cross—the cruciform posture clearly alludes to Christ (**Image 4.2**)—Bruno looks out over the crowd. He does not seem afraid or even worried but determined and almost serene. Soon, the flames and smoke engulf him, and he begins to moan. The crowd watches undisturbed, the red light of the fire reflected on their faces producing a sinister effect. Eventually, Bruno lets out a long, chilling scream, while the hooded figures work relentlessly, adding bundles of wood to the already large pile.

⁴³ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 53.

⁴⁴ White, *The Pope and the Heretic*, 6.

⁴⁵ “Credo che prenumerete la sentenza contro di me con maggior timore di quanto ne proverò io nell’ascoltarla.”

⁴⁶ “Guarda là!”



Image 4.1 A nun holding a boy in her arms while watching Bruno's public execution

The sequence lends itself to comparison with another famous public execution at the stake: that of Joan of Arc, in particular, as portrayed by Carl Theodor Dreyer in *Le Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928) and by Robert Bresson in *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 1962). In both films, the sequences portraying Joan's execution are much longer: approximately five minutes in *Le Procès* and ten minutes in *Le Passion*. By contrast, the shorter, straightforward sequence in *Galileo*, after the cut imposed by the censors, lasts less than two minutes. In Bresson's film, Joan's attitude resembles Bruno's steadfastness and quiet determination, but Dreyer's protagonist is incredibly emotional. The crowds follow the same pattern: in *Le Procès* and in *Galileo*, they exhibit neither participation in nor sympathy for the fate of the executed, but in *Le Passion*, the execution provokes an upheaval. Similar to *Galileo*, *Le Passion* also focuses on the shot of a young child, in this case, a baby being fed. Unlike the child in *Galileo*, though, this baby is blissfully unaware of events and continues to suckle on his mother's breast.

Regardless of the differences characterising the three depictions, what those executions have in common is the "spectacularisation" of such an event. The "spectacle" of public executions was famously addressed by Michel Foucault in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*.

In particular, in a section entitled “The Spectacle of the Scaffold,” the French philosopher discusses the use of public torture and execution in the eighteenth century. He writes

[...] from the point of view of the law that imposes it, public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph. The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory: the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry under the blows is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force.⁴⁷

According to Foucault’s analysis, public execution had four main functions. First, it turned the criminal into a “herald” of his condemnations, essentially a proof of the charges and a physical manifestation of the truth. Second, it reiterated the confession on a public stage, and occasionally even enriched it with new, additional information; third, it reproduced the violence of the original crime on the body of the condemned, often in abundance of symbols and theatricalities and as a warning to all. Finally, it acted as a juncture between earthly and divine justice, anticipating, or perhaps deriving from, the eternal sufferings that awaits the convict after his death.⁴⁸



Image 4.2 Bruno’s execution

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43–47.

All these elements are certainly present in Cavani's portrayal of Bruno's execution. His death is a thoroughly planned event that fulfils a number of functions and engages different, yet equally important, actors, namely the spectators, the Catholic hierarchies and Bruno himself. It is a warning, and in the minds of the persecutors most likely a deterrent, for the people watching, whose presence becomes an essential ingredient for the success of the operation. Again, on this note, Foucault writes, "In the ceremonies of the public execution, the main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance."⁴⁹ It also represents the restoration of order and reassertion of the power of the Church in a very public forum. It is a display of strength that allows the Catholic hierarchies to put Bruno, the heretic who has challenged authority and ventured beyond the moral and intellectual boundaries they had so carefully set, back into his place. To re-establish the original equilibrium, their response needs to be, and is, disproportionate and excessive. Once again, in the words of Foucault, the public execution "[...] is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular."⁵⁰ This public restoration takes place through an act of ultimate, yet calculated, violence on Bruno's body. His body engulfed by flames becomes a physical manifestation of the truth. As, it bears "his condemnation and the truth of the crime that he had committed,"⁵¹ it is the *locus* where crime and justice meet, where the transgression is not only reversed, but also annihilated.

The idea of punishment as a spectacle is re-enforced by the depiction of Galileo's official abjuration. The scientist is first paraded around the city on a donkey, wearing a long white dress and white pointed hat, eliciting the mockery of the bystanders and echoing a previous scene in the film that depicted a procession against heresy. Then, once he has reached his destination, Galileo is pushed into the middle of the enormous court, and he hesitantly walks towards the front of a space that looks more like a stadium or Roman arena than a courtroom. This spectacle-like sensation is magnified by the monkey running around the stands. The words of the script are especially illustrative of this moment: "All in all, it looks like a big circus where the biggest act is Galileo, not a man anymore, but a

⁴⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁵¹ Ibid., 43.

domesticated monkey.”⁵² Marrone observes that, at this point, Cavani’s work shows her debt to the legacy of Italian cinema,⁵³ specifically Italian neorealism as interpreted by Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini and described by Bazin as an “asymptote of reality.”⁵⁴ Discussing *Umberto D* (1952, dir. Vittorio De Sica)—a film Cavani has repeatedly acknowledged as instrumental in her directorial development⁵⁵—Bazin writes that “the purpose of De Sica and Zavattini is to make of cinema an asymptote of reality, in the process almost making of life itself a spectacle—life *in itself* at last, even as the cinema alters it.”⁵⁶ Various elements come together here to make Bruno’s and Galileo’s punishments into a spectacle. The Church’s own attested penchant for a spectacle and performance and the *modus operandi* of pre-modern power find the perfect cinematic outlet in Cavani’s own dramatisation of the events, which, as Marrone observes, is organised around “spectacular ‘numbers.’”⁵⁷

Religious Fanaticism

The punishments of Bruno and Galileo are certainly the clearest examples of dogmatism and zealotry translating into violent behaviour. There are, however, other significant displays of religious fanaticism in the film, which further convey the image of an oppressive institution. When Galileo is in Rome to introduce his invention of the telescope to the Catholic hierarchy, he witnesses a religious procession against heresy in the park of Cardinal Borghese’s palace. Men wearing black hoods carry a bier catafalque on top of which is a puppet dressed in a white tunic and pointed white hat. Hanging around the puppet’s neck is a sign that reads “Eresia defunta sia” (“Death to heresy”). The hooded figures set fire to the wood underneath the puppet, while those taking part in the procession—mainly noblemen, but also members of the clergy—start throwing fruit and vegetables at the puppet. People start to alternate the chant “Eresia defunta sia - Amen” with cries such as “Long live the Pope!” “Long live the Catholic Church!” and “Long live

⁵² “Nell’insieme sembra un grande circo equestre dove il ‘numero’ principale è costituito da Galileo, non più uomo ma scimmia addomesticata.” For more information, see Liliana Cavani, *Francesco e Galileo. Due film [Francesco and Galileo. Two Films]* (Torino: Gribaudi, 1970), 182.

⁵³ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 43.

⁵⁴ André Bazin, *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*, ed. Bert Cardullo (London: Continuum, 2011), 120.

⁵⁵ Cavani explicitly declared her love for *Umberto D* and its director Vittorio De Sica on a number of occasions. For more information, see Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 43; Barbara Palombelli, *Registi d’Italia [Directors of Italy]* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2006), 61. Interestingly, Cavani won a 1953 literary competition organised by the publishing company *Il Mulino* with a composition on the conference on neorealism, which took place in Parma that year. On this topic, see Buscemi, *Invito al Cinema di Liliana Cavani*, 25.

⁵⁶ Bazin, *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*, 120.

⁵⁷ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 43.

the Holy War!” The scene is not only a clear reminder of Bruno’s execution and a warning to Galileo, but it also foreshadows the procession at the end of the film where the scientist is forced to travel the streets of Rome on a donkey, wearing exactly the same attire worn by the puppet in this earlier scene. Such rituals have many functions, which include the promotion of social cohesion, ritual purification and admonishment. These aspects, which have been theorised by the likes of Emile Durkheim and René Girard, are efficiently summarised by Hall thus: “Violation of the targeted individual is taken to affirm the sacred, even as it legitimates the capacity of the religious group to exercise power in the affirmation of the sacred and to chart the boundaries of group allegiance.”⁵⁸

Another key sequence in this sense is the depiction of a Dominican friar preaching in Florence. As mentioned in the contextual section of this chapter, one of the consequences of the Council of Trent was the revitalisation of the religious orders of the Dominicans and Jesuits, who came to play a crucial role in Galileo’s trial.⁵⁹ The Dominicans, in particular, are known as “Domini Canes” (“Hounds of the Lord”) in virtue of “their close involvement with efforts to suppress heresy.”⁶⁰ The image of the dog appears particularly apt to portray not only the friars’ relentlessness in pursuing their objective, but also their servility and fidelity to the Inquisition’s cause, and ultimately even their blind obedience in following orders. From his podium, this particular friar speaks with tremendous fervour and vehemence against Galileo, accusing him—and any supporter of the Copernican system—of heresy. What made Copernicus’ heliocentrism particularly difficult to accept was not only its discrediting of the traditional Aristotelian and Ptolemaic geocentrism, but also its contradiction of the Scriptures. In fact, Copernicus’s theory of the Earth’s motion was incompatible with that asserted by the Bible, particularly Joshua 10:12–13, which details God’s stopping of the sun and the moon at Joshua’s request. As MacMullin explains, “The Copernican theses about the Earth’s motion and the Sun’s stability were [...] clearly at odds with specific passages in the Bible. To affirm such theses, therefore, was equivalent to calling the authority of the Scripture into question.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ John R. Hall, “Religion and Violence from a Sociological Perspective,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, eds. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 367.

⁵⁹ Mayer, “Introduction,” 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ MacMullin, “Galileo on Science and Scripture,” 272–273.

Historically, it took an embarrassingly long time for the Catholic Church to rehabilitate Galileo, and when it finally happened it was mainly thanks to the efforts of Pope Giovanni Paolo II.⁶² In a speech made on the commemoration of Albert Einstein’s hundredth birthday on 10 November 1979—not even a month after his election to the papal throne—while acknowledging the importance of celebrating the German genius, Pope Giovanni Paolo II pointed out that Galileo had yet to receive the same treatment. He said: “Galileo’s greatness is known to all, as is Einstein’s; but unlike the latter, whom we honour today in front of the College of Cardinals in our apostolic palace, the first suffered greatly—we can not hide it—at the hands of the Church’s men and organisms.”⁶³ He then encouraged theologians, scholars and historians to cooperate to give “the Galileo affair” deserved and unbiased attention as well as to promote harmony between science and faith.⁶⁴ To this end, he created a special commission on 3 July 1981,⁶⁵ whose work lasted for more than ten years. On 31 October 1992, almost three hundred and sixty years after the scientist’s condemnation, Giovanni Paolo II termed Galileo a “sincere believer”⁶⁶ and praised him for his foresight in applying a scientific method to everything and being able to separate the Sacred Scriptures from their—sometimes erroneous—interpretations,⁶⁷ thus officially rehabilitating the scientist.

Galileo: A Catholic Man

The film portrays Galileo as a profoundly religious man, compliant with and obedient to Catholic precepts. His adherence to the faith is not formal but genuine and committed. This aspect of Galileo’s character emerges early in the film as he confronts Bruno’s claims during a lunch with Venetian noblemen. Bruno provokes his dining companions by

⁶² There had been some feeble attempts at rehabilitation before. In 1823, Pope Pio VII authorised the publication of the work of Giuseppe Settele, a priest who supported Galilean heliocentrism, after the issue was discussed by the Holy Office for three years. Further, a short reference was made to Galileo in a footnote in the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). For more information, see Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes* Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” Vatican website, 7 December 1965, accessed 10 November 2015, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, sec. 36 and Giovanni Paolo II, “Discorso ai partecipanti alla Sessione Plenaria della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze,” Vatican website, 31 October 1992, accessed 30 June 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1992/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19921031_accademia-scienze.html, sec. 9.

⁶³ “La grandezza di Galileo è a tutti nota, come quella di Einstein; ma a differenza di questi, che oggi onoriamo di fronte al Collegio cardinalizio nel nostro palazzo apostolico, il primo ebbe molto a soffrire — non possiamo nascondere — da parte di uomini e organismi di Chiesa.” For more information, see Giovanni Paolo II, “Per la commemorazione della nascita di Albert Einstein,” Vatican website, 10 November 1979, accessed 30 June 2016, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1979/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19791110_einstein.html, sec. 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Giovanni Paolo II, “Discorso ai partecipanti alla Sessione Plenaria della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze,” sec. 4.

⁶⁶ “sincere credente,” Ibid., sec. 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

asking, “And if, one day, you’ll be able to figure out the anatomy of the universe, do you really think you’ll find the Heavens there?”⁶⁸ Galileo appears incredibly uncomfortable with this statement and immediately demands, “What kind of question is this?”⁶⁹ His discomfort, however, does not arise from fear of agreeing with an excommunicated man and attracting the undesired attention of the Inquisition; Galileo, indeed, agrees to meet the philosopher later. As a true believer, however, Galileo is troubled, even shaken by the insinuation. He continues to display this attitude throughout the film, even as he faces the callous, cruel, hypocritical attitude of the Catholic hierarchy. Even his dedication of one of his key works, *Il Saggiatore* (*The Assayer*, 1623), to Pope Urbano VIII, which could have been portrayed as the outcome of scheming or at least an attempt at flattery, is shown as an act of respect. As Marrone observes, “in Cavani’s ironic view, Galileo is a forerunner, but he is above all a man operating within, and answerable to, the dominant systems of his era.”⁷⁰

As the film proceeds, Galileo does defy the Church’s orders, in this sense going against its promoted values of humility and obedience. He speaks passionately about the importance of seeking the truth and gives lectures and speeches in favour of the Copernican system but never ceases to treat clerics with the utmost respect. Only a handful of times does Galileo’s frustration surface, and even so, only in dreams. Indeed, while held prisoner during his trial, he dreams of finally standing up to his accusers, calling them to account for their greed, bigotry and hypocrisy: “Don’t look at me as if I were the devil. [...] Let me tell you something, though: if there’s someone here who’s seen the devil, that is me. I’ve seen him, in some of your faces. And not just today.”⁷¹ Ultimately, the greatest error of this devout, honest man lies in his naiveté: until the very end, he is certain that he will eventually manage to change his accusers’ minds. In the words of Bondanella, “Cavani’s Galileo is the historic Galileo—not a man in revolt against the Church but a Christian scientist who felt himself, a true believer, to have been betrayed by a Church which, he wrongly believed, was as opposed to ignorance as he was.”⁷²

⁶⁸ “E se un giorno arriverete a fare l’anatomia dell’universo, pensate veramente che ci troverete il paradiso?”

⁶⁹ “Ma che domanda è?”

⁷⁰ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 38.

⁷¹ “Non state lì a guardarmi come se fossi il diavolo incarnato [...] però voglio dirvi una cosa: se c’è qualcuno che ha visto il diavolo, ebbene quello sono io. L’ho visto, sì, in alcune vostre facce. E non solo oggi.”

⁷² Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 348.

In *Galileo*, the contrast between faith lived as a personal choice, on the one hand, and as obedience and compliance to the institution of the Catholic Church, on the other, is marked. To the Italian scientist, speaking about his discoveries is not an act of defiance but an inescapable moral duty, which does nothing to deny God. For instance, during one of Galileo's lectures advocating geocentrism, a friar objects, "But this way you kick God out of the sky! Where do you put God in your system?"⁷³ Galileo's reply is as insightful as it is modern: "Where He's always been: in ourselves. Inside us."⁷⁴ A true believer, Galileo's respect for Catholic precepts and values is surpassed only by his love for the truth.

The Trial

Galileo's trial is incredibly relevant for a number of reasons. First, positioned at the end of the film, it accounts for almost one-third of its length. Second, its portrayal reflects the relevance of the actual historical event. Indeed, while Galileo's notoriety is primarily connected to the importance of his contributions, which range from physics, to astronomy, to applied technology, to philosophy, to the Italian language, his troubles and persecutions at the hands of the Inquisition further increased the mythology surrounding him. As Finocchiaro points out: "The trial of Galileo continues to fascinate scientists, churchmen, scholars, and laypersons alike, and everybody seems to find in it something to learn regarding the relationship between science and religion, between individual freedom and institutional authority, between scientific research and political power or social responsibility, and so on."⁷⁵ As a pivotal event in itself, the trial nevertheless held the more contingent and immediate consequence of silencing Galileo by sentencing him to house arrest and banning his work.⁷⁶

However, what makes the trial particularly significant is its unveiling of the repressive and multifaceted nature of ecclesiastical power, which is, paradoxically, simultaneously present and absent. On the one hand, there is constant surveillance. Cavani's portrayal of Galileo's detention during the trial appears to be modelled on Foucault's discussion of the

⁷³ "Ma così cacciate Dio dal cielo! Dove lo mettete Dio nel vostro sistema?"

⁷⁴ "Dov'è sempre stato: in noi. Dentro di noi."

⁷⁵ Galileo Galilei, *The Essential Galileo*, ed. and trans. Maurice Angelo Finocchiaro (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2008), 1–2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15. In particular, his seminal book *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* (*The Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*) would stay banned for more than two hundred years. It was not until 1835 that all the works on the Copernican system were omitted from the *Index*.

Benthamian *Panopticism*. The Vatican rooms become a space where “Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere [...]”⁷⁷ Indeed, from his first appearance before the court to his abjuration, Galileo is never let out of his accusers’ sights. Not even in his small cell does the scientist find a moment of respite. Not only is he always in the company of a young Dominican friar, Father Charles, who acts both as prison guard and intermediary, but he is also spied upon by the cardinals through holes in the walls (**Image 4.3**). The effect of this systematic surveillance is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”⁷⁸

At the same time, however, ecclesiastical power has an extremely elusive nature. There is a high degree of anonymity and impersonality in the way in which the Catholic hierarchy carries out the trial and Galileo’s punishment, which goes beyond a simple lack of empathy. This detached and indifferent behaviour is hard to reconcile with their persecutory and intimidatory attitude, as the latter would indeed suggest a strong emotional and ideological investment. However, this attitude becomes clear when inscribed into the context of Church dogma. In their exercise of justice, they derive their authority directly from God. In this sense, they are instruments of God’s will, mere executors of His design, with no need for independent and critical thinking. They are protected, ensured and enabled by the dogma of papal and Church infallibility. On this topic, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads:

The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the *charism of infallibility*. This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁷⁹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2035.



Image 4.3 A Dominican friar spying on Galileo

In practice, however, this translates into an ambiguous exercise of power, which is simultaneously non-existent and ubiquitous; irreducible to a single, contingent entity yet repeated and declined by the many members of the clergy. Once again, Foucault's theorisation of power appears particularly suited here. He writes:

Disciplinary power [...] is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is this fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification.⁸⁰

The “invisible nature” of the power exercised by the Church becomes evident if we consider the attitude displayed by Pope Urbano VIII in the film. Although the designated head of the Inquisition, the Pope never directly confronts his former protégé; yet, this behaviour comes as no surprise. As a cardinal, Maffeo Barberini was the scientist's patron, but after becoming Pope, he washed his hands of Galileo and became one of his

⁸⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 187.

worst persecutors. This change in attitude was foreshadowed in an earlier sequence in the film. After introducing Galileo to Pope Paolo V, Barberini comments that the pontiff obviously thinks highly of scientists, who he did not ask to bend and kiss his *pantofola* (slipper). However, during Galileo's audience with the newly elected Barberini, the camera first shows a close-up of the prostrate scientist kissing the Pope's slipper.

Throughout the trial scenes, Urbano VIII makes only one appearance, and this is unrelated to the Galileo affair. Instead, he discusses the details of his sumptuous tomb with Roman artist Lorenzo Bernini. Bernini directs a group of children and women who pose as models allegorising the Catholic virtues of charity, faith, hope and fortitude. It is not lost on the audience that charity is a virtue the Pope clearly lacks. In fact, after a prelate informs him that Galileo has confessed, Urbano VIII still demands an "exemplary punishment"⁸¹ for the Pisan scientist.

In addition, the statue representing the pontiff is missing its face, and the wooden framework underneath is visible (**Image 4.4**). The meaning behind this image is clear: the film gradually yet inexorably exposes the mechanisms and dynamics that regulate religious power, revealing the emptiness under the polished, elegant façade of Catholicism, devoid of genuine humanity, values or concerns. It is no mistake that Cavani selects this image as the last shot in the film: a faceless, cold statue symbolises indifference and vacuity, a form of power that varies yet remains the same, as the statue's head can be filled by any face.⁸²

4.3 Style

If *Galileo's* narrative is decisive in presenting an image of the Catholic Church as a cold, repressive institution, so is the film's *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, making its style extremely coherent with its themes. One of the film's most remarkable traits is Cavani's use of camera angles. This practice is especially evident in the scenes portraying Galileo's trial and abjuration.

⁸¹ "Una punizione esemplare."

⁸² In relation to this, Marrone comments: "Galileo's final shot zooms into the skeleton head of the pope, exposing the emptiness and decay of the papacy's repressive mechanisms." For more information, see Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 6.



Image 4.4 The statue of Pope Urbano VIII

The Pope and cardinals are shot from very low angles, and Galileo from a high angle (**Image 4.5** and **Image 4.6**), associating the former with power, authority and inapproachability and emphasising the latter's vulnerable condition. What emerges from the sequence, apart from the blatant injustice, is the feeling of loneliness: Galileo is a small, single man crushed by the enormous cultural, social and political power of the Catholic Church. During another scene of a conversation between Pope Urbano VIII and the cardinals, the Pope is shot obliquely, a visual nod to his ambiguous personality. Finally, the director often frames shots so that the camera acts as an anonymous eye. Large audiences, variously composed of academic and religious figures, in such scenes as the university lectures and the trials of Bruno and Galileo are filmed from behind as they look on at events. The camera rises above the audience and zooms in on the source of the action. This technique serves two purposes: first, it gives viewers a feeling of participation as if they were secretly peeking in at the scene, and second, it portrays the crowd as united in the refusal to be swayed from their beliefs, despite the evidence provided by Galileo. Ultimately, the audience is impenetrable to the message the scientist wishes to convey.



Image 4.5 Galileo kneeling before the judges



Image 4.6 A low-angle shot of the cardinals during Galileo's trial

Cavani paid careful attention to the film's settings. The majority of the interiors were shot on a purpose-built set in Bulgaria, with the rest filmed in the Medici chapels in San Lorenzo, Florence and the anatomy room in Padua.⁸³ In an interview with Tiso, Cavani

⁸³ Gasparini, "Dentro *Galileo*," 82.

explained the importance of set design: “[...] Cinema is the image, and the set design speaks louder than the film dialogue. The set design is deeply connected to the characters’ psychology, and it sometimes speaks on their behalf.”⁸⁴ This is particularly true of *Galileo*. Indeed, significant differences exist in the appearance of the rooms associated with Galileo (his home and lecture room) and with the Catholic hierarchy. The former are mostly made of wood and are spacious, bright and sober, almost ascetic. The latter, made of fine, expensive marble, are larger but have cold, geometric architecture. The smaller rooms owned by the Church, such as the cell where Galileo is held, are as austere as the scientist’s rooms but seem oppressive and constrictive. While Marrone argues that the “straight geometrical barrenness of [Galileo’s] environment” highlights the scientist’s status as representative of “symmetry and logical clarity,”⁸⁵ I believe that their sobriety also points to another key theme in the film, namely the contrast between the opulent and ostentatious façade of the Church, which hides a substantial moral vacuity underneath, and the simple yet genuine principles, both scientific and ethical, endorsed by Galileo.

The feeling of solemnity and pomposity is also conveyed by the clothing worn by the clergy and academics. This becomes particularly evident when confronted with Galileo’s more informal attire in his home, and his intolerance at having to wear an academic collar, which he repeatedly tugs at and at one point removes with the utmost relief. While this certainly hints at the scientist’s discomfort at conforming to the scientifically incorrect principles championed by the Church, as observed by Marrone,⁸⁶ it is also a visual nod to his desire to proceed in his intellectual endeavour without any constriction. This is reflected by the prelates’ stances and their positioning within the frame. During the interrogations, they form, at least visually, extremely cohesive ranks. They sit on marble thrones, with impassive expressions and physical immobility mirroring their mental rigidity. They fill the elegant, baroque room, literally surrounding the scientist. The contrast with Galileo, who passionately argues his case while avoiding disrespect, is marked.

⁸⁴ “[...] Il cinema è immagine e la scenografia parla più del dialogo del film. La scenografia è strettamente legata alla psicologia dei personaggi e a volte parla per loro.” For more information, see Ciriaco Tiso, *Liliana Cavani* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1975), 4.

⁸⁵ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

In other instances, however, as noted by Marrone, it is the scientist who “stands docile, unable to utter a complete sentence, while the clergymen move relentlessly along the sinuous forms drawn on the marble floor.”⁸⁷

Another interesting feature of the film is the repeated use of circular shapes that, as Gearing points out, allude to Galileo’s planetary studies.⁸⁸ Circles appear from the glass balls in the telescope and the staircase on which Bruno and Galileo discuss their ideas (**Image 4.7**) to the gardens, round pools and staircases of Venetian villas and the oval wooden bathtub in Galileo’s house. This pattern becomes even more evident in the invention of the telescope: Galileo looks at the world through this circular shape. Marrone argues that Cavani’s cinematic style validates Galileo’s privileged instrument by manipulating the lens and camera angles to magnify or reduce objects. By applying this technique, “[...] she visualizes the dialogic nature of the telescopic lenses, whose concave and convex surfaces alternatively create the optical effects of inflation and *reductio*.”⁸⁹



Image 4.7 Galileo and Bruno talking on a circular staircase

⁸⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁸ Nigel Gearing, “Galileo,” *Monthly Film Bulletin* 42 (April 1975): 81–82.

⁸⁹ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 43.

Dialogue, often in the form of monologues, is used abundantly. From the first scene of the debate in the anatomy room to Galileo's lectures and the explanation of his theories and the trials, the film is verbose. More than any of the other films examined in this thesis, *Galileo* relies on the spoken word to deliver his criticism of religious power. However, whereas in *E venne un uomo* (Chapter 3) monologue serves the purpose of endowing the film with unquestionable authority, in *Galileo* the protagonist uses it to accomplish the opposite, namely to challenge and question such authority.

Moreover, pairs of words with opposite meanings, such as “eresie” (“heresy”) and “verità” (“truth”), “bene” (“good”) and “male” (“bad”), and “ragione” (“reason”) and fede (“faith”) are repeated throughout the film, giving a further sense of the intellectual and moral boundaries Galileo is obligated to move within. A number of words are also borrowed from scientific and medical language (“surgeon,” “cut,” “brain”) to reinforce the image of the coldness, sterility, and impersonality of the Church.

4.4 Reception

Perhaps foreseeing the film's mixed reception and unusual fate, Cavani dubbed it a “*film dibattito*” (a “film for discussion”).⁹⁰ This film's journey, possibly more than any other discussed herein, reveals not only extremely interesting elements of its Catholic reception but also the nature of the repressive mechanisms operating in a secular state and organisations. Contradictions abound in the circumstances of *Galileo*'s reception, attesting to the extremely complex, variegated nature of Italian Catholicism and its often unfortunate yet inextricable ties with Italian culture. For instance, the film was commissioned by RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana), the State Italian Television, but was never shown on television.⁹¹ The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico condemned it in its publication *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, yet the film owes its visibility to the efforts of the Catholic company San Paolo Film.⁹²

⁹⁰ Luigi Costantini, “Un Galileo precursore del Concilio” [“A Galileo Precursor of the Council”], *Panorama*, 15 February 1968, 51.

⁹¹ An email exchange with the Settore Service Teche RAI confirmed that, at least up until 18 April 2016, the film has never been broadcast on the RAI channels. For more information, see Appendix I.

⁹² San Paolo Film is a branch of Società San Paolo, an Italian religious congregation active in the fields of old and new media. In 1938, Società San Paolo, which until then had focused on the book sector, decided to found its first cinematographic company, REF, which later became Parva Film and, in 1955, San Paolo Film. For more information, see Dario E. Viganò, “Il cinema: ricezione, riflessione, rifiuto” [“The Cinema: Reception, Reflection, Rejection”], accessed 26 June 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-cinema-ricezione-riflessione-rifiuto_\(Cristiani-d'Italia\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-cinema-ricezione-riflessione-rifiuto_(Cristiani-d'Italia)/)

Ironically, the fate befalling *Galileo* after its release reflects many of its themes, namely the importance of the freedom of thought and speech and the independence of judgement, the dialectics of personal conscience and obedience to authority and the implications of institutionalised power and its effects on culture.

Galileo was presented alongside Pasolini's *Teorema* at the Venice Film Festival in September 1968.⁹³ It generally received favourable comments from film critics, winning the Cineforum prize "for the clarity and the deep conviction with which it presents a current issue."⁹⁴ However, the film's release also marked the beginning of a convoluted series of events rivalling fiction. Soon after the showing, *Galileo* was ruled "VM18," or "unsuitable for children."⁹⁵ The censor board requested that the director "shorten the stake scene, horrific given the macabre details, the insistence of the sequences, and the agonising screams of the victim [...]"⁹⁶ Despite the many protests voiced by both Cavani and sections of the Italian press,⁹⁷ Bruno's execution scene was cut considerably and the restriction was eventually lifted on 11 October 1968.⁹⁸

⁹³ The 1968 Venice Film Festival was an extremely controversial affair, as explored in the next chapter.

⁹⁴ "Per la chiarezza e la profonda convinzione con le quali presenta una problematica attuale." For more information, see "Il Premio 'Cineforum 1968'" [The 'Cineforum 1968' Prize"], *Cineforum* 8 (1968), 592.

⁹⁵ "Galileo," Italia Taglia, accessed 15 November 2015, <http://www.italiataglia.it/>

⁹⁶ "abbreviare la scena del rogo, raccapricciante dati i macabri particolari, per l'insistenza delle sequenze, per le strazianti urla della vittima [...]" Ibid.

⁹⁷ See, for example, "Tre secoli dopo l'Inquisizione. La censura contro *Galileo*" ["Three Centuries After the Inquisition. Censorship Against *Galileo*"], *Paese Sera Roma*, 6 September 1968, 3; "La Cavani su 'Galileo' proibito ai minori" ["Cavani on 'Galileo' Forbidden to Minors"], *Il Piccolo Trieste*, 9 September 1968, 7; Alberto Moravia, "In ginocchio davanti ai censori" ["On (Their) Knees in Front of the Censors"], *L'Espresso*, 22 September 1968, 23; Lino Micciché, "Un salto nella verità" ["A Leap into the Truth"], *Avanti!*, 29 September 1968, 8.

⁹⁸ "Galileo," Italia Taglia, accessed 15 November 2015, <http://www.italiataglia.it/>

The Italian press concentrated on three aspects of the film. First, attention was placed on the differences between Cavani's and Brecht's interpretations of Galileo's story.⁹⁹ Second, the film's resonance with contemporary events, supported by the director's statements on the matter,¹⁰⁰ prompted many critics to draw parallels between the social, political and religious status quo of the seventeenth century and that of the late 1960s.¹⁰¹ In the article "Galileo: ieri come oggi" ("Galileo: Today, like Yesterday"), Grazzini observes:

The relevance of a similar topic is evident to anyone. [Once you] replace the Church of the Counter-Reformation with the new totalitarian churches or the occult violence exercised by consumerist society, the figure of Galileo becomes the symbol of a defeated man through the work of institutionalised hierarchies and witch hunters.¹⁰²

Biraghi, like many others, concurs with this assessment: "The most interesting aspect of the film is its timely subject. If Cavani had sought, through a particular case, to throw another rock against obscurantism in general, she could not have found a better time."¹⁰³ As these reviews stress, the film not only appears to primarily target the Catholic Church but also launches a more general criticism of repressive power and authoritarianism. Only a month before the 1968 Venice Film Festival, Russian troops invaded Czechoslovakia, effectively ending the democratisation process sparked by the Prague Spring.¹⁰⁴ In this context, a number of articles drew comparisons between the situation portrayed in *Galileo* and the repressive Soviet regime, with Zanelli going as far as to compare Czechoslovakian leader Alexander Dubcek with Galileo.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ See, for example, Angelo Maccario, "Un film a colori su Galileo per la regia di Liliana Cavani" ["A Film in Colour About Galileo Directed by Liliana Cavani"], *Il Messaggero*, 27 February 1967, 12; Italo Moscati, "Un Galileo 'Anti-Brecht' ["An 'Anti-Brecht' Galileo]," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 September 1967, 5; Mario Foglietti, "Tra un Brecht e un antiBrecht c'è posto per un altro Galileo" ["Between One Brecht and One AntiBrecht There Is Room for Another Galileo"], *Il Popolo*, 25 November 1967, 11.

¹⁰⁰ For more information, see Ivano Cipriani, "Cavani risponde ai suoi critici" ["Cavani Replies to Her Critics"], *Paese Sera*, 5 September 1968, 14; Luigi Costantini, "Un Galileo precursore," 51-52.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Guglielmo Biraghi, "Un Galileo moderno" ["A Modern Galileo"], *Il Messaggero*, 3 September 1968, 10; Giovanni Grazzini, "Galileo: ieri come oggi" ["Galileo: Today, Like Yesterday"], *Corriere della Sera*, 3 September 1968, 13; Dario Zanelli, "Un 'Galileo' che fa pensare a Dubcek" ["A 'Galileo' That Makes You Think of Dubcek"], *Il Resto del Carlino*, 3 September 1968, 9.

¹⁰² "L'attualità di un tema simile è evidente a chiunque. Sostituite alla Chiesa controriformista le nuove Chiese totalitarie o le violenze occulte esercitate dalla società dei consumi, la figura di Galileo diviene il simbolo di una sconfitta dell'uomo per opera delle gerarchie istituzionalizzate e dei cacciatori di streghe." For more information, see Grazzini, "Galileo: ieri come oggi," 13.

¹⁰³ "L'aspetto più interessante del film è la sua attualità tematica. Se la Cavani ha inteso, attraverso un caso particolare, scagliare un'ennesima pietra contro l'oscurantismo in generale, non poteva trovare momento migliore." For more information, see Biraghi, "Un Galileo moderno," 10.

¹⁰⁴ "Gli annunci di Praga e di Mosca" ["The Announcements of Prague and Moscow"], *L'Unità*, 21 August 1968, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Zanelli, "Un Galileo," 9.

Finally, several articles focus on the film's difficulties with censorship.¹⁰⁶ Significantly, Italian writer Moravia entitles his article "In ginocchio davanti ai censori" ("On [Their] Knees in Front of the Censors"), establishing a parallel between Galileo's inquisitors and the film's censors.¹⁰⁷ The newspaper *Paese Sera* makes the same reference in the article "Tre secoli dopo l'Inquisizione. La censura contro Galileo" ("Three Centuries after the Inquisition. Censorship against Galileo"),¹⁰⁸ while Miccichè comments on the censor's decision: "You cannot [but] have the feeling of being back to dark Middle Age ideas."¹⁰⁹ In reaction to the censor's decision, Cavani shot back:

I appeal to everyone's common sense in order to make it is possible for young people to see the film *Galileo*. To forbid it for children under the age of eighteen means to insult young people, hold culture in contempt and [makes me] believe that we are a country of the mentally handicapped. It's paradoxical that the fate of Galileo shall be repeated today.¹¹⁰

As far as the Catholic reception of *Galileo* goes, however, the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, through its publication *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, issued a rather harsh judgment:

The aim of bringing to light Galileo's story and the Church's error in condemning him is undermined at its roots by the polemic quality of the director's personal discourse. This biased and malicious attitude, confirmed by the distortion of some historical facts, leads to the exaggeration of the behaviour of the Church, which is portrayed as a vessel for obscurantism and conservatism. This partial and subjective view of history only allows the film to be appreciated by an audience of mature adults.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Miccichè, "Un salto nella verità," 8; Moravia, "In ginocchio davanti ai censori," 23.

¹⁰⁷ Moravia, "In ginocchio davanti ai censori," 23.

¹⁰⁸ "Tre secoli," 3.

¹⁰⁹ "Non si può non avere la sensazione di essere tornati ad un oscuro Medioevo delle idee." For more information, see Miccichè, "Un salto nella verità," 8.

¹¹⁰ "Mi appello al buon senso di tutti perché sia lecito ai giovani vedere il film *Galileo*. Vietarlo ai minori di 18 anni significa insultare i giovani, tenere in disprezzo la cultura e ritenere che siamo in un paese di minorati psichici. E' paradossale che il destino di Galileo debba ripetersi ancora oggi." For more information, see "La Cavani su *Galileo* proibito ai minori," 7.

¹¹¹ "L'intento di riportare alla luce la storia di Galileo e l'errore della Chiesa nel condannarlo, è minato alle radici dal polemico discorso personale del regista. Tale fazioso e malizioso atteggiamento, confermato dalla distorsione di alcuni fatti storici, porta a calcare la mano sul comportamento della Chiesa che sembra essere vista come vessillifera dell'oscurantismo e conservatorismo. Questa parziale e soggettiva visione della storia inducono a riservare la visione ad un pubblico di adulti maturi." For more information, see Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, ed., *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche. Volume LXIV — 1968* (Rome: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1968), 203.

Nevertheless, the Catholic world reacted otherwise quite positively to the film. Among the documents in the “Fondo Liliana Cavani” are the letters that the director exchanged with a number of Italian journalists writing for Catholic publications as well as members of the clergy in relation to the film. Cavani had sent the screenplay to Belgian Jesuit Jos Burvenich, who, in a letter dated 20 June 1967, replied: “My impression [of the film] is excellent.”¹¹² Cavani had also sent the screenplay to Cavallaro, who was then writing for *L’Avvenire d’Italia* and *Rivista del cinematografo*. In his reply, Cavallaro, while criticising the film’s dialogue as well as the depiction of Galileo as a politically shrewd man, gave an overall positive assessment,¹¹³ which was later echoed in his review published in *Rivista del cinematografo*.¹¹⁴ Further, a report on the Venice Film Festival compiled by don Francesco Angelicchio, then Ecclesiastical Advisor for the *Ente nazionale dello spettacolo*, reveals a positive attitude towards the film and its director, who is included in the ranks of the “Catholics.”¹¹⁵

An analysis of articles published in Catholic newspapers also reveals little consistency of opinion. For instance, Sorgi applauded the film, claiming that “only a Christian could handle such an issue without distorting it [...] with love, I would say, defending personal freedom, to defend the very mission of the Church.”¹¹⁶ Catholic critic Rondi took issue with what he felt was a parodic portrayal of religious figures but failed to perceive any connection to religious power, instead seeing criticism of the Soviet Union as the only reference to current events.¹¹⁷

¹¹² “Mon impression est excellente.” For more information, see Jos Burvenich, “Letter to Liliana Cavani,” ASSC, FLC, Materiale Relative a Galileo, Schedatura D, doc. N. 4.

¹¹³ Giovanni Battista Cavallaro, “Letter to Liliana Cavani,” ASSC, FLC, Materiale Relative a Galileo, Schedatura D, doc. N. 4.

¹¹⁴ Giovanni Battista Cavallaro, “Galileo,” *Rivista del cinematografo* 41 (September–October 1968), 525-526.

¹¹⁵ Francesco Angelicchio, “Rapporto sulla XXIX Mostra Internazionale d’Arte Cinematografica” [“Report on the XXIX Edition of the ‘International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art’”], 16 September 1968 (ACEI7), 3.

¹¹⁶ “Solo un cristiano poteva trattare un tema così senza deviarlo [...] con amore, direi, difendendo la libertà della persona, per difendere la stessa missione della Chiesa.” For more information, see Claudio Sorgi, “Accolto il ‘Galileo’ con una buona dose di consensi e polemiche” [“‘Galileo’ Received with a Good Dose of Consent and Controversy”], *L’Osservatore Romano*, 4 September 1968, 5.

¹¹⁷ Gian Luigi Rondi, “Un suggestivo ‘Galileo’ sullo schermo della Mostra” [“An Evocative ‘Galileo’ on Screen at the Festival”], *Il Tempo*, 3 September 1968, 7. In an article in the Catholic newspaper *Il Popolo*, Paolo Valmarana agrees with Rondi’s interpretation, dubbing Urbano VIII’s portrayal “parodic.” For more information, see Paolo Valmarana, “Esempio di chiarezza il film della Cavani” [“Cavani’s Film as an Example of Clarity”], *Il Popolo*, 3 September 1968, 5.

Both Sorgi's and Rondi's views are in line with a strategy often employed by Catholicism, which Bellocchio brilliantly describes as the Church's "extraordinary capacity for taking over and adapting everything to its own ends."¹¹⁸ The Catholic press appears to have focused only on what it could use to its own benefit, such as Galileo's faith, simply turning a blind eye to the film's more radical accusations, whether implicit or explicit.

Nevertheless, there was no hiding Cavani's criticism of authority based on religious power and its consequences. Not only was the connection between the Church in *Galileo* and the post-conciliar Church of Paolo VI easy to make, as repeatedly highlighted by both the director and critics,¹¹⁹ but Cavani also chose to dedicate much of the film to Bruno. While not dismissing different readings of the film, Cavani emphasised that *Galileo* very much dealt with situations that concern "us, the so-called Catholic people."¹²⁰ She asserted that "it is too simplistic to draw a veil of silence over the Church, over its past and present power, overt and covert, over its cultural and social influence."¹²¹

Finally, another key piece in this mosaic of reactions to *Galileo* is the film's journey with RAI. *Galileo*, like Cavani's earlier film *Francesco d'Assisi*, was commissioned by RAI.¹²² Executive Angelo Guglielmi, in the context of biographies produced for a new second channel, decided to commission the young director to make the film.¹²³ According to the accounts of Guglielmi, trouble started in the early stages of the film's production, and it was completed only due to the intercession of an important prelate,¹²⁴ most likely

¹¹⁸ Marco Bellocchio and Nicoletta Zalaffi, "Interview with Marco Bellocchio," *Sight and Sound* 42, no. 4 (1973): 199. On this matter, see Chapter Six of this thesis.

¹¹⁹ Costantini, "Un Galileo Precursore," 51-52; Tullio Kezich, "Galileo," *Bianco e Nero* 5-6 (1969): 146-147.

¹²⁰ "Noi cosiddetto popolo di cattolici." For more information, see Cipriani, "Cavani risponde," 14.

¹²¹ "Sulla Chiesa, sul suo potere passato e presente, palese e occulto, sulla sua influenza culturale e sociale è troppo semplicistico stendere un velo di silenzio." *Ibid.*

¹²² The political dynamics governing Italian state television, albeit certainly a fascinating and worthy topic, fall outside the scope of this thesis. For more information on this topic, see Giuseppe Gnagnarella, *Storia politica della RAI, 1945-2010* [*Political History of RAI, 1945-2010*] (L'Aquila: Textus, 2010); Giulia Guazzaloca, *Una e divisibile: la Rai e i partiti negli anni del monopolio pubblico, 1954-1975* [*One and Divisible: RAI and Political Parties in the Years of the Public Monopoly, 1954-1975*] (Florence: Le Monnier, 2011). An in-depth analysis of the films produced by RAI during 1965-1975 is available in Francesco Pinto, Guido Barlozzetti, and Claver Salizzato, eds. *La Televisione presenta: la produzione cinematografica della RAI, 1965-1975* [*Television Presents: RAI's Cinematographic Production, 1965-1975*] (Venice: Marsilio, 1988).

¹²³ Critics have discussed the implications of the fact that Cavani was *commissioned* to make *Galileo*. Buscemi brands the film "cold" and suggests that Cavani did not feel as emotionally connected to it as to *Francesco d'Assisi*; clearly, Buscemi mistakes ironic detachment for a lack of engagement. While concurring with Buscemi's assessment, Gasparini also points out that the work is reflective not only of the director's personal views but most likely also of a larger body of public opinion in Italy at the time. For more information on this topic, see Buscemi, *Invito al Cinema di Liliana*, 51; Gasparini, "Dentro *Galileo*," 66.

¹²⁴ Angelo Guglielmi, "Dalla TV al Cinema" ["From TV to Cinema"] in *Lo Sguardo libero: Il Cinema di Liliana Cavani* [*The Free Gaze: Liliana Cavani's Cinema*], eds. Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1990), 128.

Monsignor Francesco Angelicchio. Angelicchio, then Ecclesiastical Advisor for the Ente nazionale dello spettacolo, had previously interceded on behalf of Cavani in the case of *Francesco d'Assisi*.¹²⁵

Additional reports held that RAI executives conducted an unofficial showing without inviting the director or the producer and shortly after—possibly even the day after, according to Guglielmi¹²⁶—sold the film to the film company Cineriz, owned by businessman Angelo Rizzoli. The film was distributed in cinemas only in February 1969 after being cut from 105 to 92 minutes.¹²⁷ Cavani claimed that Rizzoli withdrew the film from cinemas at the request of Christian Democrat Giulio Andreotti,¹²⁸ then Minister of Industry and Trade.¹²⁹ Furthermore, it appears that RAI swiftly destroyed every copy in its possession, effectively breaching its contract with the director.¹³⁰ Indeed, in interviews Cavani explained that when Mimmo Scarano became General Director of RAI in 1975, he expressed his desire to finally broadcast *Galileo*, only to find out that every copy of the film had been destroyed.¹³¹ Ironically and rather inexplicably, the film's circulation only grew thanks to Catholic company San Paolo Film's¹³² decision to distribute it in schools.¹³³

This was certainly not the first time that Cavani courted controversy, nor was it the last. Her documentary *La casa in Italia* (*House in Italy*, 1964), which examines the difficulties of living in Italy, caused some debate. In particular, the second episode, a denunciation of property speculation, was cut by 18 minutes.¹³⁴ Similarly, *Francesco d'Assisi*, while appealing to the progressive strain of Catholicism, became the subject of a parliamentary

¹²⁵ For more information, see Martini, "Interview with Liliana Cavani," 246; Palombelli, *Registi d'Italia*, 60.

¹²⁶ Guglielmi, "Dalla TV al Cinema," 129.

¹²⁷ Gasparini, "Dentro *Galileo*," 75.

¹²⁸ Giulio Andreotti (1919–2013) was an Italian politician in the DC Party. He served as Prime Minister of Italy three times (1972–1973, 1976–1979, 1989–1992). He also served as Minister of the Interior in 1954 and 1978, Defence Minister in 1959–1966 and 1974 and Foreign Minister in 1983–1989. He was also a senator for life from 1991 until his death.

¹²⁹ Caterina Gasparini, *Il Galileo di Liliana Cavani. Analisi dei Materiali del "Fondo Liliana Cavani"* [*Liliana Cavani's Galileo. An Analysis of the Materials of the "Fondo Liliana Cavani"*] (PhD diss. University of Parma, 2004), 138–139 and Palombelli, *Registi d'Italia*, 60.

¹³⁰ Pinto, Barlozzetti and Salizzato, *La Televisione Presenta*, 44.

¹³¹ Gasparini, *Il Galileo di Liliana Cavani*, 138–139. See also "Dario E. Viganò e la regista Liliana Cavani su 'Galileo,'" *Galileo*, directed by Liliana Cavani (1968; Italy-Bulgaria: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

¹³² Martini, "Interview with Liliana Cavani," 246.

¹³³ Gasparini, *Il Galileo di Liliana Cavani*, 139.

¹³⁴ Buscemi, *Invito al Cinema di Liliana Cavani*, 30.

interpellation by the right-wing movement Movimento Sociale Italiano,¹³⁵ which labelled the film “heretical, blasphemous, and offensive [to] the faith of the Italian people.”¹³⁶ Finally, *Il portiere di notte* caused a scandal both in Italy and overseas.¹³⁷

Finally, what is particularly interesting to note is that the implications of *Galileo*’s censorship remain relevant today. On the one hand, there appears to have been some progress in the film’s circulation in recent years. *Galileo* was re-presented in Venice in 2009 in a section significantly named “Questi Fantasmi” (“These Ghosts”).¹³⁸ Further, in the same year, a first version of the film DVD was released. Nevertheless, the film has yet to be shown on RAI channels, a fact that has inexplicably received very little attention. In relation to this, in a 2005 interview for *La Stampa*, Ettore Bernabei, who held the role of the Director General of RAI from 1961 to 1974, after first denying any responsibility in the fate befalling *Galileo*, admitted that the film was “more scandalous than Brecht’s.”¹³⁹ Commenting on the film’s banishment from RAI, he argued that, “It was just a matter of common sense. Think what would have happened if we had aired it.”¹⁴⁰ He also added: “Her *De Gasperi* was well done, but also very institutional. Cavani has surely come a long way from her revolutionary *Galileo*.”¹⁴¹

Conclusion

Galileo serves as an interesting analysis of the mechanisms regulating the existence and working of the ecclesiastical body as well as a critique of repressive power and its consequences on cultural progress. Ironically, the same mechanisms are replicated by the film itself in the context of late 1960s Italy, making the already existing connection between the reality portrayed in the film and the one in which the film was released even more apparent. The director’s narrative and stylistic choices aim to illustrate the tyrannical

¹³⁵ Martini, “Interview with Liliana Cavani,” 246.

¹³⁶ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 18.

¹³⁷ For an analysis of the US reception of *Il Portiere di notte*, see Gaetana Marrone, “Liliana Cavani Negli USA” [“Liliana Cavani in the USA”]. In *Lo Sguardo Libero: Il Cinema di Liliana Cavani* [*The Free Gaze: Liliana Cavani’s Cinema*], eds. Paola Tallarigo and Luca Gasparini (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1990), 145–147.

¹³⁸ “Questi Fantasmi 2,” La Biennale, accessed 23 May 2016, http://www.labiennale.org/it/cinema/archivio/mostra/film/selezione_ufficiale/questi_fantasmi/

¹³⁹ Stefano Bucci, “Bernabei: ‘La cattiva tv fa cadere i governi’” [“Bernabei: ‘Bad Tv Brings Governments Down’”], *Corriere della Sera*, 28 June 2005, 39.

¹⁴⁰ “E’ stata solo una questione di buon senso. Pensi cosa sarebbe successo se l’avessimo mandato in onda.” Ibid.

¹⁴¹ “Il suo *De Gasperi* era ben fatto, ma anche molto istituzionale. Certo che ne ha fatta di strada, la Cavani, dal suo *Galileo* così rivoluzionario.” Ibid. In 2005, Cavani directed a film for television about DC leader Alcide De Gasperi, which was broadcast by RAI.

attitude of the Catholic Church, the retrograde mentality of the vast majority of its clergy and the gap between formal adherence to and the enforcement of Catholic principles and genuine faith. The characterisation of Bruno and Galileo and the portrayal of their trials and punishments illuminate different, yet interrelated aspects that characterise religious power as embodied by the institutional Church. Similarly, the film's *mise-en-scène*, camera movements and dialogue also point to an image of the Church as distant, cold and inflexible. However, in spite of its didactic nature and overreliance on dialogue, the film is never preachy or excessively polemic in its criticism of the Church, but rather maintains an ironic detachment, allowing the conduct of the Catholic hierarchy to simply speak for itself. Similarly, the director lets the film's ban by RAI and its harsh condemnation from the more traditional areas of the Catholic world—and the inappropriate overlapping of the two—speak for themselves.

In her approach to Catholicism, Cavani appears to benefit from what she has described as a “lay and anti-fascist”¹⁴² upbringing, conferring a clarity and lucidity lacking in so many of her colleagues' attitudes. It is precisely this emotional distance that allows her to unremorsefully uncover the repressive nature of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, while at the same time portraying Galileo as a profoundly Christian man, acknowledging the fundamental importance of religion both then and in the present time. Indeed, Cavani's greatest issue is not with Catholicism as a belief system, but rather with the Catholic Church as an institution, which has often exercised oppressive, unjust and even cruel power, limiting man's personal freedom both in thoughts and in actions, and, by doing so, hindering human and cultural progress.

Despite often being described as a “cattolica del dissenso” (“dissident Catholic”),¹⁴³ Cavani has made constant reference to Catholic figures, themes and symbolism throughout her career. As early as 1964, religion was a prominent subject in her work when she shot the TV documentary *Gesù mio fratello* (*Jesus, My Brother*) on the life of French priest Charles de Foucauld, the founder of the congregation of the “Little Brothers of Jesus.”¹⁴⁴ Further, the fact that Cavani has returned to narrate the life of San Francesco

¹⁴² “[...] un ambiente laico e antifascista [...]” For more information, see Tiso, *Liliana Cavani*, 16.

¹⁴³ This expression is used by a number of critics such as Francesca Brignoli, Cristina Olivotto and Antonella Testa. For more information, see Francesca Brignoli, *Liliana Cavani: ogni possibile viaggio* [*Liliana Cavani: Any Possible Journey*], (Genova: Le mani), 3; Olivotto and Testa, “Galileo and the Movies,” 376.

¹⁴⁴ Buscemi, *Invito al cinema di Liliana Cavani*, 30. The film won a prize from Unda, the International Catholic Association for Radio and Television founded in 1928. In 2011, Unda merged with the OCIC, creating SIGNIS. For more information on Unda, OCIC and SIGNIS, see Chapter Two.

three times over her sixty-year career—in 1966, 1989 and 2014¹⁴⁵—attests to her undying interest in the topic. While the three works differ considerably, they are all original, unconventional interpretations of the saint’s story. Moreover, unbeknown to most people, Cavani twice considered making a film about the life of Jesus, only two years apart, in 1964 and 1966.¹⁴⁶

An analysis of her films, however, does not reveal the same anger, spite or sarcasm underlying the work of other directors such as Bellocchio, as we see in the sixth chapter of this thesis. Her films seem to be more emotionally detached—albeit far from “cold,” as argued by some critics¹⁴⁷—and focused on exposing the mechanisms regulating religious and political power as well as performing, to borrow an expression from Marrone, “a clinical investigation of a sick society.”¹⁴⁸ In line with the anthropological reading of religion advanced by the likes of Emile Durkheim and Clifford Geertz, Cavani truly sees religion as an expression of the values of society. From this perspective, every one of her films becomes a metaphor for a universal condition, while at the same time part of a precise historical moment. This is what continues to make Galileo’s story relevant and contemporary,¹⁴⁹ prompting critics to draw parallels with the events of the time. Wary of those who deny religion any value, Cavani once stated, “I find the Marxist, who flaunts disinterest and gratuitous contempt for religion, simply boorish; religion is, at least, an analytical tool for many ancient or primitive cultures.”¹⁵⁰ The film’s—and the director’s—greatest achievement lies in its refusal to deny Catholicism its cultural and social relevance, while at the same time criticising its political dimension.

¹⁴⁵ Emilia Costantini, “Cavani torna a raccontare Francesco” [“Cavani Portrays Francesco Once Again”], *Corriere della Sera*, 4 July 2014, 50.

¹⁴⁶ The first film, *Jesus*, was modelled on the Gospel of John; the second, *Black Jesus*, was an original interpretation of the story, featuring a black Jesus as the protagonist. Together with Italian journalist Ludovica Alessandrini, Cavani also wrote a musical in which Jesus was a black man from the Alabama. Neither film, however, left this embryonic state, for unknown reasons. See Liliana Cavani, “Proposta per a un film. Dal Vangelo secondo S. Giovanni e deall’Apocalisse”, ASCC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura “Gesù Negro 1966. Il progetto – documentazione”, doc. 10; Liliana Cavani, “Soggetto per Black Jesus,” ASCC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura “Gesù Negro 1966. Il progetto—documentazione,” doc. N. 3

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Buscemi, *Invito al cinema di Liliana Cavani*, 51.

¹⁴⁸ Marrone, *The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, 37.

¹⁴⁹ Cavani has indeed repeatedly underlined the modernity of Galileo’s story. See Tiso, *Liliana Cavani*, 17.

¹⁵⁰ “Trovo semplicemnete rozzo il marxista che sfoggia ignoranza e gratuito disprezzo per la religione; la religione è come minimo uno strumento di analisi di molte culture antiche o primitive.” For more information, see Tiso, *Liliana Cavani*, 16.

This sentiment is shared by Pasolini. In his *Teorema*, which is analysed in the next chapter, Catholicism becomes instrumental in foregrounding a strong attack on a contemporaneity characterised by the loss of a religiously authentic dimension and the pervasiveness of middle-class ideology. By declining traditional Catholic elements in an unorthodox way, Pasolini—much like Cavani—also unveils the vacuity and emptiness underlying an only formal adhesion to religion, while at the same time suggesting their substitution with unconventional practices.

Chapter 5 Pasolini's *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968)

If the analysis of *Galileo* in the previous chapter outlined Cavani's balanced, respectful, yet caustic critique of the repressive nature of Italian Catholicism, *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968)¹ attests to Pasolini's deeply felt mourning for the loss of a sacred dimension in 1960s Italy. Again like *Galileo*, the film premiered amidst polemics and controversies at the 1968 Venice Film Festival. *Teorema* revolves around the arrival of a mysterious stranger—a Godlike figure—in a bourgeois household and assesses how his revolutionary message affects the family members. By simply showing love and compassion, this sacred Visitor breaks with accepted conventions and overturns the established order, leaving the family lost and desperate after his departure.²

In the film, Pasolini employs, as he often does,³ a vast repertoire of traditional Catholic themes and symbolism such as narratives (annunciations and renunciations), rites and sacraments (confessions and burials), biblical quotes at crucial junctures and highly symbolic places within Catholic tradition (the desert and the garden). He does so, however, in a rather peculiar way, either associating traditional practices with unorthodox elements or simply desecrating them, thus giving those practices not only a new meaning but also a rather blasphemous flavour. This approach perfectly suits not only the film's internal logic, but also the director's view of his contemporaneity, dominated by bourgeois values and the unrecoverable loss of any sacred dimension. By focusing on these elements, this chapter seeks to highlight Pasolini's incredibly complex and often ambivalent relationship with Catholicism, which articulates and develops around the two lines of a longing for the naïve yet genuine religiosity of the peasant world and a more rational interpretation of Catholicism as the last outpost against consumerist society. This singular take on Catholicism provides another interesting example of the range of different approaches to religion in Italy as acknowledged by Gramsci.

¹ This analysis is based on the Italian version of the film. For more information, see *Teorema*, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1968; Italy: Medusa Home Video, 2012), DVD.

² Compared with the other films considered in this research (if not other works by Pasolini), *Teorema* has been the object of a rather high number of studies. In spite of the film's undeniable religious focus, however, scholarship has often privileged psychoanalytical and Marxist readings. While not excluding those interpretations, this chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the Catholic elements presented in the film as well as the implications of their employment.

³ Colleen Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred: Women in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 7–8. On this topic, see also Paul Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 12–13.

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first section is concerned with the exploration of the cultural and religious contexts surrounding the birth of *Teorema* and highlights how its genesis was informed by Pasolini's disappointment about the alliance between Communism and Catholicism, on the one hand, and the ever-increasing power of consumerism, on the other. The second section considers the film's narrative, while the third analyses its style; in both cases, strong focus is placed on Pasolini's juxtaposition of traditional and unconventional Catholic elements as well as the meanings produced by such an association. Finally, the fourth section discusses the film's reception, with a particular focus on the markedly split reaction of the Catholic world: in fact, while Pope Paolo VI and the Vatican press openly condemned the film, the OCIC awarded it a prize.

5.1 Cultural and Religious Context

The genesis of *Teorema* is framed by Pasolini's readings of two key phenomena of 1960s Italy. On the one hand, the death of Pope Giovanni XXIII in June 1963, followed by the death of the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) Palmiro Togliatti the following year, had quashed the hope of an alliance between Catholicism and Communism. On the other hand, one of the consequences of the so-called "economic miracle" of 1958–1963 was the exponential growth in per-capita income, which led to enormous changes in lifestyles and, most importantly, to the emergence of what Pasolini defined as the "ideology of consumption."⁴ These two phenomena are strictly related in the eyes of the Italian intellectual. Indeed, Catholicism and Marxism had constituted a united ideological front against capitalism and cultural and social levelling; after the deaths of their respective leaders, however, no political or religious force was able to resist the rise of consumerism.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, dialogue between the Catholic Church and PCI became a concrete possibility under the papacy of Giovanni XXIII. During the subsequent years, both the Pope and Togliatti maintained an open channel of communication, considerably improving the relationship between the Church and the Communist Party. The Vatican and PCI shared a number of political concerns and social priorities, which led to a convergence of interests. Indeed, Giovanni XXIII showed great sensitivity towards the

⁴ "[...] altre ideologie che quella del consumo." This article first appeared in *Corriere della Sera* with the title "Sfida ai dirigenti della televisione" on 9 December 1973. For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Acculturazione e acculturazione" ["Cultivation and Cultivation"], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società [Essays on Politics and Society]*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 291.

social issues of his time such as the conditions of the working classes and principles of equality and solidarity. In particular, *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*, 1963) played a key role in this change of approach to Communism, as already mentioned in Chapter 3. Indeed, the last part of the document invited the faithful to collaborate with non-believers or those who adhered to other faiths.⁵ Moreover, it exhorted them to “distinguish between error as such and the person who falls into error”⁶ and “to make a clear distinction between a false philosophy [...] and economic, social, cultural, and political undertakings [...]”⁷ This separation between systems of belief, on the one hand, and political movements, on the other,⁸ represented a crucial development towards a more progressive disposition on the Church’s part. Therefore, although he also advised the faithful to approach non-Catholic ideas and movements with caution, Giovanni XXIII’s words represent a courageous opening up to contemporary political movements previously condemned by the Church.

It is precisely this progressive and conciliatory attitude, combined with the strong focus on solidarity with the poor and oppressed, that strongly appealed to many Communist affiliates including Pasolini. Indeed, in spite of his political views, the director was a great admirer of Giovanni XXIII. Not only did he dedicate *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964) to Giovanni XXIII’s memory,⁹ but he also wrote of the Pope in highly appreciative terms¹⁰ and portrayed him in *La Rabbia* (*The Rage*, 1963).¹¹ To Pasolini, Roncalli was “the first to understand that a Marxist is not a *bête noir* and that it is possible to create a dialogue between Marxists and Catholics.”¹² However,

⁵ Giovanni XXIII, “*Pacem in Terris* Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII,” Vatican website, 11 April 1963, accessed 11 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html, sec. 157.

⁶ *Ibid.*, sec. 158.

⁷ *Ibid.*, sec. 159.

⁸ Percy Allum, “Catholicism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 107.

⁹ The dedication reads “To the beloved, happy, familiar memory of John XXIII.”

¹⁰ See, for example, Pier Paolo Pasolini, “I ‘motti’ di Papa Giovanni” [“Pope John’s ‘Quips’”], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società* [*Essays on Politics and Society*], ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 120–124; Giacomo Gambetti and Claudio Sorgi, eds., *E Venne un uomo* [*A Man Named John*] (Milan: Garzanti, 1965), inside front cover.

¹¹ In 1963, Pasolini joined efforts with director Giovannino Guareschi to shoot *La Rabbia* (*The Rage*), a two-part film that attempts to answer a specific question: “Why is our life dominated by unhappiness, by anguish, by fear of war, by war?” The film, much like *E venne un uomo*, employs documentary footage and newsreels accompanied by a voiceover commentary. *La Rabbia* addresses some of the crucial issues of the time: the aftermath of the Second World War, the repression of the revolt in Hungary, immigration and decolonisation. One of the key sequences is the death and funeral of Pope Pio XII and the election of Giovanni XXIII. As Rohdie explains, “The Pope John XXIII depicted in *La rabbia* is a peasant pope from an agricultural past, heathen, pagan, who smiles an African smile illuminating the present with the beauty for of the past. For that reason, he is a revolutionary pope as Pasolini is a revolutionary poet.” See Sam Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 158.

¹² Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 71.

the deaths of the Pope in 1963 and Togliatti in 1964 marked the end of the dialogue between Catholics and Communists. For Pasolini, that translated into a deep ideological crisis.¹³ He stated, “A historical epoch, the epoch of the Resistance, of great hopes for Communism, of the class struggle, has finished. What we have now is the economic boom, the welfare state, and industrialization.”¹⁴

The election of Giovanni Battista Montini to the papal throne magnified this feeling of defeatism. Indeed, as already mentioned in Chapter 3, not only was Montini, who chose the name Paolo VI, less charismatic and assertive than the universally beloved Roncalli,¹⁵ but he was also a much more traditional leader. Conscious of the key relevance of the Second Vatican Council, he assured the faithful of its continuation in a radio message the day after his election.¹⁶ However, worried by the rise in the radical forces within the Catholic Church, he displayed a rather ambiguous attitude, as he alternated phases of opening and closure.¹⁷ Indeed, while the Church did not return to the fortress mentality that characterised the papacy of Pio XII, Paolo VI was certainly a moderate, and he generally trod more cautiously on the subject of reform throughout his reign.

This becomes particularly clear if we consider his issuing of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on 25 July 1968, which reiterated the Catholic Church’s unyielding position on birth control.¹⁸ His statement took the world by surprise for a number of reasons. First, as mentioned in the previous chapter, such a rigorous stance contrasted sharply with the liberalising efforts promoted by the various protest movements as well as with the open and progressive attitude shown by the Church in more recent times. Second, by issuing *Humanae Vitae*, Paolo VI effectively overruled the findings of the birth control

¹³ Pasolini’s relationship with Marxism was as complicated and nuanced as his relationship with Catholicism. A member of the PCI since 1947, he often found himself in disagreement with the Communist political class. For an account of Pasolini’s relationship with the PCI, see Zygmunt G. Barański, “Pier Paolo Pasolini: Culture, Croce, Gramsci,” in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, eds. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Robert Lumley (New York: St. Martin Press, 1990); Joseph Francese, “Pasolini’s ‘Roman Novels’, the Italian Communist Party and the Events of 1956,” in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 22–39.

¹⁴ Oswald Stack and Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Pasolini on Pasolini* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 103–106.

¹⁵ John O’Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 304.

¹⁶ For more information, see Paolo VI, “*Qui Fausto Die* Messaggio all’intera famiglia umana,” Vatican website, 22 June 1963, accessed 18 November 2015, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19630622_first-message.html.

¹⁷ Tomaso Subini, “Introduzione,” in *Tre studi su Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo di Pier Paolo Pasolini [Three Studies on Pier Paolo Pasolini’s The Gospel According to St. Matthew]*, ed. Tomaso Subini (Milan: Libreria Cortina, 2010), XIX.

¹⁸ For more information, see Pope Paolo VI, “*Humanae Vitae* Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff,” Vatican website, 25 July 1968, accessed 13 November 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

commission, whose majority had voted in favour of the use of contraception.¹⁹ Both the general public and the more progressive members of the clergy harshly criticised the document, with Cardinal Joseph Suenens going as far as to warn the Church against “a new ‘Galileo affair.’”²⁰ The consequences would be far-reaching: not only did Paolo VI refuse to publish another encyclical during his fifteen-year reign,²¹ but the conservative and rigid position also appeared to undermine the openings that had characterised the papacy of Giovanni XXIII and the first phase of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, as Dillon explains, “In rejecting the moral legitimacy of contraception, Paul VI’s decision negated several elements of the pluralist theology articulated at Vatican II. Most obviously, it reclaimed the supremacy of the church hierarchy’s authority over personal conscience, the exercise of religious freedom, and lay interpretive autonomy.”²²

Nevertheless, rather than the Church’s reactionary position to civil rights—one need only think of Pasolini’s objection to the legalisation of abortion to realise that he shared at least some of the Vatican’s conservative views²³—it was its lack of spiritual proximity to the poor and underprivileged, the forgotten Gospel message of social justice and especially its increasing inability to condemn hedonistic consumerism that deeply disturbed the Italian director. In an article originally entitled “I dilemmi di un papa, oggi” (“A Pope’s Dilemmas, Today”), Pasolini provided a poignant analysis of the reasons behind the Church’s loss of relevance in the modern world. He harshly condemned the religious institution for its failure to reject “[...] the new power of consumption, which is completely irreligious; totalitarian; violent; falsely tolerant, indeed, more repressive than ever; corrupting; degrading [...]”²⁴

¹⁹ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 309. On the same topic, see also Margherita Pelaja and Lucetta Scaraffia: *Chiesa e sessualità nella storia [Two in One Body. Church and Sexuality in History]* (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 275–276.

²⁰ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 394.

²¹ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 310.

²² Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 78.

²³ Pasolini famously expressed his thoughts on the question of abortion in articles published by Italian newspapers. On 19 January 1975, after the passing of the abortion law, Pasolini wrote a passionate article in *Corriere della Sera* with the title “Sono contro l’aborto” (“I am against abortion”). In the article, Pasolini condemned the practice in no uncertain terms: “Sono però traumatizzato dalla legalizzazione dell’aborto, perchè la considero, come molti, una legalizzazione dell’omicidio” [“I am traumatised by the legalisation of the abortion, because I consider it, like many do, legalisation of murder.” See Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Il coito, l’aborto, la falsa tolleranza del potere, il conformismo dei progressisti” [“Coitus, Abortion, the False Tolerance of Power, the Conformism of the Progressive”], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società [Essays on Politics and Society]*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 372.

²⁴ “nuovo potere consumistico che è completamente irreligioso; totalitario; violento; falsamente tollerante, anzi, più repressivo che mai; corruttore; degradante [...]” For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Lo storico discorsetto di Castelgandolfo” [“The Historic Little Speech of Castelgandolfo”], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società [Essays on Politics and Society]*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 353–354.

By denying its original status of oppositional and revolutionary force and failing to provide an ideological alternative to the values circulating in capitalistic society, the Church could not avoid being absorbed by it, eventually becoming irrelevant and superfluous.

It is necessary to address the economic miracle of the late 1950s and early 1960s to understand how a country such as Italy, which had been in rubble after the Second World War, could reach the levels of wealth suggested by Pasolini. During this period, Italy, traditionally a rural country, began to experience exceptional economic growth; indeed, between 1950 and 1970, per-capita income in Italy grew more quickly than in any other European country.²⁵ However, not all sectors expanded equally rapidly. The agricultural sector was the weakest link in the Italian economy, with the majority of farming businesses characterised by low productivity despite the fertile lands of the Po Valley. In particular, the south of Italy suffered from underdevelopment in the face of an oversupply of labour, which resulted in an ever-increasing gap between the north and south and prompted waves of national and international migration.²⁶ Further, this process of migration and urbanisation had far-reaching consequences on social stability. As Pollard observes, “Over the years, this movement massively disrupted traditional, patriarchal, rural Italian society, the bedrock of Italian Catholicism, and fragmented what had hitherto been a fairly stable class ‘system.’”²⁷ While this transformation ultimately improved the living conditions for the majority of Italians, the immediate and tangible reality was often problematic. Indeed, Pollard explains that, “This almighty upheaval also resulted in serious social problems in the big cities—lack of decent housing, schools and welfare facilities, especially for immigrants—which would lead to major political protests in the 1960s and 1970s.”²⁸ It is therefore not surprising that Pasolini directed his sympathies and hopes to these two social groups, the peasants and the subproletariat. Precisely because of their extraneousness to the economic gains of the boom, the inhabitants of the peasant world and the Roman “borgata,” the slums born out of the rapid process of urbanisation, stood in opposition to the burgeoning consumerist ideology.

²⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 239.

²⁶ Margherita Sprio, *Migrant Memories: Cultural History, Cinema and the Italian Post-war Diaspora in Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 107.

²⁷ John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2008), 132.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

Despite these exceptions, the majority of Italian families started to be able to afford contrasting lifestyles to those previously experienced. This new level of prosperity and affluence ultimately paved the way to mass consumption. For example, while in 1958 only 12% of families owned a television set, 13% a refrigerator and 3% a washing machine, these percentages grew to 49%, 55% and 23%, respectively by 1965.²⁹ However, as Scrivano points out, these statistics do little to truly convey the population's radical changes in attitude towards consumption or describe their altering patterns of acquisition and consumption.³⁰ He states:

As some historians have argued, an important element in the creation of the consumer society is what has been called the “education to consumption,” that is, the alteration of collective behaviour resulting from the acquisition and use of consumer goods. This implied that people not only lived differently, but also learned new skills, developed new identities and modified their relationships to the world and each other.³¹

This attitude was accentuated by the imitation of materialistic models imposed by the media. In particular, the birth of television, which provided the nation with a means of linguistic unification,³² also produced a cultural levelling that often resulted in conformist social behaviours.³³ Pasolini was particularly critical of the medium, which he regarded as quintessentially expressive of middle-class values. He wrote that, as a “[...] perpetual source of *representations of petit-bourgeois life and ideology*,” television is “at least as repulsive as concentration camps.”³⁴ This is to be understood in relation to Pasolini's reading of the Gramscian concept of “cultural hegemony,” namely that it is:

²⁹ Antonio Chiesi, Alberto Martinelli, and Sonia Stefanizzi, *Recent Social Trends in Italy, 1960-1995* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 373.

³⁰ Paolo Scrivano, “Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy's Postwar Conversion to Consumerism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 329.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Stephen Gundle, “Television in Italy,” in *Television in Europe*, eds. James A. Coleman and Brigitte Rollet (Exeter: Intellect, 1997), 61.

³³ John Foot, “Television and the City: The Impact of Television in Milan, 1954–1960,” *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 3 (1999): 380–381.

³⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, eds. and trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Washington: New Academia Pub., 2005), 135.

the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.³⁵

Since, according to Pasolini, this dominant group in Italy was the bourgeoisie, the values informing the cultural landscape were necessarily their own. What is more, the nature of the Italian bourgeoisie was shifting: it was redefining its own structure, with the result of incorporating everyone in their ranks, effectively erasing any cultural and linguistic differences. In particular, in Pasolini’s analysis, such changes developed along the two lines of the infrastructure and the information system. The creation of a modernised road system had abolished physical distances, while the birth of television had levelled the country’s historical and cultural particularisms³⁶ to the point that “[...] the whole of mankind is becoming petit bourgeois.”³⁷ It was in this context that Pasolini’s dislike for the bourgeoisie became pure contempt, and *Teorema* was born.

5.2 Narrative

As mentioned in the Introduction, *Teorema* develops alongside the two axes of sacralisation and desacralisation. Pasolini constantly juxtaposes traditional Catholic figures, narratives, names and places with profane, unorthodox elements. The Visitor is inherently spiritual, possibly even Christ-like; however, the modes he uses to communicate his radical message—sex and literature as means of physical and intellectual provocation—are hardly conventional. Places of the Catholic tradition such as the desert and garden as well as quotes and narratives are tainted with provocative motives and declined in an innovative way, at once expressing nostalgia for a lost sacred dimension and contempt for contemporary middle-class values, the new, burgeoning religion of Italy.

³⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. and eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 12.

³⁶ Pasolini, “Acculturazione e acculturazione,” 291.

³⁷ Oswald Stack and Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Extract from an Interview on BBC Television,” in *Pasolini on Pasolini* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 155–157.

Plot and Structure

Teorema has a clear, almost mathematical structure. It has three prologues, which Testa describes respectively as “proleptic,” “enigmatic” and “expository.”³⁸ The first prologue, which precedes the opening credits, shows a reporter interviewing factory workers. Shot in a documentary style, the sequence is a flash-forward that anticipates the donation of the factory to the workers by its owner. The second prologue is a long shot of the desert, accompanied by a voiceover reading a passage from Exodus. Finally, the third prologue is a sepia montage of the daily lives of four people in 1960s Milan. After the prologues, the narrative is divided into two large sections: the first shows the arrival of a mysterious stranger to the home of a bourgeois family. During his stay, the Visitor, played by Terence Stamp, seduces all the members of the family, including the maid, Emilia (Laura Betti). The second section deals with the consequences of the guest’s departure: the members of the bourgeois family fall into states of madness and despair, leading to the disintegration of the family unit. The narrative follows the characters on their paths of self-destruction: Pietro, the son (Andrés José Cruz), leaves home and tries, rather unsuccessfully, to become an artist, while Odetta, the daughter (Anne Wiazemsky), becomes catatonic and is later hospitalised. Lucia, the mother (Silvana Mangano), starts to pick up young men from the street and the father (Massimo Girotti) renounces all his earthly possessions and donates his factory to the workers. However, these activities cannot recover their spiritual loss. Only the maid is able to avoid the family’s fate by virtue of her peasant origins: she returns to her village and becomes somewhat of a saint.

The Visitor: A God-like Figure?

There is little doubt about the divine nature of the Visitor. Some have linked him to Christ, while others have even seen a connection with Pope Giovanni XXIII.³⁹ In an interview, Pasolini revealed his early intention to portray the Visitor as a fertility god, only to later make him into a metaphysical principle.⁴⁰ The Visitor, in fact, is rather a personification of a principle, something “authentic and unstoppable.”⁴¹ He is a stranger, something different; it is precisely the character’s otherworldliness that is responsible for the collapse

³⁸ Bart Testa, “To Film a Gospel... and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger,” in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 198.

³⁹ Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 161.

⁴⁰ Stack and Pasolini, “Extract from an Interview on BBC Television,” 155–157.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

of the social and familial order. In relation to this, Kozlovich maintains that one of the twenty-five structural characteristics of Christ-like figures is this “outsider” quality. He states that “Christ-figures are usually outsiders of their communities, vaguely defined as from ‘above’ or ‘beyond’ or ‘out there’ and thus they are in the world but not of the world.”⁴² He recalls the Gospel of John, which describes Jesus thus: “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.”⁴³

At the same time, however, there is something uncannily familiar about the guest. He is appealing and reassuring to the members of the family because they have something in common: the Visitor, in fact, is also a member of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁴ Therefore, he is both remarkably similar to and radically different from the bourgeois family. While this familiarity allows the characters to communicate with him, his otherworldliness creates the ideal situation for the revelation to take place. This duality is inscribed in the Visitor’s first appearance. When he arrives at the party, a girl asks the daughter, “Who is that boy?” Odetta answers laconically, “A boy.”⁴⁵ While the fact that the exchange between the two girls takes place in English attests to Pasolini’s desire to highlight the Visitor’s foreignness from the very start, as Casarino rightly points out;⁴⁶ Odetta’s answer also reveals the young man’s relatable and familiar quality.

Such duality further reinforces the ambiguity that appears to surround the Visitor; indeed, there is something inherently ambiguous, perhaps even diabolical, about him. In his interview with Stack, Pasolini stated that the guest “could be the Devil, or a mixture of God and the Devil.”⁴⁷ This trait is particularly evident in his mode of seduction of the three female characters, which echoes that biblical temptation of Adam and Eve. Indeed, Emilia, Lucia and Odetta first experience a strong attraction to the Visitor when they see him in the garden, where he spends a lot of his time, reading Rimbaud or playing with the family dog. In Catholic tradition, the garden is often associated with the Garden of Eden and thus with both prosperity and temptation. In the biblical narrative, the serpent tempts

⁴² Anton Karl Kozlovich, “The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-figure,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8 (2004): para. 30.

⁴³ Jn 1:10.

⁴⁴ These remarks are taken from Pasolini’s interview with Lino Peroni, first published in *Inquadrature* in November 1968. For more information, see Lino Peroni and Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Intervista con Lino Peroni” [“Interview with Lino Peroni”], in *Per il cinema. Tomo II [For Cinema. Volume II]*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), 2931.

⁴⁵ “Chi è quell ragazzo?” “Un ragazzo.” I have based my translations of Italian dialogue on the English subtitles available on DVD.

⁴⁶ Cesare Casarino, “Pasolini in the Desert.” *Angelaki* 9, no. 1 (2004): 97–102.

⁴⁷ Stack and Pasolini, “Extract from an Interview on BBC Television,” 157.

Eve, inviting her to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, therefore breaking God's command. Consequently, Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden and condemned to leave their privileged status.⁴⁸ Much like the serpent in the biblical episode, the Visitor shatters the family's illusions and forces them to leave their sheltered and privileged lives behind.

As much as Pasolini insists on underlining the character's distance from Jesus⁴⁹ and rather highlighting his godly "essence," the impact of his arrival in the bourgeois household closely resembles a messianic visit.⁵⁰ The guest is the embodiment of a disruptive force, a revolutionary principle that upsets and overturns the established order: he is "[...] revolution in action."⁵¹ Through an uninhibited intellectual and sexual provocation, he brings the family members to question their place both within the institution of the bourgeois family and as part of society. He has the unsettling force of a revelation and the sudden quality of an epiphany. In this sense, he is in line with the Gospel description of Jesus as a man who has "not come to bring peace, but a sword,"⁵² causing the family unit to disintegrate. The members of the family can only *react* to that; although different, their reactions are all spurred by feelings of loss and desperation. However, unlike the Christ of the Catholic tradition, the guest does not offer comfort or provide a message of salvation, redemption or even forgiveness. He destroys the present but does not establish a new order. This trait is picked upon by the members of the family during a sequence of confessional scenes and summarised by the father thus: "You have come only to bring destruction."⁵³ Much like a priest during confession, the Visitor listens to the members of the family as they pour out their hearts. Yet, unlike a priest, he does not judge or impose a penance. However, he does not absolve them either. After all, the family members are not asking for forgiveness: they show no remorse or contrition. If anything, they are grateful; the guest has made them aware of the emptiness of their values and the shallowness of their lives. The reason for the characters' conduct relates closely to Pasolini's view of the bourgeoisie.

⁴⁸ Gen 2:4–3:24.

⁴⁹ Peroni and Pasolini, "Intervista Con Lino Peroni," 2933. On this topic, Subini rightly argues that Pasolini gave the Visitor a mix of attributes from both the Greek and the Christian tradition to avoid identification with a specific religious confession. For more information, see Tomaso Subini, *La necessità di morire: il cinema di Pier Paolo Pasolini e il Sacro [The Necessity of Dying. Pier Paolo Pasolini's Cinema and the Sacred]* (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2007), 86–87.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, the *theoros* (θεωρός) in Ancient Greece were special "envoys" of a city with a mandate to fulfil a religious mission. For more information, see Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

⁵¹ Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 159.

⁵² Mt 10:34–39.

⁵³ "Tu sei certamente venuto qui per distruggere."

The Visitor cannot bring about real change because no real spiritual or social change can occur for the bourgeoisie. As a social class, it is so removed from anything authentic that it can only fall apart in front of the manifestation of the sacred.

This depiction of the Visitor is certainly an indebted concept of the holy as elaborated on by German theologian Rudolf Otto, whom Pasolini had got to know through the work of Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade.⁵⁴ Otto formulated the notion of holy as “numinous,” an ineffable, non-rational experience that can be felt but not conceptualised; in other words, the experience of “the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion.”⁵⁵ Such experience can only be described with the expression of “mysterium tremendum” (“terrible and fascinating mystery”): indeed, the numinous feeling presents itself as something “wholly other,” completely different, special and unique, which awakens feelings of awe, overpoweringness and energy, but that also holds incredible fascination.⁵⁶ However, the members of the bourgeois family cannot stop longing for the sacred, just as Pasolini himself could not stop looking for God and longing for a return to a more spiritually authentic past.⁵⁷ As Nightingale underlines, “In philosophic *theoria* [...] wandering is translated into Wondering.”⁵⁸ The members of the bourgeois family, after their encounters with the sacred, cannot help but want to *look at* the sacred, *wonder* about the sacred and, in the case of the father, even *wander* in search of the sacred.

Sex as Revelation

What distinguishes Pasolini’s God in *Teorema* is also his overtly sexual connotation. While the sexual encounters are not overly descriptive and graphic, they are the main way in which the characters in the film communicate with the Visitor. In *Teorema*, sex is an incredibly transformative experience. It is an act of conversion and redemption: it is through sex that the Visitor *reveals* himself to the members of the family. Pasolini stated

⁵⁴ Stefania Benini, *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 19; Subini, *La necessità di morire*, 84.

⁵⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12–41.

⁵⁷ In his poem *L'alba meridionale* (*Southern Dawn*), Pasolini wrote: “Manca sempre qualcosa, c’è un vuoto / in ogni mio intuire. Ed è volgare, / questo non essere completo, / mai fui così volgare come in questa ansia, / questo “non avere Cristo’...” (There is always something missing, there is a void / in all my intuitions. And it is vulgar, / this my being incomplete, / it was never as vulgar as it is in this anguish, / this ‘not having Christ’...). For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, “L’alba meridionale” [“Southern Dawn”], in *Tutte Le Poesie [Collected Poems]*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), 1236.

⁵⁸ Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 12.

that the love the Visitor arouses is authentic because it is “[...] love without compromises, [...] a scandalous love, a love which destroys, which alters the bourgeois’ idea of themselves.”⁵⁹ For the sentiments it awakens and the radical changes it provokes, sex is certainly portrayed as a sacred act in the film. In relation to this, Subini notes that a view of sex as a means to get closer to God is actually embedded in Christian tradition. He explains:

[...] the crucial idea put forward by *Teorema*, that sex as a spiritual experience could be a means to encounter God, is not at all unknown in Christian tradition which for centuries has considered, with a surprising nonchalance for us today, the relation between the soul with God by means of daring sexual metaphors, from *The Song of Solomon* to the erotic-religious peaks gained by some mystics [...].⁶⁰

According to Pasolini, he used sexuality to depict an “authenticity” that could not be communicated with words.⁶¹ The Visitor does not preach, and he offers no argument; he is actually silent for the better part of the film. He upsets the status quo with his mere presence and appeals to the members of the bourgeois family only by being immediately visible and tangible. In Pasolini’s view, the body is sacred, almost divine: it is worthy of devotion.⁶² In the film, we see Lucia worshipping the Visitor’s garments; the camera lingers on the Visitor’s crotch. Similarly, the maid also considers him with profound reverence. For instance, when the Visitor is smoking in the garden and some ash falls on his trousers, Emilia literally drops everything and runs to him to brush off the ash from his clothes. Later on, before the two have sex, she grabs his hands and kisses them with the adoration and veneration usually reversed for holy figures.

⁵⁹ “[...] è un amore fuori dai compromessi, [...] un amore scandaloso, un amore che distrugge, che modifica l’idea che il Borghese ha di sè” See Peroni and Pasolini, “Intervista con Lino Peroni,” 2933.

⁶⁰ Tomaso Subini, “May God Have Sex?” (paper presented at Transnational Italy: National Identity and the World Atlas, University of Reading, 14–15 July 2012), 6–7. For an account of the problematic and contradictory relationship between the Catholic Church and sexuality, see Margherita Pelaja and Lucetta Scaraffia, *Due in una carne: Chiesa e sessualità nella storia [Two in One Body. Church and Sexuality in History]* (Rome: Laterza, 2008).

⁶¹ Sandro Meccoli, “Pasolini difende Teorema” [“Pasolini Defends Theorem”], *Corriere della Sera*, 10 November 1968, 23.

⁶² Much has been written about the importance of the human body in Pasolini. See, for example, Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 77–91; Alessandro Corinti, *La forma mutante: il corpo e la rivoluzione antropologica pasoliniana [The Mutant Form. Pasolini’s Anthropological Revolution and the Body]* (Udine: Campanotto, 2008); Armando Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Agnese Grieco, “The Body of the Actor: Notes on the Relationship between the Body and Acting in Pasolini’s Cinema,” in *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities*, eds. Luca Di Blasi, Manuele Gagnolati and Christoph F. E. Holzhey (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2012), 85–104.

Such contemplation is actually already inscribed in the title:⁶³ the Greek term “theorin” (θεωρεῖν), which means “to look at, to contemplate,” and its derivative “theoria” (θεωρία), which stands for “contemplation, spectacle.”⁶⁴

On the other hand, once the Visitor leaves, sex becomes associated with loss. The mother, in particular, attempts to recreate her experiences with the Visitor by starting to seduce younger men. It is certainly in her case that the association between sex and the sacred reaches its clearest point. Shortly after a sexual encounter with a stranger she picked up from the street, Lucia meets another two young men—significantly, in front of a church—who are hitchhiking on the streets of San Donato Milanese. She then drives to the countryside of the small village of Sant’Angelo Lodigiano.⁶⁵ There, in a ditch once again close to a church, she has sex with them, before dropping them off in the main square of the village. The composition of this scene is particularly significant: Lucia is standing next to her Mini Cooper, a statue of priest don Nicola De Martino on her right and a Catholic school behind her (**Image 5.1**).⁶⁶ The camera first zooms onto a statue of Christ with his arms wide open in a blessing gesture. Then, the focus shifts to the statue of the priest before moving to the anguished expression on Lucia’s face, highlighting her unease. Upon her return trip to the city, Lucia once again drives past the country church. This time, she enters the building, closes the door and walks towards the altar with a hesitant expression on her face, as if expecting to be reprimanded or ordered to leave. As he often does, Pasolini uses images and sound to associate morally questionable behaviour with religious motifs. This practice, which is typical of Pasolini’s early films such as *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), answers to the director’s need to sanctify the subproletariat. However, while it is no secret that Pasolini held the bourgeoisie in utmost contempt, it is hard to see here any parodic or malicious intent on his part; if anything, the feeling that emerges is one of sympathy for the character’s clumsy and misguided attempts to fill the void left by the Visitor.

⁶³ The title *Teorema* and its meaning have long caused disagreement among scholars and film critics. Generally, the title is taken to allude to the programmatic structure of the film. Pasolini sets out to prove something, namely his personal *theorem*, and his thoroughness in pursuing his thesis is mirrored by the film’s symmetrical and mathematical organisation. Surprisingly, a much smaller number of theorists have reflected on the etymology of the word “theorem.” See, for example, Janice Tong, “Crisis of Ideology and the Disenchanted Eye: Pasolini and Bataille.” *Contretemps 2* (2001): 74–91; Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini’s Film Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 200.

⁶⁴ Walter W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Perigee Books, 1993), 551.

⁶⁵ Vittorio Prina, *Pier Paolo Pasolini, Teorema: i luoghi, paesaggio e architettura* [*Pier Paolo Pasolini. The Places, the Landscapes, the Architecture*] (Rimini: Maggioli, 2010), 69–70.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 70–71.



Image 5.1 Lucia looking at a statue of don Nicola de Martino after dropping off the young men

The Sacred Value of Literature

Another way in which the Visitor communicates with the members of the bourgeois family is through artistic and intellectual provocation. Four books appear in *Teorema*: Konrad Lorenz’s *King Solomon’s Ring*, Arthur Rimbaud’s *Oeuvres*, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and a collection of Francis Bacon’s works. The books are not only significant in themselves, but they also help illuminate certain aspects of the characters and the film. In this sense, and in order to understand the implications of this inclusion, it is necessary to delve further into Pasolini’s view of the bourgeoisie and culture. In an interview, after describing the ambiguous nature of the Visitor and maintaining that it is precisely his bourgeois nature that makes him “vulgar,” Pasolini added, “There are no uncultured bourgeois who are not vulgar; only culture can purify.”⁶⁷ Elsewhere he stated, “An illiterate always has a certain grace, which then is lost through culture. It is then found again at a very high cultural level, but average culture is always corrupting.”⁶⁸ While we know little about the characters’ knowledge or level of education—except that

⁶⁷ “non c’è borghese non colto (perchè solo la cultura può purificare) che non sia volgare.” Peroni and Pasolini, “Intervista con Lino Peroni,” 2933.

⁶⁸ “Mentre un analfabeta [...] ha sempre una certa grazia, che poi va perduta attraverso la cultura. Poi si ritrova a un altissimo grado di cultura, ma la cultura media è sempre corruttrice.” For more information, see “La saggistica. Pensieri e parole sparsi,” Pier Paolo Pasolini in Europe, accessed 1 July 2016, http://www.pierpaolopasolini.eu/saggistica_pensierisparsi.htm.

the children attend high school—their middle-class status suggests that they possess a middlebrow culture. On the other hand, it is certainly no coincidence that Emilia, the only proletarian and only positive character in the film, is never associated with a book.

Interestingly, in 1968, Pasolini also published a novel that had the same plot and title as the film. However, the director maintained that in spite of the similarities, the two were to be understood separately, as distinct cultural products.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, as Subini points out, “The book without the film is not fully comprehensible, nor is the film without the book. What we are witnessing is an actual doubling that gives rise to two complementary and inseparable objects, albeit children of two different codes.”⁷⁰ In this sense, the book becomes a precious hermeneutic tool to establish a dialogue *with* and help clarify certain aspects *of* the film, much like the books that appear *in* the film. Indeed, the book *Teorema* is valuable in one of the first scenes, when we see Lucia reading a book with an out-of-focus title. In relation to this, Viano observes that the missing title is used to convey the character’s emptiness: “The missing title indicates that her reading is a question of form rather than content, of signifying a cultivated way of spending time rather than using the words in the book.”⁷¹ However, from the book *Teorema*, we learn that Lucia is reading *King Solomon’s Ring*. In the book, the zoologist discusses the language of animals and explains how they communicate through their behaviour.⁷² In the novel, Pasolini wrote that in order “to realise her dream”—that is, to seduce the Visitor—Lucia must “act before deciding.”⁷³ Only a spontaneous, unplanned action can free her from the shackles of her suffocating bourgeois identity. In other words, she must act like an animal or, rather, give in to her more “animal instincts.”⁷⁴ Interestingly, this is precisely the path she will seek out during the rest of the film, namely picking up young men and having sex with them.

⁶⁹ Peroni and Pasolini, “Intervista con Lino Peroni,” 2934.

⁷⁰ “[...] il libro senza il film non è pienamente comprensibile, ugualmente il film senza il libro. Ciò a cui si assiste è un vero e proprio sdoppiamento che dà vita a due oggetti complementari e inseparabili, sebbene figli di due codici diversi.” For more information, see Tomaso Subini, “Teorema e la fine del mondo” [“Theorem and the End of the World”], in *Pasolini e l’interrogazione del sacro [Pasolini and the Interrogation of the Sacred]*, eds. Angela Felice and Gian Paolo Gri (Venice: Marsilio, 2013), 139.

⁷¹ Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 207.

⁷² For more information, see Konrad Lorenz, *King Solomon’s Ring. New Light on Animal Ways*, trans. Marjore Kerr Wilson (London: Routledge, 2002), back cover.

⁷³ “Agire prima di decidere.” For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teorema (Theorem)* (Milan: Garzanti, 2012), 43.

⁷⁴ Cesare, for example, reads Lucia’s behaviour in light of Marx’s theory of alienation. He explains that, according to Marx, people in a capitalist society feel more human when performing an animal function like having sex. This is why Lucia reacts the way she does after the guest’s departure, why she “throws herself into an orgy of sexual activity.” For more information, see Tony Cesare, “Pasolini’s Theorem.” *Film Criticism* 14, no. 1 (1989): 24–25.

Rimbaud's *Oeuvres* appears three times during the film. Each time, it precedes a sexual encounter between the Visitor and one of the three women of the family: first Emilia, then Lucia and finally Odetta. However, it is in the third scene that the book plays the most significant role. The Visitor, the father and Odetta are in the garden, comfortably lying on chaise lounges. The father asks the younger man what he is reading. The Visitor answers by reading aloud an excerpt from the poem *Les Deserts de l'Amour* (*The Deserts of Love*): "And he belonged to his own free life. The goodness he radiated would have taken more time to recreate than a star. The loved one, who came without my ever hoping he would, has not come back and indeed never will."⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that the Visitor changes the gender of the subject from the feminine "elle" to the masculine pronoun "he."⁷⁶ That is because, in *Teorema*, the "loved one" is the Visitor himself: much like the messiah's, his unexpected arrival and sudden departure turn the world upside down. Therefore, the passage underlines the exceptional quality of the Visitor's advent. More importantly, it foreshadows the state of despair the family will fall into once he leaves.

The Death of Ivan Ilych tells the story of Ivan Ilych, a wealthy Russian judge who leads an apparently fulfilling family and social life. After an accident, the man falls seriously ill. The thought of an impending death leads him to consider his relationships with his family as well as his career. He realises that the only person who truly cares for him is his young servant, Gerasim.⁷⁷ In *Teorema*, the father draws a comparison between Ivan Ilych and himself, telling the Visitor that the book tells the story of "a man who's sick like me."⁷⁸ He then proceeds to read an excerpt describing the character of Gerasim as "a young peasant, clean, fresh,"⁷⁹ linking the character to the guest. In fact, like Gerasim, the Visitor is kind and compassionate to the father. In addition, much like the young peasant, the guest does not fear death or the truth. The reference to the book here seems to allude to the father's "symbolic death" at the end of the film.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ "Egli apparteneva alla propria vita e il turno di bontà avrebbe messo più tempo a riprodursi che una stella. L'Adorabile, che, senza che io l'avessi mai sperato, era venuto, non è ritornato, e non tornerà mai più."

⁷⁶ For the correct translation of the poem, see Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 152.

⁷⁷ For more information, see Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

⁷⁸ "Un uomo malato come me."

⁷⁹ "Un giovane contadino, pulito, fresco."

⁸⁰ In relation to this, Viano explains, "As with Ivan Ilych, Paolo's disease takes on metaphysical connotations and enforces a confrontation with death and the absolute; as Ivan dies from his illness, so Paolo will never really recover and, in a sense, will experience death as the collapsing of his stable identity." For more information, see Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 207.

Finally, a collection of Bacon's works also makes its appearance in the film. The son and Visitor are sitting on the bed, flipping through the book. Here, Pietro's interest in Bacon's work foreshadows his future career as a painter. The camera lingers on three paintings in particular: *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, *Two Figures* and the *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent XIII*. Both *Three Studies* and *Two Figures* portray scenes of homosexual sex, clearly referencing the sexual encounter between the son and Visitor. Here, it is also worth noting that the shot is framed so that a poster hangs above Pietro, as if it were a cartoon bubble popping out of his head, reading, "Seize him!" In his portrayal of Pope Innocent XIII, Bacon depicts a screaming Pope: the figure is deformed and deprived of any sacred value (**Image 5.2**). Bacon's deliberate disfiguration of religious subjects may foreshadow the crisis of the bourgeois family. Deleuze famously comments on the function of the scream in Bacon's works: "The scream [...] is the operation through which the entire body escapes through the mouth."⁸¹ The painting also alludes to the final sequence of the film, in which the father, roaming the desert, lets out a desperate scream. Overall, the references to books in *Teorema* appear to have a plurality of functions. Not only do they reveal more about the characters and storyline, but, by foreshadowing future events and developments, they also acquire an almost "prophetic" function, incidentally typical of sacred books.



Image 5.2 Bacon's *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent XIII*

⁸¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum, 2003), 16.

The Desert and the Scream

The desert, or a generic wilderness, is a recurrent element in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. As Apostolos-Cappadona observes, it is an “ambiguous symbol for desolation or contemplation. In the Old Testament, the desert typified separation from God and the place of his special intense presence. In the New Testament, it was the place of retreat and of trial for both Jesus and John the Baptist.”⁸² In fact, the most famous biblical narrative connected to the desert may be Christ’s temptation in the wilderness, as narrated in the New Testament, which Pasolini portrayed in *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*. In *Teorema*, the desert is certainly negatively connoted. Images of a windy desert appear from the second prologue. This shot is accompanied by a voiceover that quotes the following biblical passage: “And therefore God caused his children to be led through the desert.”⁸³ The citation situates itself in the first half of Exodus. In this section, the Jews are about to enter the desert of Sinai, where they will spend forty years before finally reaching the Promised Land. In this sense, the quote foreshadows the state of despair and loss that will befall the bourgeois family after the guest’s departure. Like the Jews, they are now walking through uncharted territory. Unlike the Jews, however, they will never reach their Promised Land: there is no salvation for the members of this bourgeois family.

The desert returns again at significant junctures in the film. After the sexual encounter between the Visitor and father, the voiceover quotes a passage from Jeremiah 20:7 and 20:10:

(7) You seduced me, God, and I let myself be led astray. You took me by force and I succumbed. I have become an object of every day scorn. People mock me. (10) I feel the shame of many, terror all around me. All my friends look on my fall. Renounce him and we will support you: maybe if he lets himself be seduced, we can prevail over him and we can wreak our vengeance over him.

Once again, the quote seems to foreshadow the father’s fate. At the beginning of the film, he is a well-respected member of the Milanese upper class, the head of a distinguished family and a successful business owner. The guest’s visit, however, has a major impact on him.

⁸² Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art*, 105.

⁸³ The English Standard Version reads: “But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.” For more information, see Ex 13:18.

He is “ashamed and intrigued by the homosexuality that has been revealed in him”⁸⁴ but cannot bring himself to follow his new sexual inclination. Powerless and humiliated, he witnesses the disintegration of his family.

However, the last sequence of the film, when we finally see someone in the desert, is the most significant. It is the father, who after renouncing his earthly possessions and undressing in the train station of Milan, walks out of the frame and into the desert. The camera follows him as he runs through the desert, then zooms close: the shot of his face contorting in a chilling scream—echoing Bacon’s painting—is the last one in the film (**Image 5.3**). The reason for placing the father in the desert—a place that had been hinted at visually and verbally (Rimbaud’s *The Deserts of Love*) throughout the film—becomes clear if we read what Pasolini wrote in the novel in relation to this episode:

As it was for the people of Israel or the apostle Paul, the desert presents itself to me as the only indispensable part of reality. Or, even better, as reality stripped of everything except for its very own essence. Reality as represented by those who live it and, sometimes, who think of it, even if they are not philosophers. In fact, there is nothing around here except for what is necessary: the earth, the sky and the body of a man.⁸⁵

The image of a man crying in the desert immediately conjures the Scriptures and the expression “*vox clamantis in deserto*” (“the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness”) used by the prophet Isaiah.⁸⁶ Quoting Isaiah, the four evangelists also speak about a “voice crying out in the wilderness,” but attribute it to that of John the Baptist announcing the arrival of the Messiah.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Susan Macdonald, “Pasolini: Rebellion, Art and a New Society,” *Screen* 10, no. 3 (1969): 32.

⁸⁵ “Come già per il popolo d’Israele o l’apostolo Paolo, il deserto mi si presenta come ciò/che, della realtà, è solo indispensabile./O, meglio ancora, come la realtà/di tutto spogliata fuori che della sua essenza/così come se la rappresenta chi vive, e, qualche volta, la pensa, pur senza essere un filosofo./Non c’è infatti, qui intorno, niente/oltre a ciò che è necessario:/la terra, il cielo e il corpo di un uomo.” See Pasolini, *Teorema*, 197.

⁸⁶ Is 40:3. Interestingly, the sentence was mistranslated, as it should read: “*Vox clamantis: In deserto parate viam Domini*” (“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’”). For more information, see “*Vox clamantis in deserto*,” Treccani Enciclopedia Italiana, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/vox-clamantis-in-deserto>.

⁸⁷ Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4 and Jn 1:23.



Image 5.3 The father screaming in the desert

However, such a reading of the father's scream, albeit suggestive, does not suit the narrative, nor does it justify the tremendous sadness and grief that appear to fuel the gesture. If anything, the scream seems to stem from the same place that prompted the famous words shouted by Christ on the cross, "[...] 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"⁸⁸ The theme of "abandonment" is crucial here and is consistent with the etymology of the word "desert," which comes from the Latin *desertum*. *Desertum* is the past participle of the verb *deserere*, which means, "to abandon."⁸⁹ After his encounter with the sacred has uncovered the vacuity of his existence and after he himself was "abandoned" by the Visitor, the father's only option is, in turn, to abandon life as he knows it by renouncing his possessions. However, no amount of penance can restore the precarious balance of the life before the guest's arrival; nor can he move forward. He is therefore stuck in a non-land, in what Pasolini defined "the visual form of the absolute, of time outside history."⁹⁰ In this context, there is not much left for him to do, except for letting out his anguished scream.

⁸⁸ Mt 27:46.

⁸⁹ Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary*, 137.

⁹⁰ Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 133.

Everyone is Now a Petit Bourgeois

The father's decision to donate the factory to his workers and to strip himself of all his clothes in the train station is the ultimate act of renunciation. Of course, practices of renunciation and dispossession have long been a part of Christian asceticism, and they are often associated with the figure of Jesus in the Scriptures.⁹¹ The most famous renunciation narrative relates to the figure of St. Francesco d'Assisi.⁹² According to his biographers such as St. Bonaventura and Tommaso da Celano, in 1206 Francesco famously undressed in front of his father and the Bishop of Assisi, thus renouncing his patrimony. Robson commented that, "by casting off his clothes, Francis proclaimed the renunciation of his birth right and all claim to paternal support. His nakedness primarily associated him with the imitation of Christ, whose mode of redemption was being considered more closely by Francis as a symbol of self-emptying."⁹³

The father's name is never pronounced in the film. In *Teorema* the book, however, his name is Paolo, immediately evoking that of St. Paolo. According to the biblical narrative, Paolo persecuted the early Christians. He was later converted to Christianity on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus.⁹⁴ In *Teorema*, the father's conversion is just as radical as that of St. Paul. By relinquishing his ownership of the factory, he gives up his status of the "persecutor" of the working classes. Certainly, the father's gesture—at first glance, possibly a generous and selfless deed—has deep ideological ramifications. In fact, while his act of renunciation is born out of the desire to recover his spiritual loss, by giving away the factory, he also effectively strips his employees of the possibility for a workers' revolution. This feature emerges during the first prologue, which is shot in a *cinema verité* style. It shows a journalist interviewing workers assembled in front of the factory about the implication of such a gesture: "An action like this might just be the first pioneering step towards the transformation of all humanity into one middle class?"⁹⁵ Picking up on the workers' reluctance to acknowledge the full implication of their boss's gesture, but also on their apparent lack of gratitude, the journalist formulates the following hypothesis: "So then, putting it hypothetically, though it's not a new idea, the middle class man, no matter what action he takes, even giving you his factory, is the wrong action. Isn't that

⁹¹ For an example, see the episode of Jesus and the rich young man in Mk 10:17–31.

⁹² The last chapter of this research discusses Francesco's renunciation in more depth.

⁹³ Michael Robson, *St. Francis of Assisi: the Legend and the Life* (London: Continuum, 1997), 36.

⁹⁴ Acts 9:1–31, 22:1–21 and 26:9–24.

⁹⁵ "Questo potrebbe essere un primo preistorico contributo alla trasformazione di tutta l'umanità in piccolo-borghesi?"

what you're implying?"⁹⁶ This assumption certainly resonates with Pasolini's view of the bourgeoisie and his contention that it was quickly assimilating the working class into its rank. In a later interview, given just a few hours before his death, he stated: "I'm nostalgic for the poor and genuine people, who fought to overthrow the master without becoming the master."⁹⁷ In Pasolini's belief, such development was certainly no longer possible in contemporary Italy.

The Burial of the Sacred

In one of the final sequences, one of great impact and significance, Emilia is buried alive. Accompanied by an old woman, presumably her mother—played by Pasolini's own mother Susanna—she leaves the village and walks to the outskirts of the town. They reach the point at which the countryside merges with the city, signalled by elements of urban life: a road, a graffiti representing the Communist symbol of the hammer and sickle, a construction site and an excavator. Emilia, crying, lies down on the ground and orders the older woman to cover her up (**Image 4**). When only her eyes are visible, she tells her, "Don't be afraid. I have not come here to die, but to weep. My tears are not tears of pain, no. They will become a fountain. And it won't be a fountain of pain. Now go, go away, go."⁹⁸ With regard to this scene, Pasolini stated that "preceding civilisations have not disappeared, but they're only buried. Thus: peasant civilisation remains buried under the world of workers, under industrial civilisation."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "Cioè l'ipotesi sarebbe questa, che del resto non è originale: un borghese, anche se dona la sua fabbrica, in qualsiasi modo agisce, sbaglia? È così?"

⁹⁷ "Ho nostalgia della gente povera e vera che si batteva per abbattere quel padrone senza diventare quel padrone." Pasolini made these remarks during his interview with Furio Colombo on 1 November 1975, just a day before his murder. For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Siamo tutti in pericolo" ["We're All in Danger"], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società* [Essays on Politics and Society], ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 1727.

⁹⁸ "Non aver paura. Non sono venuta qui per morire, ma per piangere. E le mie non sono lacrime di dolore, no. Faranno una sorgente, che non sarà una sorgente di dolore. Va, va via adesso."

⁹⁹ "le civiltà anteriori alle nostre non sono affatto scomparse ma si seppeliscono soltanto. Cosicché la civiltà contadina permane seppellita sotto il mondo operaio, sotto la civiltà industriale." Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jean Dufлот, "Enigmi. Enigmi grandi... Enigmi piccoli" ["Enigmas. Big Enigmas... Small Enigmas"], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società* [Essays on Politics and Society], ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 1502.



Image 5.4 A close-up of Emilia during her burial

In the film, Emilia is the last representative of the peasant civilisation, the only character with a sense of the sacred. In one of the film's early sequences, Emilia's locker is filled with "santini," or devotional images of saints. The woman kisses them before closing the locker again. Further, she is the first to be seduced by the Visitor because she is closer to what he represents. Moreover, she is the only one who, by going back to her peasant village, can restore some sense of authenticity and spirituality. There, in fact, Emilia begins her path to sainthood: in a state of ascetic contemplation, she spends her days in complete silence, refusing to eat anything but boiled herbs and roots. Her exceptional status is demonstrated by her ability to perform miracles; for example, she first heals a young boy by touching him, while in a later scene we see her levitating in a "cruciform pose" (**Image 5.5**). Not even the Visitor has supernatural powers; he is, after all, a member of the bourgeoisie. However, even Emilia's genuinely religious disposition is not enough to halt the process of industrialisation and the advancement middle-class consumerism, as her burial demonstrates.



Image 5.5 Emilia levitating

A Different Kind of Annunciation

Emilia is, however, not the only character of non-bourgeois origin in the film. Indeed, actor Ninetto Davoli plays a peculiar postman named Angiolino, who announces the arrival and departure of the guest by delivering a telegram. Davoli's appearance immediately conjures a feeling of youthfulness and cheekiness, which in Pasolini's world is associated with the young subproletarian of the Roman *borgata*. As Bondavalli observes, "Ninetto's dark curly hair and distinctive accent immediately recall the *ragazzi* of the Roman novels."¹⁰⁰ A modern version of the Archangel Gabriel, he is dressed in white and flaps his arms as though they were wings (**Image 5.6**). Interestingly, the Gospel of Luke, which chronicles the Annunciation, does not provide any description of the Archangel Gabriel.¹⁰¹ In Christian art, however, Gabriel is often portrayed as "a beautiful young man richly dressed in a dalmatic or cope and had multicolored or elaborate wings."¹⁰² Such a description contrasts sharply with the film. Indeed, Davoli's expressions are almost caricatured, as he laughs merrily and cheekily, and even asks the maid for a kiss in exchange for the delivery. Unlike the biblical narrative, the angelic messenger

¹⁰⁰ Simona Bondavalli, *Fictions of Youth: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Adolescence, Fascisms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 132.

¹⁰¹ Lk 1:26–38.

¹⁰² Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art*, 140.

makes a second, even more gleeful, apparition. Angiolino runs into the garden, does a somersault and playfully hides behind a tree, until Emilia urges him: “Come here!” He then lightly teases her: “What? Were you talking to me? Then you can speak, hey!”¹⁰³ The two episodes are portrayed with an absolute lack of solemnity, further underscored by the rock-and-roll theme on the soundtrack, making Pasolini’s parodic intention quite clear here.

Parody is defined by Harries as “the process of recontextualizing a target or source text through the transformation of its textual (and contextual) elements, thus creating a *new* text. This conversion—the resulting oscillation between the similarities to and differences from the target—creates a level of ironic incongruity with an inevitable satiric impulse.”¹⁰⁴ A particular kind of parody appears to be employed here, namely “exaggeration.” Angiolino’s expressions and gestures are overemphatic, his words are loud and his movements are amplified, producing an almost comic effect. As Harries puts it: “In terms of iconography, elements can be exaggerated in order to create a sense of irony with regard to how they are conventionally depicted.”¹⁰⁵



Image 5.6 Angiolino delivering the telegram

¹⁰³ “Angiolino! Angiolino!” “Cosa? Cos’hai detto? Eh, allora parli!”

¹⁰⁴ Dan Harries, *Film Parody* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 85–89.

5.3 Style

Teorema is an aesthetically controlled film, from its rigorous division into segments and its frequent episode rhymes to the highly elliptical editing and soft pastel shades as well as extremely sparse use of dialogue. Such qualities serve perfectly the metaphorical, almost parabolic nature of the story. As Testa points out, the structure of the film is tripartite: “Pasolini imitates the evangelist here, not necessarily suggesting that the film is a gospel allegory, but that *Teorema*’s structural template is the triplex segmentation of the gospel.”¹⁰⁶ It can also be argued that this choice, besides enhancing the rigorous structure of the theorem, also mirrors the trinity, thus reiterating and reinforcing the religious reference.

Similar to the approach taken by Olmi for *E venne un uomo* (Chapter Three), Pasolini opted to use national and international stars instead of non-professional actors. Since this was the first film set in the bourgeois world, Pasolini cast professional actors to play the middle-class family and, unusually, the Visitor and the maid, too. He explained that the choice was a compromise dictated by the fact that middle-class people would never be able to interpret themselves on screen and give an honest performance. He stated:

For the proletarian films, all you need to do is go down the street and you immediately find someone willing to give himself truly, totally, without mediation, without fear, without shame, without a sense of ridiculous—in short, generously. Whilst the idea of taking an industrialist from Milan to play the Milanese industrialist in a film is practically unrealisable, and the same goes for the industrialist’s wife, the industrialist’s children; therefore there is, inevitably, some compromise in choosing the actors.¹⁰⁷

In the film, light is certainly associated with spirituality. The Visitor is often portrayed surrounded by a halo of light, almost an aureole (**Image 5.7**), which in Christian art represents “a circle or orbit of light signifying the radiance of divinity.”¹⁰⁸ This feature is perhaps expressed at its clearest in the sequence that precedes his sexual encounter with Lucia.

¹⁰⁶ Testa, “To Film a Gospel...,” 201.

¹⁰⁷ “Per i film proletari basta andare per la strada e si trova subito uno disposto a dare se stesso veramente, totalmente, senza mediazioni, senza paure, senza pudori, senza il senso del ridicolo, generosamente insomma. Mentre l’idea di prendere un industriale milanese che facesse un industriale Milanese in un film è praticamente irrealizzabile, e così la moglie di un industriale, così i figli di un industriale; quindi c’è, fatalmente, nella scelta degli attori, un certo compromesso.” Peroni and Pasolini, “Intervista Con Lino Peroni,” 2934–2935.

¹⁰⁸ Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art*, 47.

Stamp is here portrayed from a low camera angle, surrounded by light, smiling benevolently at the woman's awkwardness. The shot manages to convey both his ascendance over her and his compassion, ultimately highlighting his divine status.



Image 5.7 The Visitor surrounded by a halo

Further, in a later scene, the father walks into the bathroom and is blinded by the light coming through the window, so much so that he has to shield his eyes with his hand. However, when he finally gets to the window and looks outside, all he can see are confusing shadows. Much like what happens to the slaves in Plato's allegory of the Cave, the father is blinded by the light allegorising the truth and cannot stare directly at it. Unlike some of Pasolini's other works,¹⁰⁹ the colours in *Teorema* are soft—almost subdued—as if they mirror the repressed nature of the bourgeois family, varying from pale blue to pink to beige and white. Interestingly, the only person in the family dressed in the same way throughout the film is the maid, who always wears black.

The film proceeds at a very slow pace. The camera focuses meticulously on tiny details and often lingers on long shots, almost as if to mirror the contemplation of the Visitor by the family members. This slow, almost analytical structure is intercut with a very high number of elliptical accelerations. According to Sorlin, however, this “interrogation on the

¹⁰⁹ MacDonald notes that the soft colours in *Teorema* contrast with the more aggressive colours in *Oedipus Rex*. See MacDonald, *Pasolini*, 32.

function of rhythm in films”¹¹⁰ was a characteristic of the time: “Narration was suspect because it offered a single-minded, logical view of things. But nobody was in a position to suggest an alternative solution, which explains why the same filmmakers could, successively, disturb and then re-establish a chronological order.”¹¹¹ However, when asked about the use of long shots in *Teorema*, Pasolini explained that the choice related to the artificial nature of professional acting. He stated:

If I point the camera at an ordinary man, at an ordinary boy, at an old peasant woman, then the sequence shot would work too, especially if they do not realise it; but if I point at an actor, then the actor emerges and [the film] loses its natural quality. In *Teorema* I shot longer than usual sequences for certain special circumstances; but, after all, even this film is shot in very short fragments, which capture [the actor’s] essential expression, time after time, and forbid the actor from showing off nuances and techniques [which are] outside of his real nature.¹¹²

Finally, the film’s soundtrack is curated by Ennio Morricone and offers a rather eclectic mix of old and new motifs. A prominent place in the soundtrack is occupied by Mozart’s *Requiem*, which underscores some of the most dramatic moments in the film, such as the final sequence depicting the father wandering and screaming in the desert. The solemn feelings associated with *Requiem* are counterbalanced by the presence of the contemporary rock-and-roll and jazz pieces that accompany the less intense scenes such as Angiolino’s annunciation. On the other hand, the dialogue is incredibly sparse. Very few words are spoken throughout the film, and these are mostly concentrated into monologues spoken by the members of the bourgeois family, such as the confessional scenes before the Visitor’s departure. The reason for this silence relates to the director’s desire to reduce the characters to essence; not to deny their particular traits, but rather to universalise the experience. He stated: “[...] these bourgeois never speak (the film is almost silent); they do not use their own expression, they have no attitude etc. They, too, are seen in this particular way which I call ‘reverential,’ which is my way of looking at human beings (who, up to now, have been subproletarians).”¹¹³ Nevertheless, the characters’ silence in

¹¹⁰ Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema: 1896-1996* (London: Routledge, 2002), 132.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Se io punto la macchina da presa su un uomo del popolo, su un ragazzo del popolo, su una vecchia contadina, allora il piano sequenza andrebbe benissimo ugualmente, soprattutto se loro non se ne accorgono; ma se io la metto su un attore, allora viene fuori l’attore e si perde la sua realtà. In *Teorema* ho fatto dei piani sequenza più lunghi del solito per certe situazioni particolari, però tutto sommato anche questo film l’ho girato a rapidissimi frammenti, in cui cogliere l’espressione essenziale, di volta in volta, e non permettere all’attore di sfoggiare sfumature e abilità, al di fuori della sua natura reale.” Peroni and Pasolini, “Intervista con Lino Peroni,” 2935.

¹¹³ “[...] non parlano mai, intanto, questi borghesi (il film è quasi muto), quindi non usano i loro modi di dire, non hanno atteggiamenti, eccetera. Insomma sono cisti anche loro in quel modo particolare, che io chiamo “sacrale”, con cui vedo

the film also expresses “reverence” towards the Visitor. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the family spends a long time quietly looking at the young man, as if contemplating him. Traces of “worshipful silence,”¹¹⁴ to employ a term used by MacCulloch, are certainly found in the Scriptures, such as in the book of Zachariah, which prescribed silence before God: “Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.”¹¹⁵ *Teorema* appears to suggest that the encounter with the disarming force of sacredness provokes *aphasia*, namely the inability to speak, and that the only possible reactions are either to stay silent or to scream.

5.4 Reception

Similar to *Galileo*, as described in the previous chapter, *Teorema*’s journey after its release was particularly complex, and only in part because of its thought-provoking and original subject matter. The film was screened at the 29th Venice Film Festival in 1968 amid controversies and polemics that fell for the greater part outside the domain of cinema.¹¹⁶ Unexpectedly, and rather inexplicably, it won the OCIC prize.¹¹⁷ Much like *Galileo*, it was ruled “VM18,” a veto that was downgraded to “VM14” in 1991 and fully lifted in 1994.¹¹⁸ Almost immediately after the festival, it was seized for “obscenity” and Pasolini and producer Donato Leoni were brought to trial, only to be later acquitted.¹¹⁹ An analysis of the newspapers of the time suggests that the Italian press focused primarily on three aspects: Pasolini’s behaviour during the festival, the legal controversies surrounding *Teorema* and, to a comparatively lesser extent, the content of the film itself.

As already mentioned in Chapter Four, the 29th Venice Film Festival was a rather controversial event. Given the unprecedented social and political upheaval already seen in Italy in 1968, the festival could not escape heavy political connotations.¹²⁰ Five days before its opening, ANAC filmmakers, part of the Associazione Nazionale Autori

(cont’d)

tutti gli esseri umani (nella specie, finora, i sottoproletari).” Peroni and Pasolini, “Intervista con Lino Peroni,” 2932–2933.

¹¹⁴ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (New York: Viking, 2013), 21.

¹¹⁵ Zechariah, 2:13.

¹¹⁶ Enzo Siciliano, *Pasolini. A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1982), 317.

¹¹⁷ Italo Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso [Pasolini and the Sex Theorem]* (Milan: Saggiatore, 1995), 125–126.

¹¹⁸ “Teorema,” Italia Taglia, accessed 7 July 2016, www.italiataglia.it.

¹¹⁹ Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso*, 141.

¹²⁰ For an in-depth analysis of the cultural, social and political forces at play during the 29th Venice Film Festival, see Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso*, 101–132.

Cinematografici (National Association of Cinematographic Authors), decided to withdraw their films from the competition by way of a protest. Their gesture was immediately endorsed by left-wing political associations and organisations.¹²¹ The disgruntlement of ANAC filmmakers ranged from the fact that the festival was still regulated by Fascist statute, to a diffuse dislike for festival president Luigi Chiarini, to more generic, yet ideologically oriented motives such as the condemnation of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹²²

Directors such as Cavani, Bernardo Bertolucci and Carmelo Bene openly declared their intention to participate in the festival and defy the decisions and expectations of ANAC.¹²³ Pasolini, on the other hand, maintained, until the very last minute, a rather ambiguous and indecisive attitude, declaring in newspapers that he did not share the contestation's motives, only to later change his mind and join the contestation.¹²⁴ When the film was finally shown, he invited journalists to follow him and leave the room as a sign of protest, as the screening was taking place against his wishes.¹²⁵ Reviewers criticised Pasolini not only for the indecisiveness that led him to change his mind—and sides—repeatedly, but also for his “prima donna” attitude.¹²⁶ Film critic Tullio Kezich bitterly comments, “With only one story, Pier Paolo Pasolini was able to turn the summer of Italian culture [...] into a personal ‘show’ contending space to the events in Prague in the newspapers.”¹²⁷

Just as the festival was ending and the polemics were receding, two unexpected turns of events provoked new and intense reactions. First, *Teorema* was awarded the OCIC prize (a fact that immediately overshadowed Laura Betti's victory of the Volpi Cup);¹²⁸ second, the film was denounced and seized, marking the beginning of a rather long and complex legal controversy. Indeed, *Teorema* had been forbidden to viewers under age eighteen

¹²¹ Ibid., 95–96.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 107.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 107–109.

¹²⁵ Siciliano, *Pasolini*, 317.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Guglielmo Biraghi, “Eccezionale e discontinuo ‘Teorema’” [“‘Theorem:’ Exceptional and Uneven”], *Il Messaggero*, 6 September 1968, 10; Tullio Kezich, “Teorema”, *Panorama*, 13 September 1968, 13.

¹²⁷ “Con una sola idea di racconto Pier Paolo Pasolini è riuscito a trasformare l'estate culturale italiana [...] in uno ‘show’ personale che sui quotidiani ha conteso lo spazio ai fatti di Praga.” For more information, see Kezich, “Teorema,” 13.

¹²⁸ Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso*, 123.

because of “its themes and scenes of erotic nature.”¹²⁹ On 13 September 1968, the Public Prosecutor of Rome seized the film for “obscenity and for many scenes of carnal embraces, some of which were particularly lewd and lascivious and homosexual relations between a guest and the family who hosted him.”¹³⁰ It was not the first time Pasolini found himself in such a predicament, nor would it be the last. His short film *La ricotta* (*Curd Cheese*, 1963) had also been seized with the accusation of insulting the religion of the state (“vilipendio alla religione di stato”),¹³¹ while the legal controversies surrounding his posthumous work *Salò o 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1976) would be memorably long and considerable.¹³²

During the trial, prosecutor Louis Weiss asked for a term of imprisonment of six months for Pasolini and Leoni as well as the destruction of the work.¹³³ On 23 November 1968, after an hour of deliberation, the court discharged the filmmakers with the following verdict: “The upheaval caused by *Teorema* is not of a sexual nature, but essentially ideological and mystical. Since this is unquestionably a work of art, *Teorema* cannot be suspected of obscenity.”¹³⁴ Obviously, the Italian press closely followed these events from the film’s seizure¹³⁵ to the trial,¹³⁶ and to Pasolini’s acquittal.¹³⁷

¹²⁹ “la sua tematica e le scene di carattere erotico.” For more information, see “Teorema,” Italia Taglia, accessed 7 July 2016, www.italiataglia.it.

¹³⁰ “oscenità e diverse scene di amplessi carnali, alcune delle quali profondamente lascive e libidinose e ai rapporti omosessuali fra un ospite e un membro della famiglia che lo ospita.” For more information, see “La Procura di Roma sequestra ‘Teorema’ di Pasolini” [“The Public Prosecutor Office on Rome Seizes Pasolini’s ‘Theorem’”], *L’Unità*, 14 September 1968, 9.

¹³¹ Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso*, 48.

¹³² For an in-depth account of the topic, see Naomi Greene, “Salò: The Refusal to Consume,” in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 232–242.

¹³³ “Pasolini assolto” [“Pasolini Acquitted”], *L’Unità*, 24 November 1968, 11.

¹³⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Teorema,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23 dic 1968, quoted in De Giusti, *I film di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 95.

¹³⁵ See, for example, “Sequestrato ‘Teorema’” [“‘Theorem’ (Is) Seized”], *Corriere della Sera*, 14 September 1968, 13; “La Procura di Roma sequestra ‘Teorema’ di Pasolini,” 9.

¹³⁶ See, for example, “Pasolini: ‘Non mi sento colpevole’” [“Pasolini: ‘I Don’t Feel Guilty’”], *L’Unità*, 25 October 1968, 7; E. D. P., “Pasolini si dichiara innocente,” *Corriere della Sera*, 25 October 1968, 17; G. Fr., “Per direttissima il processo al film ‘Teorema’ di Pasolini” [“Fast Track Trial for Pasolini’s Film ‘Theorem’”], *La Stampa*, 18 September 1968, 7; Giovanni Grazzini, “Pasolini in tribunale imputato di oscenità per il film ‘Teorema’” [“Pasolini in Court Accused of Obscenity for His Film ‘Theorem’”], *La Stampa Sera*, 25 October 1968, 1; Giovanni Grazzini, “‘Teorema’ è un’opera scandalosa ma solo in senso ideologico” [“‘Theorem’ is a Scandalous Work, but Only Ideologically,”] *La Stampa*, 10 November 1968, 11.

¹³⁷ See, for example, “Pasolini assolto,” 7; Giovanni Grazzini, “Piena assoluzione a Pasolini. Il film ‘Teorema’ non è osceno” [“Full Acquittal for Pasolini. ‘Theorem’ Is Not Obscene,”] *La Stampa*, 24 November 1968, 11.

As far as actual analyses of the film go, *Teorema* left the majority of film critics unsatisfied regardless of their ideological orientation. With the exception of Moravia's piece in *L'Espresso*, which considered Pasolini's achievements to be "extremely positive,"¹³⁸ and Pestelli's article in *La Stampa*,¹³⁹ reviewers oscillated between bewilderment and open hostility, frequently branding the film "cold"¹⁴⁰ and "ambiguous."¹⁴¹ If Emilio Garroni made no mystery of his assessment of the film by titling his piece in *Paese Sera* "Teorema: osceno no, velleitario si" ("Theorem: Not Obscene, but Whimsical"),¹⁴² other critics such as Biraghi and Grazzini gave it tepid receptions, citing inconsistencies and ambiguities.¹⁴³ However, while for Grazzini the film can at least count on great style and *mise-en-scène*,¹⁴⁴ Biraghi argued that it suffers not only from sterility, but also from the same contradictions that seem to plague the director, stating that, "Inspiration and calculation, depth and superficiality, knowledge and ingenuity, accuracy and carelessness follow one another in this hour and a half."¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Kezich also criticised *Teorema* for a certain coldness and sophistication reminiscent of the work of Michelangelo Antonioni and for its underlying ambiguity. While Kezich was a left-wing critic,¹⁴⁶ his severe assessment eerily resembled the most conservative Catholic reviews:

¹³⁸ "ampiamente positivi." The article was originally published in *L'Espresso* in September 1968. For more information, see Alberto Moravia, "Si spogliano fra le ciminiere" ["(They) Undress among the Chimney Stacks"], in Alberto Moravia. *Cinema italiano. Recensioni e interventi 1933-1990* [Italian Cinema. Reviews and Comments 1933-1990], eds. Alberto Pezzotta and Anna Gilardelli, (Milan: Bompiani, 2010), 720.

¹³⁹ Leo Pestelli, "Il poetico 'Teorema' di Pasolini. Arduo film di un marxista cristiano" ["Pasolini's Poetic 'Theorem'; the Difficult Film of a Christian Marxist"], *La Stampa*, 6 September 1968, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Biraghi, "Eccellente e discontinuo 'Teorema,'" 10 and Kezich, "Teorema," 13.

¹⁴¹ Kezich, "Teorema," 13. The adjective "ambiguous" is also employed rather abundantly by Grazzini in *Corriere della sera*. While less caustic than Kezich, Grazzini also shares his opinion on the confusing role attributed by Pasolini to both sex and the guest; however, while such ambiguity in content is hardly desirable, the film's similarly ambiguous form is what makes it fascinating. For more information, see Giovanni Grazzini, "Teorema: Eros arriva a Milano" ["Theorem: Eros Arrives in Milan"], *Corriere della Sera*, 6 September 1968, 13.

¹⁴² Emilio Garroni, "Teorema: osceno no, velleitario si" ["Theorem: Not Obscene, but Whimsical"], *Paese Sera*, 5 October 1968, 14.

¹⁴³ Biraghi, "Eccellente e discontinuo 'Teorema,'" 10 and Grazzini, "Teorema: Eros Arriva a Milano," 13.

¹⁴⁴ Grazzini, "Teorema: Eros arriva a Milano," 13.

¹⁴⁵ "Si alternano, nella sua ora e mezzo, ispirazione e calcolo, profondità e superficialità, consapevolezza e ingenuità, accuratezza e faciloneria." For more information, see Biraghi, "Eccellente e discontinuo 'Teorema,'" 10.

¹⁴⁶ Edmondo Berselli, "Le chiavi di sinistra e le chiavi di destra," accessed 7 July 2016, <http://www.edmondoberselli.net/le-chiavi-di-sinistra-e-le-chiavi-di-destra/>

The hypothesis (of the *Theorem*) seems unjustified: we do not get to know this family, we can identify only briefly the relationship between the characters. The erotic Messiah who happens to disrupt the lives of the bourgeois looks mischievous rather than angelic; and the public can very well misunderstand the author's discourse, reversing the theorem: if the family was [truly] "respectable", that is, more careful and conservative of traditional values, nothing at all would happen. And the Eros, no matter how much positivity Pasolini wants to put in his speeches, causes damage so irreparable that it becomes associated with the sphere of sexuality understood as sin and guilt-inducing.¹⁴⁷

Surprisingly, the official Catholic reaction was also mixed. For example, the OCIC jury, composed of seven Catholic critics from different nations and guided by the Canadian Jesuit Marc Gervais, gave the following verdict:

More than any other film presented at this festival, this work, imbued with the disturbing ambiguity that characterizes so heartbreakingly our era, confronts, with intense sincerity and compelling dramatic force, a certain view of contemporary bourgeois society in its most squalid aspects, with an experience that can be described as religious. This experience is supported by some biblical aspects, proposed to the consciousness of men of all time. With this award, the jury wishes to acknowledge the author's authentic research and spiritual anxiety, especially evident in *Teorema*, where the clearly metaphorical—however ambiguous—character of the cinematographic "language" reaches a profoundly human dimension.¹⁴⁸

While it was not the first time that a film by Pasolini had been awarded the OCIC prize—he had won it in 1964 for *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*—the news still came as a shock. The Vatican reacted immediately to the decision by publicly condemning *Teorema* and forbidding Catholic audiences from watching it. The review in *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche* read:

¹⁴⁷ "L'ipotesi (del *Teorema*) appare ingiustificata: questa famiglia non arriviamo a conoscerla, non individuiamo che sommariamente i rapporti esistenti tra personaggi. L'erotico Messia che capita a sconvolgere la vita dei borghesi ha un aspetto malizioso piuttosto che angelico; e il pubblico può benissimo fraintendere il discorso dell'autore, rovesciando il teorema: se la famiglia fosse "per bene," cioè più attenta e conservatrice dei valori tradizionali, non accadrebbe niente. E l'Eros, per quanta positività voglia mettere Pasolini nei suoi interventi, produce guasti così irreparabili da rientrare nella sfera della sessualità intesa come peccato e produttrice di senso di colpa." For more information, see Kezich, "Teorema," 13.

¹⁴⁸ Raimundo Dinello et al. "Motivo dell'assegnazione del Premio OCIC a *Teorema*," in Italo Moscati, *Pasolini e il teorema del sesso [Pasolini and the Sex Theorem]* (Milan: Saggiatore, 1995), 173.

The disturbing metaphor purporting to represent the problem of an encounter with a reality intended as the symbol of transcendence is undermined at the roots by Freudian and Marxist consciousness [...]. The mysterious guest is not the image that liberates and frees man from his existential torments, from his limitations and impurities, but is almost a demon [...] Excluded.¹⁴⁹

Catholic dissent was especially vociferous in the Vatican paper *L'Osservatore Romano*, whose correspondent in Venice don Claudio Sorgi dedicated numerous articles to the film,¹⁵⁰ as well as in other official publications at the national, local and parish levels.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Pope Paolo VI hinted at the issue during a speech from Castel Gandolfo, warning the faithful against “inadmissible films.”¹⁵² In the aftermath of the Pope’s open condemnation of the film, the OCIC board publicly disapproved of its jury’s decision and stated that giving *Teorema* the prize had been a mistake.¹⁵³ For his part, Pasolini told the press that the OCIC could take back both prizes—the one for *Teorema* and the one for *Il Vangelo*.¹⁵⁴

Subini offers an interesting reading of the events and provides an explanation of the interests and forces at play at that time within the Catholic world. First, he suggests that it is rather peculiar that the hostility towards *Teorema* was limited to Italy, whereas an international organisation such as the OCIC found the film imbued with religious themes. “At stake,” explains Subini, “[were] different religious identities, in conflict one with another: an international way to be Catholic, which can enter into dialogue with Pasolini’s discourse, and an Italian one, which cannot.”¹⁵⁵ While it might be a hazardous operation to generalise and extend such a perception to the whole country, it is undeniable that *Teorema*, just like *Galileo*, was released during a particularly sensitive juncture for Italian Catholicism. It is clearly relevant that just a few months before *Teorema* was released the Pope promulgated the aforementioned encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. In relation to this,

¹⁴⁹ Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, ed., *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche. Volume LXV - 1968* (Rome: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1968), 68. On the same topic, see also “Negativo e pericoloso il film di Pasolini” [“Pasolini’s Film (Is) Negative and Dangerous,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, 14 September 1968, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Claudio Sorgi, “Enigmatico e anche ambiguo non trasparente il ‘teorema’” [“Theorem”: Enigmatic, also Ambiguous, Unclear], *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7 September 1968, 3; Claudio Sorgi, “Il Leon D’oro’ veneziano al tedesco Alexander Kluge” [“The Venetian ‘Golden Lion’ Goes to the German Alexander Kluge”], *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 September 1968, 5. On the same topic, see also “Negativo e pericoloso il film di Pasolini,” 6.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Piero Zanotto, “Un ambiguo ‘Teorema,’” *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 6 September 1968, 5.

¹⁵² “films inammissibili.” For more information, see “Amare la Chiesa, ‘il dovere dell’ora presente’” [“To Love the Church: ‘(Our) Duty Right Now’”], *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 September 1968, 1.

¹⁵³ V., “Pasolini a Parigi polemico con l’OCIC” [“Pasolini in Paris Polemises with the OCIC”], *La Stampa*, 23 March 1969, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Subini, “May God Have Sex?,” 4.

Subini states:

On one hand, there is the Catholicism that led the Second Vatican Council that was made up mostly of foreign Cardinals; on the other hand, there is the Italian Catholicism, frightened of the contemporary world and conservative, which reluctantly accepted the changes wanted by the Council, and now seeks to limit the damage by running for cover.¹⁵⁶

Pasolini himself validated this interpretation. When asked in a BBC interview why *Teorema* caused such a scandal, he replied: “There are plenty of reasons, which are neither strictly cultural nor cinematographic: the first is probably the fact that it was in the centre of the cyclone which is hitting the Catholic Church at the moment, with a clerical left and clerical right and so on.”¹⁵⁷

What emerges from this analysis is confirmation of the incredible diversity colouring the reception of *Teorema*. The film was certainly problematic on many levels: not only was it disturbing for its unconventional and provocative use of religious themes and Catholic symbolism, but it was also a cause for concern because of its political, ideological and ultimately anti-bourgeois overtone. Moreover, the film was even more problematic from a Marxist perspective. In fact, the father’s donation of his factory to his workers goes against Marx’s theorisation of a necessary and inevitable uprising of the working class. Ultimately, *Teorema* seems to have been too scandalous for Catholic and conservative audiences and too religious for Marxist ones.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the lasting impact of *Teorema*, in particular, and Pasolini, in general. The key relevance of the director’s legacy has been highlighted numerous times over the years. In particular, more recently, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his death in 2015, a large number of events and screenings of his films were organised throughout Italy,¹⁵⁸ demonstrating once again how, in spite of the controversies and disagreements often surrounding his works, Pasolini still represents an essential point of reference in the Italian cultural landscape.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁷ Stack and Pasolini, “Extract from an Interview on BBC Television,” 157.

¹⁵⁸ “Pasolini 1975-2015. Gli Appuntamenti,” Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali, accessed 2 July 2016, http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sitoMiBAC/Contenuti/MibacUnif/Eventi/visualizza_asset.html_232948987.html.

Conclusion

In *Teorema*, Pasolini employs traditional Catholic themes and symbolism to deliver a message that is anything but conventional. While this is, as we have seen, a recurring feature of his work, it takes on a new dimension in this film. Here, the director uses a vast repertoire of Catholic elements to theoretically underpin his *theorem* of the spiritual inauthenticity of the bourgeoisie. In fact, the use that Pasolini makes of this repertoire is as innovative as it is provocative. He does so either by desecrating traditional Catholic elements or by doing the exact opposite, namely associating unorthodox characters and practices with Catholicism through citations, music, symbolism and iconography, ultimately sanctifying them. Catholicism therefore is not only the point of reference for Pasolini's criticism, but also the tool with which to deliver it. His constant juxtaposition of sacred and profane elements does not only shock and provoke for its sheer novelty, but also encourages a deeper reflection and possibly a reconsideration of our moral parameters. These practices undoubtedly left an impression with the audience within and outside the Catholic world and led to one of the most controversial film receptions in the history of Italian cinema.

As *Teorema* illustrates—and in spite of his self-profession of atheism¹⁵⁹—Pasolini was certainly not indifferent to religion, in general, or to Catholicism, in particular. His relationship with Catholicism, although extremely complex, evolved through the years and also in relation to the events of the time.¹⁶⁰ Throughout his life, he tried to reconcile his Marxist views, on the one hand, with his Catholic upbringing and his strong sense of the sacred, on the other. He oscillated between a romanticised, “irrational”¹⁶¹ attachment and a more critical, even anticlerical position.¹⁶² He combined a more mediated, intellectualised approach to religion—through the works of the likes of the aforementioned Rudolf Otto

¹⁵⁹ Giuseppe Cardillo and Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Reality is a Sacred Language,” in *Poet of Ashes*, eds. Roberto Chiesi and Andrea Mancini, (San Francisco, Citylights, 2007), 89.

¹⁶⁰ Scholars such as Subini and Benini chart such an evolution in their works. For instance, Benini summarises it thus: “[...] from initial hostility, through open reciprocity to a final diffidence and separation.” For more information, see Subini, *La necessità di morire*, 35-104 and Benini, *Pasolini*, 12.

¹⁶¹ The term “irrational,” or rather the sentence “a furious wave of irrationalism,” was used by Pasolini when describing what compelled him to film *Il Vangelo*. See Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 70.

¹⁶² In a caustic passage entitled “La Chiesa, i peni e le vagine” [“The Church, Penises and Vaginas”], Pasolini wrote: “The Church can only be reactionary; the Church can only side with Power; [...] the Church can only detest any form of even vaguely free thinking; [...] the Church can only act completely outside the Gospel teachings.” Pier Paolo Pasolini, “La Chiesa, i peni, le vagine” [“The Church, Penises and Vaginas”], in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società [Essays on Politics and Society]*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 475.

and Mircea Eliade and, within the Italian context, Ernesto di Martino¹⁶³—with a more visceral fascination that found its root in a childhood spent in rural Friuli under the loving care of his mother, a devout Catholic. This Catholicism, in particular, was hardly ascribable to the one preached by the ecclesiastical hierarchies: it was “poetic and natural,”¹⁶⁴ devoid of any hypocrisy. Thus, not unlike Olmi (Chapter Three), Pasolini came to identify the pre-capitalist, pre-bourgeois world of the peasantry with spiritual authenticity. The implications of such beliefs become even more evident if we take into account that, while Pasolini was extremely concerned—even obsessed—with the notion of death,¹⁶⁵ he did not entertain ideas of an afterlife, but rather focused on the existence of the sacred *in this* life. This “immanent and corporeal vision of the sacred,”¹⁶⁶ to borrow an expression from Benini, governed his artistic production; he believed that an “epic and mythological dimension to life”¹⁶⁷ could still be found in the peasant world, the only one to have kept a strong sense of the sacred. After his move to Rome, such identification extended to include the urban underclass of the Roman *borgata*, variously referred to as subproletariat or *Lumpenproletariat*. This view is certainly reflected by his filmography. In addition to *Il Vangelo*—which faithfully portrays episodes of the life of Jesus as narrated by Matthew,¹⁶⁸ and as such obviously contains a large number of biblical quotes and Catholic symbols, rites and iconography—the majority of Pasolini’s films preceding *Teorema* present Christ-like figures as protagonists. In fact, Pasolini repeatedly links the subproletarian characters of films such as *Accattone* (1961), *Mamma Roma* (1962) and *La ricotta* to Christ by, for example, making them assume a cruciform posture or by creating a composition that references famous Italian religious paintings.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, while these social groups never cease to hold the strongest appeal for the director, Pasolini had to acknowledge the momentous cultural and social changes taking place in Italy and the increasingly disappearing gap between the lower stratum of society and the bourgeoisie, which prompted a more negative outlook and the mourning and nostalgia for a more spiritually authentic past.

¹⁶³ For recent works that explore Pasolini’s relationship with Otto, Eliade and di Martino, see Benini, *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*; Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 18-51; Tomaso Subini, *La necessità di morire*, 20-34.

¹⁶⁴ Stack and Pasolini, *Pasolini on Pasolini*, 14.

¹⁶⁵ The idea of death is a powerful and recurrent theme in the works of Pasolini. For an analysis of the topic, see, among others, Benini, *Pasolini*, 31-41 and Subini, *La necessità di morire*, 15-20.

¹⁶⁶ Benini, *Pasolini*, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Stack and Pasolini, *Pasolini on Pasolini*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Much has been written about Pasolini’s adherence to the Gospel of Matthew in his film. See, for example, Testa, “To Film a Gospel,” 180-197.

¹⁶⁹ See Pasolini’s portrayal of the deaths of Accattone in the homonymous film, Ettore in *Mamma Roma* and Stracci in *La Ricotta*.

While Pasolini's perspective appears rather sombre, it is still not as bleak as Bellocchio's in *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972). Indeed, as becomes apparent in the next chapter, the harsh criticism permeating *Nel nome del padre* does not express regret for the loss of a more genuine religious dimension, nor does it identify a specific social class as privileged interlocutor in the religious discourse, but rather pinpoints the overbearing interferences of religious power and beliefs in the life of the Italian population.

Chapter 6 Bellocchio's *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972)

The previous chapter highlighted Pasolini's deepest regret for the loss of genuine religious values as incarnated by the peasant world, now almost entirely assimilated into the bourgeoisie. This sense of disillusionment is shared by Bellocchio's *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972).¹ Perfectly in tune with the rebellious spirit of the times, the film illustrates the sentiment of clashing with authority through the character of Angelo, a young man whose arrival disrupts the equilibrium of life in a Catholic boarding school. A film of a highly allegorical nature,² not only does the Catholic boarding school typify Italian society, with the triad of the priests, students and servants representing the ruling class, bourgeoisie and working class, respectively, it also embodies pre-conciliar Catholicism, with its inflexible yet anachronistic teachings; its focus on the concepts of guilt, sin and death; its pathological sexual phobia; and its demand for blind, passive obedience. Further, the two parallel yet ideologically different revolts taking place in the school, that of the students and that of the servants, resonate with the students' and workers' movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which were characterised by the same shortcomings and that were ultimately as ineffective.

Comparable to how Pasolini directs *Teorema*, Bellocchio embraces traditional Catholic themes and symbolism (Catholic names, narratives, rites and sacraments, miracles and supernatural elements and quotes as well as the prominent use of typical elements of Catholic iconography) only to later bend these motives to his own expressive end to deliver his criticism. By providing an exhaustive analysis of these elements, this chapter seeks to offer another insight into Italian Catholicism. Indeed, the film reveals Bellocchio's strong critique of Catholicism as an ideology that fosters a climate of fear and repression, whose committed adhesion requires the relinquishing of intellectual freedom and critical thinking. However, unlike Pasolini, Bellocchio's criticism is not delivered in order to show an alternative but rather serves as a violent yet resigned "j'accuse" to a politically, socially and religiously faulty status quo.

¹ While the film was first released in 1971 in the United States, I take into account the date of its Italian release. Further, this analysis is based on the 1972 Italian version of the film. For more information, see *Nel nome del padre*, directed by Marco Bellocchio (1972; Italy: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

² See, for example, Marco Bellocchio and Nicoletta Zalaffi, "Interview with Marco Bellocchio." *Sight and Sound* 42, no. 4 (1973): 197–199, 231; Sandro Bernardi, *Marco Bellocchio* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1978), 73; Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2009), 249.

If, for Pasolini, there was no salvation for the bourgeoisie as a result of its own inauthenticity and morally corrupted class status, in *Nel nome del padre*, Bellocchio denies anyone a chance of redemption, revealing his profoundly negative and disillusioned views.

The analysis of *Nel nome del padre* covers four areas. The first takes into account the film's religious and cultural context. In particular, I consider how the shortcomings of the student protests of 1968 and the battle for the reform of psychiatric healthcare and eradication of asylums relate to the film. In the second and third sections, I focus on the film's narrative and style, respectively, and explain how Bellocchio systematically desacralises traditional Catholic elements through satire. Finally, the last section examines the film's release and reception, with a special focus on the reaction of the Catholic world.

6.1 Cultural and Religious Context

Despite being set in the academic year 1958/1959, *Nel nome del padre* strongly reflects the events in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this sense, the students' and servants' revolts echo the social unrest of the period, which had been channelled especially by the youth and labour movements. Further, the film's timeliness is also evident in the strong critique of the repressive order exercised in the school by the priests on their pupils and, especially, on the servants. The latter, in particular, are an eclectic group of ex-cons, the unemployed, orphans and the mentally ill, whom the priests agreed to take in and provide for. However, they are exploited and denied any rights; they endure constant abuse and humiliation. Even their sleeping quarters—a large room significantly located near the pigsty—reflect their status as “undesirables.” As such, their portrayal in the film strongly resonates with the critique of the treatment of the mentally ill heralded by Venetian psychiatrist Franco Basaglia and his battle to reform mental health and to close asylums.

The School as a Metaphor for Italian Society: The Student Movement

As far as the episodes of disobedience in the film go, the protests take the form of both *generational* conflicts (Angelo and his father; Franc and his mother; the students and priests) and *social* conflicts (centring mainly on the exploitation of the servants and their relationships with the students and priests). Generational conflict and disobedience to authority are embedded in the film from the very first scene.

The first sequence shows a violent altercation between Angelo and his father, one of the self-made men emerging from the Italian industrial boom.³ Furthermore, in a significant scene in the middle of the film, Franc, exasperated by his hysterical mother, shoots her mirror image. The conflict is reiterated not only by different characters, but also on different levels. For instance, Angelo's rebellion against his father is repeated against Father Corazza and, during the play, against God.

From the very beginning, Bellocchio is extremely critical of what he considers to be puerile and foolish disobedience. He portrays the students as disorganised, selfish and lazy, incapable not only of conceiving an overall programme but also of overcoming their narcissism and individualism. Their rebellion is therefore limited to practical jokes, silly attempts at ridiculing the priests and lots of laughter. Further, the students are all too quick to accept Angelo's authority, following him without question or hesitation. In this regard, Bernardi points out how their attitude perfectly exemplifies the futility and inconsequentiality of what are only *partial* rebellions, in that they undermine just some of the images of authority, only to have them reappear a little later in a different form. For instance, Franc's potentially radical gesture—shooting his mother's mirror image—quickly loses much of its significance as the boy replaces his mother's authority with Angelo's.⁴

The portrayal of the students' revolt in the film is highly reminiscent of the issues that characterised the student protests of the late 1960s in Italy. The student movement failed to achieve significant political outcomes, or even shift the electoral status quo. Not only did the national elections of 1968, 1972 and 1976 leave the primacy of the Christian Democrats basically untouched, but the more radical requests from the left were also dampened by their gradual incorporation into the government to moderate their requests, in a process known as "Compromesso storico" ("Historic Compromise").⁵ The only, meagre result was the approval of a handful of educational reforms.⁶

³ Bernardi, *Marco Bellocchio*, 73.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The term "compromesso storico" refers to the attempts at reconciliation by the DC and the PCI during the 1970s in Italy. For more information, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 354–356.

⁶ Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 101-108.

The most common criticism was the movement's inability to translate its aspirations into concrete programmes, or even produce organisational structures able to realise them. The students stood accused of ideological short-sightedness for their ultimate inability to co-opt the working class into their struggle in order to constitute a united front with common goals.

This aspect is also reflected in the film: indeed, not only does their naiveté and immaturity condemn the students to failure, so also does their ideological short-sightedness. What prevents the students' disobedience from truly changing the school is their inability to acknowledge the benefits of creating a unified front with the proletariat. This is clearly illustrated by a scene towards the end of the film in which the students refuse to seek an alliance with the servants. To them, it boils down to irreconcilable differences in their respective priorities. They state, "We want to pay less, and they want to earn more."⁷ It becomes clear that the demands of both groups are contrary: while the servants are advocating more equal conditions, the students' demands can only be met as long as the proletariat continues to be exploited. In this sense, it is significant that the only time that the servants are actually "free" coincides with the absence of the students rather than that of the priests.⁸

Compared with the students, the servants appear to be more united. Not only are their demands more conscious of their class struggle, but they are also portrayed as truly seeking social equality and justice. Brook observes: "They do not have individual spaces into which to retreat at night, but they sleep together in a dormitory [...] They have a greater sense of the collective than the middle-class pupils have: they're not shown bickering, as the schoolboys are, but instead maintain a quiet solidarity."⁹ The servants' limits are connected to their intellectual shortcomings. As opposed to the students, their revolt is hindered not by their own selfishness and petty motives, but rather by their incapability of conceiving and carrying out an overall programme. Again, in the words of Brook: "The random and damaged nature of this collective renders it inefficient and too easily quashed, and it ultimately fares little better than do the schoolboys."¹⁰

⁷ "Noi vogliamo pagare meno e loro vogliono guadagnare di più."

⁸ Bernardi, *Marco Bellocchio*, 78.

⁹ Clodagh J. Brook, *Marco Bellocchio. The Cinematic I in the Political Sphere* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 57–58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

Overall, both revolts in *Nel nome del padre* are destined to failure. If the type of Catholicism exemplified by that at the boarding school is now truly obsolete, as the opening shots of a now-abandoned building seem to suggest, it is certainly not thanks to either rebellion. The students' disobedience, fuelled more by puerile and irrational sentiments than by critical reflection, as well as the servants' revolt, marked by a more cohesive spirit yet lacking the intellectual skill necessary to develop a coherent and valid programme, hardly touch such a powerful institution as the Catholic Church or the system of thought that sustains it, and they certainly are not enough to make its physical manifestation crumble into ruin.

The School: Prison or Asylum?

Throughout the film, Bellocchio offers a decidedly negative portrayal of the boarding school as a repressive environment that fosters the spread of both Catholic and middle-class values; in other words, it is the perfect embodiment of Althusser's *Ideological State Apparatuses*.¹¹ In fact, the school operates through cultural conditioning, aiming to harness, if not even change, the nature and sensitivity of the students, often inhibiting their intellectual, physical and sexual development. This is reflected in the school's appearance: the large empty rooms, bare walls and bars on the windows give the building not only a sober and ascetic look appropriate for a religious institution, but actually veer on the gloomy and sinister.

The school is something in between a convent, a prison, an asylum or even "a giant sepulchre."¹² Not only are the students treated akin to prisoners in terms of being locked inside their rooms every night, rarely setting foot outside and gathering in the courtyard for a cigarette, but the school also physically resembles a detention centre. In relation to this, designer Amedeo Fago recalls how Bellocchio was determined to reproduce the prison-like architectural structure of his own boarding school, with the cells of the boarders arranged in a gallery, opening onto a very large room.¹³ The fact that when they eventually came across an old and abandoned school, the Collegio Massimo, they decided

¹¹ It is Althusser's contention that, at least at the time he was writing the essay, the school held an especially prominent role in society, and it had even replaced the Church in its role as a dominant ideological state apparatus. For more information, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, (London: Verso, 2008), 1–60.

¹² Marina Pellanda, *Marco Bellocchio tra cinema e teatro: l'arte della messa in scena [Marco Bellocchio between Cinema and Theatre. The Art of the Mise-en-scène]* (Venice: Marsilio, 2012), 109.

¹³ Paola Malanga, ed. *Marco Bellocchio. Catalogo ragionato* (Milan: Olivares, 1998), 155.

to invest in rebuilding works so it would indeed resemble a prison¹⁴ certainly attests to the director's commitment to his vision. In particular, the large main room off which the dormitories are situated seems closer to a Foucaultian *panopticon* than to a school. The students have literally no privacy: they are always under surveillance. Many scenes show the priests in semi-darkness watching over the room from their own cells. Indeed, the portrayal of the school arguably borders on that of an asylum. In particular, as Bernardi explains, the servants' room resembles a psychiatric ward: "Their dormitory, next to the pigsty, full of religious writings and warnings, resembles the big rooms of confinement of the classical age. There, as recalled by Foucault, madness was mixed with all other forms of unreason, any other possible threat to the world order."¹⁵

This portrayal also reflects the heated debates on the issue of the reform of psychiatric institutions in Italy at the time. Indeed, throughout the 1960s, there were attempts to reform the state of psychiatric healthcare as well as change the general attitude towards mental illness. Ground-breaking work in this sense was carried out by Basaglia, who advocated a new model of psychiatric healthcare with the ultimate objective of the eradication of mental hospitals in the country.¹⁶ The law regulating the matter in Italy was old—it was passed in 1904—and heavily stigmatised people with mental disorders. As Tarabochia explains: "The main response to the problem of mental illness [...] amounted to internment in the asylum and to therapeutic approaches with very dubious, if not entirely pathogenic, results, such as shock therapies and psychosurgery."¹⁷

Thanks to the work of Basaglia and his team, the issue of the state of mental hospitals and the necessity of reform started to gain increasing attention. In September 1965, Italian Health Minister Luigi Mariotti made a speech comparing psychiatric hospitals to the German concentration camps and advocating change.¹⁸ In 1967, the Associazione per la lotta contro le malattie mentali (ALMM, Association for the Fight against Mental Illness), whose goal was to denounce any form of violence against the mentally ill, was born in Florence.¹⁹ However, it was especially at the end of the decade that the protests intensified

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bernardi, *Marco Bellocchio*, 77.

¹⁶ Ginsborg, *A History*, 392.

¹⁷ Alvisè Sforza Tarabochia, *Psychiatry, Subjectivity, Community: Franco Basaglia and Biopolitics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 3.

¹⁸ David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation Since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 199.

¹⁹ ALMM, "La nostra storia," accessed 7 July 2016, http://www.almm.it/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=40.

and even took a radical turn.²⁰ In particular, the book published by Basaglia and his collaborators in 1968, *L'istituzione negata* (*The Institution Denied*), found great resonance, both in Italy and abroad, and became one of the “bibles” of 1968.²¹ In the same year, the mental hospital of Colorno, a small town near Parma, was occupied by nurses and students protesting the institution’s poor conditions. Finally, in 1969, RAI broadcast Sergio Zavoli’s documentary *I Giardini di Abele* (*The Gardens of Abel*), which had been shot inside the asylum of Gorizia; the film made a lasting impression and was seen by millions across the country.²²

In particular, of the many concepts put forward by Basaglia, one is of extreme interest for the analysis of *Nel nome del padre*, namely his theorisation of “le istituzioni della violenza” (“the violent institutions”). In *L'istituzione negata*, Basaglia dedicates a chapter to the examination of the concepts of institutionalised violence and its connection with power. In an analysis strongly reminiscent of the work of Foucault, he writes:

Family, school, factory, university, hospital are institutions based on a clear division of roles, i.e. the division of labour (slave and master, teacher and student, employer and worker, doctor and patient, organiser and organised). This means that what characterises the institutions is a clear division between those who have power and those who do not. It follows that the division of roles is the *relationship of oppression and violence between power and non-power, which is transformed in the exclusion, by the power, of the non-power*: violence and exclusion are at the basis of each relationship established in our society.²³

This notion relates to the portrayal of power relations in the film, where those in charge systematically exploit and abuse those who are weaker. This behaviour, while characterising all three groups in the school, is especially evident in the relationship between the priests and servants. Indeed, in a sort of emotional blackmail, the priests constantly remind the servants of their compassion and generosity: they have “saved” them, taken them in when nobody else would, and for that they deserve loyalty and eternal

²⁰ Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*, 200.

²¹ John Foot, “Franco Basaglia and the Radical Psychiatry Movement in Italy, 1961–78,” *Critical and Radical Social Work* 2, no. 2 (2014): 238.

²² John Foot, “Photography and Radical Psychiatry in Italy in the 1960s. The Case of the Photobook *Morire di classe* (1969),” *History of Psychiatry* 26, no 1 (2015): 20.

²³ “Famiglia, scuola, fabbrica, università, ospedale, sono istituzioni basate sulla netta divisione dei ruoli: la divisione del lavoro (servo e signore, maestro e scolaro, datore di lavoro e lavoratore, medico e malato, organizzatore e organizzato). Ciò significa che quello che caratterizza le istituzioni è la netta divisione fra chi ha il potere e chi non ne ha. Dal che si può ancora dedurre che la suddivisione dei ruoli è il *rapporto di sopraffazione e di violenza fra potere e non potere, che si tramuta nell'esclusione, da parte del potere, del non potere*: la violenza e l'esclusione sono alla base di ogni rapporto che si instauri nella nostra società.” For more information, see Franco Basaglia, *L'istituzione negata* [*The Institution Denied*] (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 2014), 115.

gratitude. This point also relates to Basaglia's contention that the poor are ultimately forced into asylums, as people from wealthier families are able to afford private care. In the introduction to his work provocatively titled *Morire di classe (To Die of Class)*, he writes that the patient was "at the same time, a poor person and an underdog who has no contractual power in order to resist the violence of the place, and who definitively comes under the control and power of a controlled [...] institution."²⁴ This is exactly the predicament in which many of the servants find themselves; with nowhere else to go, or no one else to turn to, they cannot do anything but endure their oppression. Bellocchio is extremely aware of this social injustice: he is sympathetic towards their cause, as confirmed by the fact that the director returned to the topic of psychiatric institutions in *Matti da Slegare (Fit to Be Untied, 1975)*, directed together with Sandro Petraglia, Silvano Agosti and Stefano Rulli.

6.2 Narrative

Similar to Pasolini's *Teorema*, *Nel nome del padre* is characterised by a creative and provocative association between the traditional and unorthodox elements of the Catholic repertoire. What distinguishes *Nel nome del padre*, however, is not only the plurality of targets, but also the intensity of such an attack. Indeed, Bellocchio takes issue with merely formal adhesion to religion, the exploitation of the weak, the sexual repression fostered by the school and the superstitions of the peasant world, imbuing the film with biting satire.²⁵ The following analysis concentrates on the director's constant sacralisation and desacralisation of elements of the narrative and shows how such an operation allows him to meet his critical target.

²⁴ Foot, "Photography and Radical Psychiatry," 26.

²⁵ In the previous chapter, I defined Pasolini's portrayal of the annunciation as "parody." Nevertheless, I believe that in the case of *Nel nome del padre*, it is more appropriate to speak of satire. There appears to be consent that satire differs from parody in that it is more socially and politically oriented in its criticism. Further, what distinguishes the two is the different nature of their targets. As Hutcheon explains, while parody's target is "intramural," satire's target is "extramural." In other words, while parody's polemical objects are other discursive texts or artistic forms, satire targets "the vices and follies of mankind." Finally, another difference between the two lies in their intent or, in Hutcheon's chosen term, "ethos." Indeed, while satire has an evaluative and corrective intent, parody, at least in its modern form, is free from such a limitation. For more information, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 43. On the same topic, see also Dan Harries, *Film Parody* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

Plot and Structure

While the first part of *Nel nome del padre* is more description-oriented, the second is more action-oriented. The film is preceded by a sort of prologue, set in the present. In the film's opening sequence, the camera shows dark, empty rooms and corridors full of debris. In the meantime, a quite modern—even sinister—arrangement of the traditional religious song “Gesù mio con dure funi” (“My Jesus [tied] with tight ropes”) is the accompanying soundtrack. After that, there is a cut to the same location, seemingly intact, thus indicating a change in the timeline. The caption “School Year 1958–1959” appears onscreen. A young man and his father are walking quickly along the corridors. The father, who appears to be rather fearful, hits his son with his walking stick, demanding respect, only to have the boy slap him in return. They continue hitting each other while walking; the father repeatedly shouts demands such as “Respect me! Obey me!” and “I am your father,”²⁶ while the boy methodically hits back, staying silent, seemingly unfazed.

The first part of the film focuses in detail on the monotonous life of the boarding school with its three groups: the priests, who represent the ruling class; the servants, who stand for an exploited and marginalised social class; and the students, who represent the middle class. Within these three groups emerge four representatives: Angelo, Franc, Salvatore and Father Corazza. Angelo, played by Yves Beneyton, is the boy we saw at the beginning of the film. He sets himself apart from the rest of the students and immediately assumes the role of the leader. He befriends Franc, another student, played by Aldo Sassi, who represents the intellectual incapable of making decisions and taking action. Salvatore, interpreted by Lou Castel, is the leader of the servants and true antagonist of Angelo in the film. Finally, Father Corazza, played by Renato Scarpa, is the school's deputy director.

The second part of the film focuses on Angelo's merciless and relentless provocation, as he pushes his classmates to question their blind obedience to the establishment. Together with Franc, he organises a grotesque and blasphemous play loosely based on Goethe's *Faust*. After the play, everything precipitates. Fra' Matematicus dies and his body is kidnapped by Angelo who, in a dog costume, carries it around the school, followed by Father Corazza. The servant, Beato, who had been having an affair with one of the boys, shoots himself, leading the servants to finally rebel against the priests. However, both revolts, albeit different in nature, end in failure. While the priests accept some of the

²⁶ “Rispettami! Obbediscimi! Sono tuo padre!”

servants' requests, they fire Salvatore; moreover, the students' protest is quashed by their own limited goals and the inability to establish an alliance with the servants. The film ends with Angelo and the servant Tino, a man the priests had taken in from the mental hospital who believes himself an alien from the planet Mongo, driving on the highway, discussing politics, power and technology.

Angelo: the Eagle Disguised as a Dog

The messianic nature of Angelo's arrival in the school is already embedded in the boy's name. Indeed, the name "Angelo," which can be translated in English as "angel," means "messenger" or even "the messenger of God."²⁷ However, not unlike the protagonist of Pasolini's *Teorema* (Chapter Five), Angelo hardly acts as a messenger of God—or even a messianic figure—in the traditional sense. His obsession with efficiency, contempt for the mediocrity and laziness of both his peers and the priests and single-minded determination to dismantle the religious institution reflect not just a no-nonsense, practical and intransigent attitude but also a cruel and callous one. The disloyalty of an angelic figure towards ecclesiastical hierarchy is hardly novel in Catholic tradition, finding an antecedent in the rebellion of Lucifer, "the fallen angel."²⁸ Interestingly, a contrary line of thought reads the figure of Lucifer in a positive light. In fact, some currents within *Gnosticism* and *Manicheism*, resting on the Latin meaning of the name Lucifer as "light bearer," have identified the figure of the serpent or Lucifer as leading Man to knowledge and towards liberation from the slavery of ignorance, therefore liberating man from the tyranny of the Creator.²⁹ Clearly, both understandings of the figure of Lucifer are consonant with the role played by Angelo in *Nel nome del padre*.

Moreover, Angelo's surname is "Transeunti," best translated into English as "transient," which only adds to his sense of foreignness and uniqueness. Seemingly, Angelo is not destined to stay long at the school. Though he might just be passing through, his presence wreaks havoc in the monotony of school life, leaving chaos and destruction in its wake. Clearly, Angelo does not belong in the school; he sets himself apart from the other

²⁷ Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle and Hodges Flavia, *A Dictionary of First Names* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), ebook edition, "Angelo."

²⁸ According to Judeo-Christian tradition, Lucifer was the name of Satan before God plunged him into the Underworld as a result of his desire to usurp God, as attested by the Gospel of Luke (Lk 10:18) and the Book of Revelation (Rev 12:7–9). More precisely, while the archangel Michael is the head of the angelic orders, Lucifer is the leader of the rebel angels. The Fathers of the Church agreed, ultimately, to ascribe to these rebels the introduction of death and evil (metaphysical, moral and physical) into an otherwise perfect world. For more information, see Frank Flinn, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 226.

²⁹ Jeffrey Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 59–60.

students as soon as he steps foot inside the building. Upon his arrival, he refuses to bow his head when asked to, he does not take part in the practical jokes his peers play on the teachers and he openly defies the deputy director. A natural-born leader, he fascinates and intrigues his companions into following his orders. His difference is visually conveyed through his height, good looks, and strong physique; even his uniform is a more vivid colour compared with those of the other students.

Throughout the film, Angelo is associated with elements of the Catholic tradition, and, in particular, with the symbols of the eagle and the dog. In the film, the school emblem of the eagle is sewn onto the uniforms, painted on the walls and etched on the doors and windows (**Image 6.1**). Because of its physical qualities such as excellent sight, extremely high flight speed, rapacity and majesty, the eagle has come to stand for invincibility and power.³⁰ In particular, in Judaism and Christianity it took on particular importance as an intermediary between man and God and for its ability to regenerate and renew.³¹ Further, the eagle is also the symbol of the Evangelist John: “The eagle is his attribute, a reference to the soaring majesty and inspiration of his writing as he contemplates the divinity of Christ.”³² John is said to be the author not only of a gospel, but also of the *Book of Revelation* (also known as *the Apocalypse*), “an apocalyptic prophecy”³³ written in the form of a letter, famous for its vivid imagery and ominous tones. In this sense, Angelo appears to be the perfect embodiment of the eagle and, by extension, of John. Not only does he share many of the aforementioned qualities (i.e., strength, rapacity, even the ability to “regenerate and renew”), but, in a way reminiscent of the evangelist, he announces a true apocalypse: regardless of the poor results of his rebellion, his arrival signals “the end of the world” as they know it for all the boarding school residents.

³⁰ Boria Sax, *The Mythical Zoo: An Encyclopedia of Animals in World Myth, Legend, and Literature* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 101. This richness of symbolic meanings has long been present on the emblems and coats of arms of armies, cities, nations, noble houses and sports associations. One only has to think, for example, of the German *Bundeswappen* and the flags of many countries such as the Holy Roman Empire after 1400, the United States, Poland, Albania and even Nazi Germany and the Republic of Salò, just to name a few.

³¹ See Ps 103:5 and Dt 32:11; 28:49, 14:12.

³² Gertrude Sill, *A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 48. Interestingly, this association is also emphasised by Dante, who, in his *Divina Commedia*, refers to John as “aguglia di Cristo” (“Eagle of Christ”). For more information, see Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1985), 327.

³³ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6.



Image 6.1 Angelo portrayed between the school emblem of the eagle and a crucifix

Further, Angelo is also associated with the symbol of the dog. Not only is a rabid dog possessed by Satan in the school play, but Angelo himself wears a dog costume at the end of the film to kidnap Fra' Matematicus's body from the coffin. According to Apostolos-Cappadona, the dog is "an ambiguous animal symbol in Christian art denoting either fidelity or evil."³⁴ While the dog, as the first known domesticated animal, is often associated with positive feelings such as loyalty, altruism and generosity, there is also a different side to it. In fact, dogs are also connected with the idea of night and death and, as such, are often seen "an omen of doom."³⁵ Moreover, the dog often assumes the role of *psychopomp*—namely, the figure who guides and escorts souls in the afterlife.³⁶ Further, the ambivalence of the values associated with the dog is famously discussed by Erwin Panofsky in relation to Jan van Eyck's *Arnolifini Portrait*. The little dog at the couple's feet has variously been interpreted as a symbol of fidelity³⁷ or as a reminder of the couple's powerful status.³⁸ In his seminal essay of 1934, Panofsky acknowledges the abundance of meanings, observing how "Iconographical symbols, especially in medieval

³⁴ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 107.

³⁵ Sax, *The Mythical Zoo*, 87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 86–87.

³⁷ See, for example, Margaret D. Carroll, "'In the Name of God and Profit': Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *Representations* 44, no. 1 (1993): 105.

³⁸ See, for example, Craig Harbison "Sexuality and Social Standing in Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Double Portrait," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1990): 270.

art, are almost always ambivalent [...] Thus, the equation Dog-Faith does not preclude the equation Dog-Animality.”³⁹ In the film, the dog is certainly anything but a “domesticated” and reassuring figure; rather, it embodies the idea of doom and death.

Muscolo’s Crucifixion

Angelo’s ruthlessness emerges clearly in one of the first scenes of the film, as he engages in a bet with another student, Muscolo. Muscolo bets his peers that he can suspend himself from the rings in the gym for a whole hour. While the other students barely acknowledge him, Angelo takes the bet. This exchange is followed by an apparently unrelated sequence: a nun approaches one of the boys and asks him to help her kill a chicken. The boy, unperturbed, proceeds to break the animal’s neck with an ease that suggests a strong familiarity with the practice. His callousness is accentuated by the shot composition: the boy is framed by the horrified nun on the left and by a statue of the Virgin Mary on the right, both conveying a feeling of innocence in the face of such a display of brutality. This episode, already significant in itself, becomes even more important in its symbolic allusion to the following scenes. The next shots alternate close-ups of the boy suspended from the rings—sweat pouring down his neck, face screwed up in concentration—with wider camera angles. It is here that the Christic analogy becomes clear. First, Muscolo is in a *cruciform pose*. Further, the analogy is reinforced iconographically: behind the boy is a large fresco portraying the crucifixion (**Image 6.2**). These visual nods resonate at a narrative level as well. Just when an hour is about to pass, the boy, exhausted, lets go of the rings and falls to the floor, effectively losing the bet. The use of an extremely melancholic flute and harpsichord musical theme⁴⁰ further amplifies the sense of sacrifice and loss in the sequence; the next scene sees Muscolo admitting defeat to Angelo, who then refuses to give him any money in another display of callousness and cruelty.

There is something potentially blasphemous in linking a boy such as Muscolo to Jesus. He is not particularly bright or brave; even his arguably greatest asset, namely his strength (“muscolo” in Italian means “muscle”), turns out to be less than impressive. The same could be said for suggesting that something as trivial as a schoolboy’s bet could relate to the crucifixion. However, I believe that Bellocchio’s intention is not to suggest an

³⁹ Erwin Panofsky, “Jan van Eyck’s ‘Arnolfini’ Portrait,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 64, no. 372 (1934): 127, note 35.

⁴⁰ Roberto Calabretto, “La musica nel cinema di Marco Bellocchio” [“Music in Marco Bellocchio’s Cinema”], in *Nè padri nè madri. Il cinema di Marco Bellocchio [Neither Fathers nor Mothers. Marco Bellocchio’s Cinema]*, eds. Alberto Achilli and Gianfranco Casadio (Ravenna: Comune di Ravenna, 2004), 45.

identification in terms of qualities and attributes but rather to focus on the gratuitous sufferance as well as the injustices one can experience at the hands of those in power. In this sense, the sacralisation of the boy's bet becomes a powerful ideological tool.



Image 6.2 Muscolo suspended from the rings in the school gym in front of a painting of the crucifixion

The Servants

In the same vein as Muscolo's crucifixion is Bellocchio's portrayal of the servants in the film. As mentioned in the first section of the chapter, the servants are a heterogeneous group of misfits, exploited and preyed upon by both the priests and the students. They are guided by Salvatore, arguably the only positive character in the film. He stands up to both the students and the priests, advocating change and justice. Salvatore sincerely cares about his companions and tries to protect them. He urges them to stand up for themselves against the mockery and contempt of the students as well as to free themselves from the priests' patronising and moralising influence. The perfect counterpart to Angelo's individualism, he represents the compassionate leader, willing to sacrifice himself for the good of his cause and companions. This is reflected in his name. The name Salvatore, meaning 'saviour' in English, is obviously at home in the Catholic tradition, as "a

common epithet of Christ, and the name is borne in his honour.”⁴¹ While it would be a stretch to draw a parallel between Salvatore and Christ, or even to suggest that Salvatore acts as a Christ-like figure in the traditional sense, some elements are consonant with Christ’s salvific and redemptive functions. In fact, by assuming leadership of the servants, Salvatore comes to represent for them their chance to improve their living conditions and, ultimately, social redemption. In this sense, he is their only possible saviour. Sadly, Salvatore’s efforts do not pay off. Any possible alliance with the students—the bourgeoisie—is undermined by their lack of shared goals or solidarity between classes. In particular, the priests accommodate very few demands and identify Salvatore as the instigator of the servants’ revolt and fire him, effectively making him the scapegoat for the events in the school.

The scapegoating of the servants is portrayed at its clearest in their Christmas dinner, which could be seen as a peculiar variation of the Last Supper (**Image 6.3**). The sequence is imbued with religious symbolism: above the dining table is a portrait of Pope Pio XII and next to the table, a nativity scene. Before the eating begins, the school director gives the impatient servants a speech in which he explains that, in a role reversal, the priests will serve the servants. This, however, is more of an exercise in the Catholic virtues of humility and mercy than a demonstration of gratitude towards the servants. Listening in silence, the servants show very little interest in the moralising speech. In particular, Salvatore makes a great show of eating while the director is still speaking; when one of the nuns tells him off, he simply grabs her and squeezes her bottom.

⁴¹ Hanks, Hardcastle and Flavia, *A Dictionary of First Names*, ebook edition, “Salvatore.”



Image 6.3 The servants listening to the school director's speech on Christmas Day

Later, Nicola puts on some music and invites one of the nuns to dance with him. Unexpectedly, she accepts and the two waltz around the room, producing a rather surreal effect. At the same time, Tino, wearing a uniform and a helmet with antennae, and with mathematical formulas drawn on his face, walks solemnly across the room, pulling the long white tablecloth along with him. To the amusement of his companions, this causes everything to fall off and break. His promenade terminates at the end of the room, where an enormous painting portraying Judgement Day hangs. On the other side, Nicola has pulled the nun down under the table. He is now on top of her, forcing himself on her. The sequence ends with a shot of the Judgement Day painting, with the focus on the figure of God, who shows His displeasure.

Towards whom this displeasure is directed is unclear. Is it towards the servants for their sacrilegious and disrespectful conduct, or is it towards those who have exploited their unfortunate condition, such as the priests and students? The answer becomes rather obvious if we consider the development of the plot and the impact on the protagonists as the film proceeds. Beato commits suicide after having an affair with a student; shocked by the event as well as by the school's intention to simply get rid of the servant's body in order to avoid a scandal, his companions finally decide to stand up for themselves. The non-violent revolt is led by Salvatore, who tries his best to organise and coordinate his peers. Despite his best efforts, however, the protest is quashed and he is fired.

Angelo's Own Narrative: The Play

The theme of Judgement Day re-emerges in the school play,⁴² to which a rather large proportion of the film is dedicated. The play is a hastily assembled, vivid and gruesome collage with apocalyptic overtones. Among the works referenced is Goethe's *Faust*, Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi (The Betrothed)*, which is one of the best-known historical novels in Italy, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Verdi's *Otello*.⁴³ In line with Antonin Artaud's elaboration of the theatre of cruelty,⁴⁴ the scope of the play here is to induce fear in the spectator, as Angelo explains to his companions. Interestingly, starting from the observation that, "for centuries, fear has been the priests' monopoly,"⁴⁵ Angelo desires not to try to oppose this climate of terror but rather enhance it. To him, then, the only possible course is to start a fierce battle, attempting to substitute himself for the priests as a powerful and fear-inducing leader.

Angelo, in his parodic role of *Faustolo*, plays the head surgeon of a team of veterinarians. The scene is particularly gruesome: the boys on stage wear masks or are dressed in threatening-looking costumes; red stains and fake blood are everywhere, and skeletons and dummies resembling zombies are placed in the theatre's seats. The frightening atmosphere is also conveyed through special effects, with thunder booming and lightning flashing. After treating a gorilla, Angelo dedicates his talents to saving Countess Cazzaniga's rabid dog, Bobby. While on the operating table, the dog speaks: he is actually Satan and has come from hell to fulfil Faustolo's every wish, in exchange for his soul.

⁴² Bellocchio is not new to the idea of meta-discourse on theatre and cinema, as most of his films feature either the portrayal of plays in the theatre or a reflection on the role of the actor and the function of cinema. Consider, for example, *La macchina cinema* (1979), *Il sogno della farfalla* (1994) and *Il regista di matrimoni* (2006). For an in-depth examination of Bellocchio's use of theatrical representations in his works, see Pellanda, *Marco Bellocchio tra cinema e teatro*.

⁴³ For a complete account of the many scenes in the play, see Carlo Testa, *Italian Cinema and Modern European Literatures, 1945–2000* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 66–67.

⁴⁴ In his writings on theatre, collected in *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud introduces the concept of "theatre of cruelty." Distancing himself from the psychological theatre tradition initiated by Racine, Artaud argues for the necessity of "immediate and violent action" in theatre. "The theatre of cruelty" should be a multi-sensorial experience, a "mass spectacle" appealing to the irrational mind. It should attack and terrorise the audience's sensibility on multiple levels. In this sense, dance, gestures, lights and sounds come to hold as much importance as the spoken word. Further, the influence of Artaud's elaboration on the school play can also be found in the discard of modern costumes in favour of age-old clothes as well as the employment of masks, puppets and mannequins. For more information, see Antonin Artaud, "The Theatre of Cruelty," in *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 84–144.

⁴⁵ "Per secoli, la paura è stata incontrastato monopolio dei preti."

Faustolo accepts the offer: “You obviously want my soul [...] I have no problem giving it to you. After all, it does not exist.”⁴⁶ The deal is sealed: from this moment on, Faustolo will spread evil with his kiss.

The second act is a compilation of quotes and citations organised in a rather rushed sequence. It begins with Iago’s famous aria, “Credo in un Dio crudel” (“I believe in a cruel God”), from Verdi’s *Otello*. Faustolo and the dog kidnap the countess and her kids, and, kissing the countess, he dooms her soul for eternity. Finally, God appears on stage, in the form of a student dressed, quite comically, as a bearded man, carrying a globe in his hands. He speaks directly to Faustolo, admonishing him in an imitation of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*: “Repent! Repent!” (**Image 6.4**). In an unforeseen twist, a hatch opens under Faustolo’s feet, and he is plunged into hell. God has won; with Faustolo gone, the whole family kneels down in front of God, while sacred music plays.⁴⁷

At the end of the play, Father Corazza asks the school director: “What should we do?” To which the director shrugs and simply says: “We clap!”⁴⁸ The priests’ choice to ignore the provocative and blasphemous themes and “turn the other cheek,” in truly Catholic fashion, turns out to be a winning strategy. It instantly neutralises the play’s potentially dangerous and far-reaching impact, leaving Angelo, once again, helpless and frustrated. Ultimately, the boy’s endeavours have been fruitless. Even if the blasphemous quality of the play is not lost on the audience, his intellectual and artistic provocation has achieved very little aside from upsetting the most impressionable spectators, such as the younger students and Fra’ Matematicus.

⁴⁶ “E vuoi l’anima, naturalmente? Non ho nessuna difficoltà a cedertela, tanto non esiste.”

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the last scene also echoes the exchange between Angelo and his father at the beginning of the film, highlighting once again the protagonist’s aversion towards authority figures. What differs, however, is the nature of the appeals: while Angelo’s father was commanding respect, the God-figure is now asking for the boy’s repentance. Further, while Angelo’s communication in the prologue was non-verbal, as he hit his father back, now his refusal is accompanied by a forceful “No!” signalling an even stronger rejection of authority.

⁴⁸ “Come ci dobbiamo comportare?” “Applaudire.”



Image 6.4 Faustolo and God in the final scene of the school play

Fra' Matematicus's Apocalypse

While the theme of death pervades not only the play, as seen above, but also the entire film, it is perhaps best embodied by the character of Fra' Matematicus. Apocalyptic, ominous overtones are already inscribed in his first appearance in the film, which sees him sleeping in a coffin to acquaint himself with the idea of death. Franc goes to see him and, in a conversation that strongly resembles a confession, expresses his worry over his fascination with Angelo, only to have Matematicus remind him that the only concept truly worthy of attention and speculation is death. With an unsettling smile on his face, which contrasts deeply with his words, the friar admonishes Franc: “You keep forgetting about death, so when you remember it, you are afraid [...] But death is like a medicine—you should take it regularly.”⁴⁹ Matematicus's behaviour is perfectly inscribed into an attitude frequently displayed by the Catholic Church.

⁴⁹ “Tu continui a dimenticarti della morte, così quando te ne ricordi, hai paura. La morte è come una medicina, va presa con regolarità.” While Bellocchio frequently employs grotesque and surreal elements in his works, the fact that it is Franc who opens and closes the coffin, which effectively begins and puts an end to the conversation, seems to suggest that the sequence belongs more to the oneiric. For more information, see Victoria Surliuga, “The ‘Fantastic’ Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema.” In *Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery*, ed. Regina Hansen (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 219–231.

In relation to this, Bellocchio explained: “The edifice of death in which a Catholic feels himself sheltered is extremely dangerous because, paradoxical as it may seem, there is nothing more ‘tranquillising’ than constant reminders of death and the mixture of obsession and reassurance they produce.”⁵⁰

Far from being trapped in a coffin, Fra’ Matematicus reappears throughout the film. In particular, he plays a rather conspicuous role in a scene towards the end. He falls ill, rather significantly, right after the play. Lost in a sort of delirium, he quotes a passage from the Gospel of Matthew in which John the Baptist preaches the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and to prepare the way for the advent of Christ.⁵¹ According to Matthew, upon seeing how many Pharisees show up at his baptism, asking for forgiveness, John castigates them and ends with strong admonishment and a violent image of destruction. Therefore, Fra’ Matematicus clearly appears to both reprimand the priests for their hypocrisy and warn or predict the very near end of their world as they know it. Concordantly, images of a bulldozer physically destroying the school are intercut throughout the scene.

Finally, Fra’ Matematicus appears for the final time as a corpse in a coffin, exactly as we met him the first time, making this particular narrative a circular one. His body is kidnapped by Angelo, dressed in the dog costume (**Image 6.5**). The sleeping priests that should be guarding Fra’ Matematicus’s body do not stir, even when the dog lifts the corpse: in an almost comic turn of events, one of them actually ends up falling into the empty coffin without waking. When the priest is eventually shaken awake by an angry Father Corazza demanding to know where their dead brother is, he excitedly exclaims, “He has resurrected!”⁵² The priests are here portrayed as a bunch of lazy, gullible men, who fall asleep instead of watching over their deceased brother—another jab at the clergy’s ultimately superficial adhesion to religious practices.

The figure of Fra’ Matematicus serves many purposes in the film. Not only does his apparently eccentric, disturbing behaviour enhance the eerie and grotesque atmosphere that pervades the school, but its portrayal is also a strong critique of the emphasis placed by Catholicism on the idea of death. In *Nel nome del padre*, the Catholic penchant for death is negatively connoted: images of damnation and doom appear throughout the film,

⁵⁰ Bellocchio and Zalaffi, “Interview with Marco Bellocchio,” 199.

⁵¹ Mt 3:10–12.

⁵² “E’ resuscitato!”

from the painting of Judgement Day hanging in the canteen, to the school play, to the skull sewn onto the banner hanging on the wall in the school's small chapel. Such apocalyptic tones are however difficult to reconcile with the promise of salvation embedded within Catholicism. Indeed, the notion that eternal life awaits "those who die in God's grace and friendship"⁵³ does little to placate the fears of Fra' Matematicus, as attested to by his hysterical words on his deathbed, leaving the audience to wonder whether the constant reminders of death achieve anything apart from conveying a feeling of hopelessness, resignation and the loss of value of the earthly, present dimension.



Image 6.5 Angelo, dressed in his dog costume, kidnapping Fra' Matematicus's corpse

The Death of the Pope

Fra' Matematicus' death is not the only one portrayed in the film. Indeed, a more conspicuous and significant one is the inclusion of the television broadcast of Pope Pio XII's funeral in the school's common room. The students react to the news with not only a lack of reverence but also total and utter indifference. Absorbed in their matches of table tennis and pool, they completely ignore the news of the pontiff's death. The juxtaposition of the gravity of the commentator's voiceover and the solemnity of the music score on the television on the one hand and the sound of the table tennis ball bouncing on the table on the other also contributes to creating a sharp contrast. The fact that two of them actually

⁵³ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1023.

start a fight because they lost the game only serves to highlight how little consideration they hold for the school's religious tradition. In addition, this sense of indifference is heightened by the attitude of Father Corazza, who is following the ceremony only distractedly while smoking a cigarette. Indeed, according to the *Magisterium*, smoking is actually an *actus indifferens*, an "indifferent act." While not an inherently negative action—actions in themselves are neither good nor evil and only the abuse of this vice constitutes a mortal sin—the image of a smoking priest may arouse a feeling of indignation in viewers.⁵⁴

Disenchanted and disillusioned, Father Corazza has long given up the idea that what is taught in the school might actually positively impact the students. Acutely aware of how outdated, reactionary and bigoted the boarding school's microcosm is, he nevertheless does nothing to try to change things. He recites old formulas without believing in them; he applies rules mechanically. Although he is aware of the social injustice and exploitation taking place in his school, he still looks the other way, ultimately condoning the behaviour. I believe this trait is underscored by his name: the word "corazza" means "armour." According to Bernardi, this name indicates his disposition "to be bombarded with blows."⁵⁵ I believe that the name rather refers to Corazza's cautious and circumspect attitude and his tendency to stay entrenched in a position, remaining in his shell and avoiding open confrontation as much as possible.

While Bellocchio's films often feature the presence of reactionary Popes, such as Paolo VI in *Sogni infranti* (*Broken Dreams*, 1995) and Pio XII in *La religione della storia* (*History's Religion*, 1998),⁵⁶ the broadcast of the latter's funeral is extremely significant here. Pio XII (1938–1958), born Eugenio Pacelli, is a rather controversial figure in Italian history. While he was rarely criticised in his lifetime and actually appeared to be an extremely beloved Pope, within fifteen years of his death, he became the target of much criticism. In particular, his detractors accuse him of morally dubious conduct during the Second World War as he did not explicitly speak out against the atrocities of the Holocaust.⁵⁷ Further, he held a strict attitude towards Italian Communism and famously

⁵⁴ Giorgio Betti, *Il pensiero e la dinamite: riflessioni su alcuni film di Marco Bellocchio* [*The Thinking and the Dynamite. Thoughts on Marco Bellocchio's Selected Films*] (Bobbio: Pontegobbo, 2010), 39–40.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Adriano Aprà, "Tormenti, estasi, rigenerazioni. Una panoramica sull'opera di Marco Bellocchio" ["Torments, Ecstasies, Regenerations. An overview of Marco Bellocchio's Work"], in *Marco Bellocchio: il cinema e i film* [*Marco Bellocchio. His Cinema and Films*], ed. Adriano Aprà, (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), 20.

⁵⁷ John O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 282.

issued a decree in which he officialised the excommunication of Catholics affiliated with Communist organisations.⁵⁸ It follows that Pio XII had become, especially at the time of the film's release, "a symbol for leftists in Italy of the Vatican's reactionary politics."⁵⁹

The use of archival footage both underscores the anachronistic role played by the Catholic Church and signals how the particular reactionary form of Catholicism embodied both by the Pope and by the boarding school is about to be discarded. Further, by juxtaposing the images of the papal funeral to something as trivial as a table tennis match and pointing out how the students and deputy director care more about the latter than the Pope's passing, Bellocchio highlights not only the gap between official Catholicism and the daily lives of the Italian populace but also the latter's lack of true religious sentiment.

Sex and the Sacred

One of the first scenes of the film portrays the students sat in the school chapel, listening to Father Granita⁶⁰ offering an *exemplum*.⁶¹ Here, the story is about a boy of seventeen—significantly, roughly the age of the protagonists of the film—who falls into temptation, repeatedly commits the sin of masturbating and subsequently dies a long, painful death. Interestingly, the boy's death is presented as the natural and logical consequence of his moral and physical degradation. Unsurprisingly, masturbation is considered by the Catholic Church to be a grave sin, "an intrinsically and gravely disordered action,"⁶² and the priest's intention here is clearly to instil fear and apprehensions in order to have the students avoid the practice. One of the boys, Marsilio, seems to be especially stricken by the story. Next to the priest is a statue, the *Our Lady of Sorrows*, also known in Latin as *Mater Dolorosa*, recognisable from an iconographic point of view for having her red heart pierced by seven daggers.⁶³ As the priest continues to describe in detail the moral degradation and sufferance of the protagonist of the story, Marsilio begins to touch himself. As he does so, the statue comes alive. She walks over to him, and instead of

⁵⁸ Peter Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 242.

⁵⁹ Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*, 249.

⁶⁰ Once again, the names are of great importance to Bellocchio, insofar as they hint at the character's qualities. The word "granita" in Italian recalls "granite," and as such certainly highlights the priest's intransigence.

⁶¹ An "exemplum" is a story in which the protagonist, thanks to morally good or bad behaviour, obtains either the salvation or the damnation of the soul. A literary genre popular in the Middle Ages, the exemplum was used as means of Christianisation or to fight against heresy. For more information, see John Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 9.

⁶² Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2532.

⁶³ Joseph Kroger and Patrizia Granziera, *Aztec Goddesses and Christian Madonnas: Images of the Divine Feminine in Mexico* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 114.

being horrified at what he is doing, she caresses his face and hugs him (**Image 6.6**). However, the sequence hardly terminates on a positive note: the last shot shows a crying, guilt-ridden Marsilio contemplating a skull sewn onto a banner hanging on the wall, acting as a reminder of the gravity of his sins, and obviously, of death.

Curiously, there has been very little elaboration on this scene, one of the most audacious ever attempted in Italian cinema, not only for its juxtaposition of sex with the sacred—which, after all, is not completely foreign to Catholicism⁶⁴—but also for the implications that it carries. In fact, rather than an actual miracle—Marsilio, after all, is the only one who witnesses the statue coming to life—the sequence most likely belongs to the realm of the “oneiric” as understood by Brook.⁶⁵ If the whole sequence is Marsilio’s dream or a hallucination or figment of his imagination, the Virgin’s behaviour is also a product of his mind. While it is not uncommon for Italian Catholics to privilege their own “version” of Mary and the saints, to the point that “Catholics have tended to splinter the image of Mary to a range of personalities, each of which has become the object of an extensive cult [...] each of these Marys has her own iconography in her own set of prayers,”⁶⁶ Marsilio’s Mary is certainly unique. Compassionate, forgiving and even maternal, she does not berate the boy for what he is doing, nor judges him, but instead offers him comfort. Her attitude contrasts sharply with that of the priest’s macabre, in-depth description of the fate that awaits those who fall into temptation.

⁶⁴ For an account of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and sexuality, see Margherita Pelaja and Lucetta Scaraffia, *Due in una carne: Chiesa e sessualità nella storia* [*Two in One Body. Church and Sexuality in History*] (Rome: Laterza, 2008).

⁶⁵ In her study “The Oneiric in the Cinema of Marco Bellocchio,” Brook gives a rather broad definition of the term: “to encompass not only dream, but also imaginings, hallucinations, and events that stand at the borders between imagination and the supernatural.” For more information, see Clodagh J. Brook, “The Oneiric in the Cinema of Marco Bellocchio,” *Italica: Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Italian*. 84, nos. 2/3 (2007), 480.

⁶⁶ Michael Carroll, *Madonnas that Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 2.



Image 6.6 The Virgin comforting Marsilio

In her book *La Madonna*, Italian anthropologist Ida Magli considers the cultural construction of Mary and the psychological and emotional investment Italian men have made in her. She argues that, over the centuries, Popes, theologians, mystics, poets and artists have turned Mary into the expression of one of the greatest desires of Western culture: a woman who is both a virgin and a mother, who is the daughter of her son, who was conceived without sin and who does not know sexuality and who is an ardently desired bride but at the same time remains intangible. She is, in short, a woman who ultimately is the complete denial of female identity and reality.⁶⁷ It is no wonder then that, to Marsilio, she is both mother and trusted companion. The boy does not begin masturbating *because* of her—it is rather the thrill of doing so in the chapel, of transgressing the Catholic norm and of challenging the priest’s words. However, he also does not stop masturbating because of her. She does not inhibit him, nor does she censor him. Nevertheless, after consoling him, she returns to her place behind the altar, resuming her hieratic stance and leaving Marsilio prey to his guilt.

⁶⁷ Ida Magli, *La Madonna* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), inside front cover.

Peasant Superstitions: The Miraculous Pear Tree

Finally, another key critical target for Bellocchio is the superstitious beliefs embedded in the peasant world. During one of the few scenes set outside the school, Angelo and Franc, on their way to Franc's house for the holidays, drive past a field. In the field, a group of peasants is reciting the rosary, led by a young woman dressed in white. The girl, Lisetta, is said to be able to see and communicate with the Virgin Mary and is, as such, worshipped by the peasants (**Image 6.7**). As Franc explains to Angelo, such apparitions occur under a "miraculous pear tree" that blossoms in winter. Interestingly, such a privileged channel of communication is used by the girl not to deliver important information but rather to relate what she had for lunch. Encouraged by her parents, she tells the Virgin: "I ate pasta. Then steak with salad, then gorgonzola..."⁶⁸ The actions of the main characters throughout the scene are imbued with sarcasm and present a strong critique of such superstitious practices. In fact, Angelo and Franc's mode of transport is itself a symbol of progress and industrialisation, underscoring the separation between the bourgeois and peasant worlds. Further, throughout the sequence, the two remain in the car: they do not get out or roll down the window but rather limit themselves to critically observing the scene unfolding before their eyes. Moreover, the sarcastic tone is highlighted by the parents' insistence that their daughter describe every aspect meticulously, as if what she had for lunch was somehow of any importance at all. The comic effect is emphasised by both the parents' praise of such an extraordinary act and the girl's own zealotry in describing her lunch in such intricate detail.

⁶⁸ "Ho mangiato la pastasciutta, poi la bistecca con l'insalata, il gorgonzola..."



Image 6.7 Lisetta talking to the Virgin Mary, surrounded by her parents and other faithful

It is, however, in a later scene that the film's critical tone becomes especially clear. In this sequence, Angelo is now accompanied by Tino—the servant the priests had rescued from a mental hospital—as they once again drive past the field. This time, however, they get out of the car and proceed to cut down the tree. While they are busy at their task, Lisetta awakens and walks towards them. She does not protest, however; indeed, she says nothing. She and Angelo just stare at each other until the tree falls. “Everything that is anti-scientific must be eliminated!” says Angelo. “Now you're free!” he continues, “go work in a factory!”⁶⁹ He then turns and walks away, leaving her staring at the fallen tree, which here symbolises pre-industrial, peasant civilisation, soon to be left behind by the industrialisation and scientific progress incarnated by Angelo.⁷⁰ Similar to Pasolini's *Teorema*, *Nel nome del padre* critically reflects on the contrast between the modern, industrialised world and the rural world. However, Pasolini suggests a certain authenticity underlying the practices and beliefs of the peasants, which is completely lost on the bourgeoisie, whereas Bellocchio is highly critical of their naïve, superstitious attitude. Nevertheless, the film's criticism does not end there: Angelo's last words to the girl are highly significant, as they uncover another essential element. According to Angelo, now

⁶⁹ “Tutto ciò che è antiscientifico deve essere eliminato. Ora sei libera. Vai a lavorare in fabbrica.”

⁷⁰ When asked about this particular scene, Bellocchio explained how the tree constituted a pretext for illustrating Angelo's fanaticism and obsession with scientific progress. For more information, see Bellocchio and Zalaffi, “Interview with Marco Bellocchio,” 199.

that the pear tree has been cut down, Lisetta is “free.” Free, one could argue, means both from her role as an “intermediary” between the Virgin and the faithful as well as, most importantly, from the narrow-minded, superstitious mentality of her community. By suggesting that she “go work in a factory,” however, Angelo implies that she will never be free; there, in fact, she will have a new master; she will instead simply develop new beliefs—most likely political ones—that will prove as illusory as her previous ones. According to Angelo’s classist view, Lisetta is thus no different from the majority of his schoolmates, teachers or servants. Incapable of critical thinking, she will never overcome her subordinate status. Ultimately, she will merely swap one form of slavery for another.

Bellocchio employs here satiric elements to reflect critically on the contrast between the modern, industrialised world and the rural world. Far from being portrayed as the last post for those of genuine Catholic faith, the peasant world is depicted as a concentration of false, irrational beliefs. His radical condemnation is further highlighted by his implication of the impossibility of ever freeing oneself from the shackles of this uncritical disposition, even after having left the rural world behind.

6.3 Style

Nel nome del padre’s style aims to convey the atmosphere of repression that characterises the school. In this sense, the use of camera angles, colours, light, dialogue music and editing is particularly significant. The film proceeds at a rather slow pace, perfectly reflecting the monotony of life in the boarding school. Bellocchio is meticulous in his attention to detail, alternating long, almost exploratory shots with close-ups of the students, of their faces contracted in hysterical laughter or simply in boredom or the details of their uniforms. The underlying atmosphere of fear and oppression is often conveyed through the clever use of camera angles. For instance, the priests are often framed by using low-angle shots. Interestingly, Angelo is also often framed this way—and he is typically isolated in the scene, a visual nod towards his charisma as well as his individualism. As Bernardi rightly points out, the only scene shot with a hand-camera is the one that portrays the servants playing in the snow,⁷¹ as if the director wanted to enhance the spontaneity and freedom by using less stable shots.

⁷¹ Bernardi, *Marco Bellocchio*, 77.

Colour makes its first appearance in Bellocchio's cinema in *Nel nome del padre*. The colours used in the film are extremely vivid to the point of being almost "expressionistic."⁷² Bellocchio employs highly symbolic colours such as black, white and red. Black has negative associations in the film, as it is mostly linked with spiritual and physical death or images of doom—one only has to think of the priests' dresses or the dog costume. Conversely, white represents purity. For instance, the scene of the servants playing in the snow in the middle of the film portrays their fates and exploitation, if only briefly, completely forgotten. Further, the visionary peasant girl is dressed in a white tunic—certainly a visual nod to both her purity and naiveté. Finally, it is arguably the abundant use of red in the film that reveals the extent to which Bellocchio invested in symbolism. Apostolos-Cappadona explains that red is "the colour of passion, blood, and fire. An ambiguous symbol, red signified the emotional passion and lust of Venus, the spiritual love of John the Evangelist, and the true love of Mary."⁷³ Unsurprisingly, the eagle sewn on the school uniform is red, while red is the colour of Madonna's heart pierced by daggers as well as of the blood employed profusely during the school play.

As the film is almost entirely shot inside the school building, lighting comes to occupy a prominent role. An analysis of the screenplay reveals the constant presence of notes on the use of artificial light ("white light," "neon light") or candlelight.⁷⁴ Many scenes are shot in a state of darkness or semi-darkness. The school residents, especially the priests, often lurk in the shadows, watching without being seen, adding to the atmosphere of surveillance and repression as well as conveying a sense of fear and suspicion. Further, the use of hard light creates a *Chiaroscuro* effect, emphasising the shadows and creating a sense of depth and volume. Finally, the shadow of the school emblem, the eagle, is repeatedly cast on Angelo's face, thereby enhancing the association between the two, as well as on the classroom wall and on Franc's face, acting as a visual reminder of Angelo's influence on his peers.

⁷² In an interview, Bellocchio explained: "We worked in a very compact way, with very few colours. The end result was a lot like a colourful expressionist painting." For more information, see Marco Bellocchio, "The Surrealist movement had great influence on the way I direct movies," Festival de Cannes, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/theDailyArticle/57701.html>.

⁷³ Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art*, 288.

⁷⁴ Marco Bellocchio, *Nel nome del padre [In the Name of the Father]*, ed. Goffredo Fofi (Bologna: Cappelli, 1971), 39-136.

Dialogue is also employed abundantly throughout the film, especially in the form of monologue: from the priests' lectures and preaching to the expression of Angelo's and Franc's theories. In particular, the monologue in the film appears to serve to define the characters, their motivations and their objectives. Very little remains unsaid or is left to the imagination. Indeed, everything is explained, to either reflect Angelo's scientific and positivist nature or to express the Church's didactic attitude.

Moreover, music plays a major role by underscoring the film's mood, often reflecting the students' emotional state. Melancholic motifs alternate with highly repetitive, almost obsessive ones, once again highlighting the monotony of boarding school life. Calabrò observes, however, that the film also presents intense moments of asynchronism between music and images. The primary example is the scene in which the sober, black and white pictures of the funeral of Pope Pio XII broadcast on television are contrasted with the sound of a bouncing table tennis ball—the students are engaged in their game, oblivious to anything else.⁷⁵

6.4 Reception

Nel nome del padre was first presented at the New York Film Festival in the autumn of 1971, reportedly receiving an enthusiastic reaction from the audience.⁷⁶ However, in the aftermath of a review in *The New York Times*, Bellocchio decided to introduce some changes. He employed the help of producers Franco Cristaldi and Silvano Agosti, who suggested a series of cuts that ultimately resulted in a rather different version of the film.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, in Italy, the film immediately ran into trouble with the censorship board and was rated "VM18" ("unsuitable for children") owing to its themes and to certain sequences such as Marsilio's masturbation.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Calabrò, "La musica nel cinema di Marco Bellocchio," 44.

⁷⁶ "Caloroso il pubblico con Bellocchio" ["An Appreciative Audience for Bellocchio"], *L'Unità*, 14 October 1971, 7.

⁷⁷ For more information, Marco Bellocchio, "Marco Bellocchio sulla nuova versione di 'Nel nome del padre.'" In *Nel nome del padre* Pressbook, 7 July 2016, www.cinetecadibologna.it/files/stampa/...2011/Pressbook_Nel_nome_del_padre.pdf, 5.

⁷⁸ "Nel nome del padre," Italia Taglia, accessed 6 July 2016, <http://www.italiataglia.it>.

Further, the board of directors of the Ente autonomo gestione cinema,⁷⁹ the majority of which was composed of Christian Democrats, refused to let *Italnoleggio*⁸⁰ distribute the film alongside Marco Ferreri's *L'udienza* (*The Audience*, 1972), claiming that both these works "lacked sufficient cultural and artistic value."⁸¹

It has been argued that the hesitancy displayed by Italnoleggio in accepting the film was due especially to its relentless attack on religious institutions.⁸² In fact, *L'udienza* also deals with a rather sensitive topic, as it tells the story of a man desperately seeking, and constantly being denied, an audience with the Pope. The film exposed and was critical of the mechanisms regulating the religious body and the political corruption of the DC. Conversely, and rather inexplicably, the board did not object to the distribution of the most recent work of director Tinto Brass, *La vacanza* (*Vacation*, 1971),⁸³ which had also been forbidden to minors.⁸⁴ Eventually, the board's decision was revoked, and both films were finally allowed to be distributed.⁸⁵ Interestingly, *Nel nome del padre* was broadcast on state television as soon as 1972 (see Appendix II), but remained "VM18" until its DVD release in 2011.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ The Ente Autonomo Gestione Cinema was created in 1958 to manage the state shareholding in the cinema sector. For more information, see Marco Scollo Lavizzari, "Ente Autonomo Gestione Cinema," *Enciclopedia Treccani*, accessed 6 July 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/eagc_\(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/eagc_(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema)).

⁸⁰ The main task of Italnoleggio Cinematografico, created in 1965, was film distribution. For more information, see Sergio Toffetti, "Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico," *Enciclopedia del Cinema Treccani*, accessed 7 July 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ital-noleggio-cinematografico_\(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ital-noleggio-cinematografico_(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema)).

⁸¹ "Privi di sufficienti valori culturali e artistici." For more information, see M. Ar., "Bocciati agli esami degli enti di Stato" ["(They) Failed the Exams of the State Authorities"], *L'Unità*, 26 October 1971, 7.

⁸² Lino Micciché, *Cinema italiano: gli anni '60 e oltre* [*Italian Cinema. The 1960s and Beyond*] (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), 369.

⁸³ M. Ar., "Bocciati agli esami degli Enti di Stato," 7.

⁸⁴ "La vacanza," Italia Taglia, accessed 7 July 2016, <http://www.italiataglia.it/>.

⁸⁵ M. Ar., "Tolto il veto a Ferreri e Bellocchio" ["Lifted the Veto on Ferreri and Bellocchio"], *L'Unità*, 16 December 1971, 11.

⁸⁶ "Nel nome del padre," Italia Taglia.

In Italy, the film debuted in Venice at the counter-festival “Giornate del Cinema Italiano” (“Days of Italian Cinema”), organised by the associations of cinematographic authors.⁸⁷ Bellocchio insisted on joining the contestation, against the advice of Cristaldi,⁸⁸ which led to months of dispute between the two. The provocative quality already clearly embedded in the film was only accentuated by such a spectacular and controversial launch, as attested to by the reviews at the time, which concentrated heavily on the topic.⁸⁹ Comparatively few articles actually analysed the film *per se*. Most of them highlighted its expressionistic, even visionary quality of being able to convey its message in such a powerful way,⁹⁰ with Moravia describing it as Bellocchio’s “best film, the most motivated and important.”⁹¹ Reviewers also praised Bellocchio’s relentless and systematic effort in dismantling the basis of Italian society such as the family and, in this case, the school.⁹²

⁸⁷ The 1972 Venice Film Festival was a messy affair. The director of the exhibition, the powerful Catholic figure of Gian Luigi Rondi, was criticised by left-wing directors for embodying a reactionary system. Therefore, the Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici (National Association of Cinematographic Authors), known as ANAC, and the Associazione Autori Cinematografici (Association Cinematographic Authors), known as AACI, organised a counter-festival called the “Giornate del Cinema Italiano.” One of the main motives of discontent among directors was the law regarding the film’s copyright. Dating back to Fascism, the Legge n. 633 of 22 April 1941 established that “The exercise of the rights of economic use of the cinematographic work belongs to whom has organised the production of said work, within the limits indicated by the following articles” (“L’esercizio dei diritti di utilizzazione economica dell’opera cinematografica spetta a chi ha organizzato la produzione dell’opera stessa, nei limiti indicati dai successivi articoli”). For more information, see Guglielmo Biraghi, “Cristaldi: porterò Bellocchio davanti ai giudici” [“Cristaldi: I Will Bring Bellocchio Before the Judges”], *Il Messaggero*, 30 August 1972, 12; Alfonso Mandelli, “Bellocchio sfida il produttore e inaugura l’antifestival” [“Bellocchio Challenges His Producer and Opens the Anti-Festival”], *Corriere della Sera*, 29 August 1972, 13.

⁸⁸ Bellocchio clarified the motives behind his decision in a statement circulated on opening night. The document reads: “Together with the authors of AACI and ANAC, who share the responsibility and the significance of the choice that I made, I present *Nel nome del padre* at the festival Giornate del Cinema Italiano. (The film is) today available to AACI and ANAC, which challenge the restrictive interpretation of the Fascist law of 1941 on copyright, which considers the producer the sole owner of the film. (I) do so in the belief that such a choice does not damage the prestige of the film and its chances of distribution, but rather that it facilitates its circulation for a more qualified and larger audience. Thanks to Marco Ferreri for giving my film the opening night” [“Insieme agli autori dell’AACI e dell’ANAC che condividono la responsabilità e il significato della scelta da me compiuta presento nella rassegna Giornate del Cinema Italiano il mio *In nome del padre* oggi nella materiale disponibilità dell’AACI e dell’ANAC le quali contestano l’interpretazione restrittiva della legge fascista del 1941 sul diritto d’autore che considera il produttore l’unico proprietario del film. Ciò nella convinzione che una tale scelta non danneggia il prestigio del film e le sue possibilità di divulgazione, ma anzi che ne facilita la diffusione per un pubblico più qualificato e insieme più vasto. Ringrazio Marco Ferreri per aver voluto concedere al mio film la serata inaugurale.”] For more information, see Mandelli, “Bellocchio sfida il produttore,” 13.

⁸⁹ See, for example, “Cristaldi annuncia il ricorso al magistrato” [“Cristaldi Announces His Appeal to the Judge”], *Il Tempo*, 30 August 1972, 8; “Bellocchio chiede a Cristaldi il rispetto degli impegni contrattuali” [“Bellocchio Asks Cristaldi for Compliance with the Contract Commitments”], *Il Messaggero*, 31 August 1972, 10; “Bellocchio rischia tre anni di carcere” [“Bellocchio May Face Three Years of Prison”], *Corriere della Sera*, 30 August 1972, 13; Ivo Livi, “Le ‘Giornate del cinema’ aperte in un clima festoso” [“The ‘Days of Cinema’ Opened in a Festive Atmosphere”], *L’Unità*, 29 August 1972, 7; L. T. [Lietta Tornabuoni], “Il produttore Cristaldi denuncerà Bellocchio” [“Producer Cristaldi Will Denounce Bellocchio”], *La Stampa*, 30 August 1972, 7.

⁹⁰ Giovanni Grazzini, “Nel nome del padre” [“In the Name of the Father,”] *Corriere della Sera*, 9 September 1972, 12; Leo Pestelli, “Nel collegio di Bellocchio” [“In Bellocchio’s Boarding School”], *La Stampa*, 13 September 1972, 7.

⁹¹ Alberto Moravia, “Un cadavere su e giù per il collegio” [“A Corpse Up and Down the School”], *L’Espresso*, September 1972, 23.

⁹² Grazzini, “Nel nome del padre,” 12; Pestelli, “Nel collegio di Bellocchio,” 7; Aurora Santuari, “Nascono in collegio i vizi della società” [“The Vices of Society Are Born in School”], *Paese Sera*, 16 September 1972, 17; Aggeo Savoli, “Ribellione in collegio” [“Rebellion in the Boarding School”], *L’Unità*, September 16, 1972, 11.

Not all the reviews were positive, however. One of the most common criticisms of the film was its overreliance on allegories and symbols, making it rather contrived, or according to an article in *Il Tempo* “mannerist” and “gratuitous.”⁹³ Further, critics underscored the film’s preceptive, even preachy quality. The characters, some of them argued, had been reduced to “types,” to mere personifications of ideological orientations and principles.⁹⁴ Other detractors underscored how the film’s many themes resulted in a confused and rushed product.⁹⁵

As far as the Catholic reception of the film went, a scathing review appeared in *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, from which we can certainly gauge the Catholic reaction:

Conscious that the matter in dispute offered precarious foundation to his furious invective, Bellocchio had the illusion of making up for it by indulging in the amplification, in the grotesque and terrifying deformation, in the invention of an absurd and non-existent boarding school, at least among those of Catholic mark. He has done worse, if possible, by generalising and radicalising as if all Catholic boarding schools were of that mould and were like that precisely because Catholic. [...] From the stark realism of the first film, the director has moved to an allegorical-symbolic expressionism, easily referable to pictorial-architectural, theatrical and cinematographical precedents. [What] remains is the rage of an author who has not achieved, or has lost, the domain of the subject matter and does not hide a chilling contempt even for those he presents as victims of the situations denounced.⁹⁶

⁹³ E. Jatt. [Emidio Jattarelli], “Nel nome del padre” [“In the Name of the Father”], *Il Tempo*, 16 September 1972, 12.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Bernardi, *Marco Bellocchio*, 82; Nuccio Lodato, *Marco Bellocchio* (Milan: Miozzi Contemporanea, 1977), 31–32.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Aprà, “Tormenti, estasi, rigenerazioni,” 12–13. Indeed, Bellocchio recognised the film’s shortcomings. He explained that the abundance of “words, concepts [and] messages” in the film was a result of his desire to mitigate the disappointment for the failure of the protests of the 1960s. In such a pessimistic atmosphere, he felt compelled to display a profusion of symbols, exhibit a large number of characters and explore a plethora of themes, ultimately endowing the film with many potential meanings. Interestingly, during the award ceremony for the 68th Venice Film Festival in 2011, in which he received the Career Golden Lion, Bellocchio presented a much shorter version of the film: 90 minutes as opposed to the original 105 minutes. For more information, see the *Nel nome del Padre Press book*, 5.

⁹⁶ “Conscio che la materia del contendere offriva precario fondamento alla sua furibonda invettiva, Bellocchio s’è illuso di sopperirvi abbandonandosi all’amplificazione, alla deformazione grottesca e terrificante, all’invenzione di un collegio assurdo e inesistente, tra quelli almeno di segno cattolico. Ha fatto di peggio, se possibile, generalizzando e radicalizzando come se tutti i collegi cattolici fossero di quello stampo e tutti, appunto, perché cattolici. [...] Dal crudo realismo del primo film, il regista è passato ad un espressionismo allegorico-simbolico facilmente riferibile a precedenti pittorico-architettonici, teatrali e cinematografici. Rimane la rabbia di un autore che non ha raggiunto, o ha perduto, il dominio del materiale utilizzato e non nasconde un raggelante disprezzo per coloro stessi che presenta quali vittime delle situazioni denunciate.” For more information, see Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche. Volume LXXIV - 1973* (Rome: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico), 31.

This opinion is echoed by Bolzoni in *Avvenire*.⁹⁷ For his part, when asked about the reaction of the Catholic hierarchy, Bellocchio observed that the Church was able to turn a scathing and angry attack on the religious institution of the boarding school and the conservative, bigoted and hypocritical type of Catholicism it represented into something innocuous that belonged to the past. He stated:

As always, the Church has this extraordinary capacity for taking over and adapting everything to its own ends. The use of metaphor and the past tense allowed it to put everything down to the fact that one pontificate was ending, and so to religious politics that were out of date. There is something Machiavellian about the way they reacted—like the school principal in the film, when at the end of the boys' play instead of accepting the provocation he decides to absorb the scandal by applauding.⁹⁸

This particular attitude is certainly ascribable to a more general behaviour repeatedly exhibited by the Catholic Church through the centuries. As MacCulloch notes, “The history of Christianity is full of things casually or deliberately forgotten, or left unsaid, in order to shape the future of a Church or Churches.”⁹⁹ Mindful of what had happened in the case of Pasolini’s *Teorema*—with the most progressive fringe of the Catholic Church recognising the relevance of the themes addressed in the film—the Catholic world seems to have been able to nullify the demystifying impact of Bellocchio’s film by pointing out that that the kind of Catholicism criticised in the film belonged to the past. For his part, the director never stopped emphasising the film’s timeliness. Indeed, Bellocchio decided to screen a different, shorter version of *Nel nome del padre* when he was presented with the Career Golden Lion award in Venice in 2011. As the director himself explained, the decision to re-edit the work and present it in Venice was spurred by the belief that the film had yet to find its “final shape,”¹⁰⁰ as well as by the awareness that the subject matter of *Nel nome del padre* was still as relevant in 2011 as it was when it was first released.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ See, for example, Francesco Bolzoni, “L’ambiguo Bellocchio” [“The Ambiguous Bellocchio”], *Avvenire*, 30 September 1972, 6.

⁹⁸ Bellocchio and Zalaffi, “Interview with Marco Bellocchio,” 199.

⁹⁹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (New York: Viking, 2013), 191.

¹⁰⁰ “la sua forma definitiva.” For more information, see Bellocchio, “Marco Bellocchio sulla nuova versione di ‘Nel nome del padre,’” 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Oozing anger and anticlericalism, *Nel nome del padre* offers a harsh critique of the Catholic Church as an institution that embodies repressive power and heavily limits people's freedom and self-determination. However, the Church is but one of the film's objects of criticism; in fact, in tune with the rebellious spirit of its time, *Nel nome del padre* reveals its polemic charge by targeting a number of issues such as the inconsistency of the motives behind the students' revolt, the anachronism of Catholic teachings, the morally dubious conduct of the priests, the superstitious nature of popular Catholicism in Italy and the perils of an authoritarian and uncompromising attitude, as expressed by Angelo. Verbose to the point of preachy, the film nevertheless delivers one of the most powerful and imaginative attacks on institutional religion and on the implications of its undisputed ideological dominance. Unsurprisingly, these features failed to impress Catholic audiences, whereas critics from *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa* and *L'Espresso* praised its uncompromising spirit and imaginative style.

What emerges from the film is Bellocchio's extremely critical attitude towards Italian Catholicism—undoubtedly highly influenced both by his upbringing in a traditionally Catholic, conservative bourgeois family and by his experience as a student in strict Catholic schools.¹⁰² It would be reductive, however, to ascribe Bellocchio's dislike for the Catholic Church to a mere boyhood grudge. The exploration of religious themes, both in the foreground and in the background, has been a constant throughout his work. As Brook puts it, "What is intriguing about Bellocchio's films is not so much their manifest attack on Catholicism across five decades of filmmaking but—reading against the surface of the films—the peculiar and continuing lure of the church."¹⁰³ Brook also points out that Bellocchio's cinema constantly oscillates between opposite poles of private and public, political and personal.¹⁰⁴ In this framework, the questions of personal freedom and self-determination occupy a prominent place. Clearly, the Catholic Church's hegemonic presence within Italy, even more salient during Bellocchio's formative years, and its unrelenting efforts to oversee not only the spiritual, but also frequently the cultural and political life of the population, constituted, for the director, unbearable interference.

¹⁰² Bellocchio, *Nel nome del padre*, 31.

¹⁰³ Clodagh J. Brook, "The Spectacle of the Unseen: Marco Bellocchio and Lure of the Catholic Church," *Italian Studies* 68, no. 3 (2013), 399.

¹⁰⁴ Brook, *Marco Bellocchio*, 29.

This critical disposition, however, did not prevent Bellocchio from employing a vast repertoire of Catholic themes and symbols, not unlike Pasolini. While desecrating family, social and religious rituals, Bellocchio also invents new ones.¹⁰⁵ Fantuzzi maintains that the tension of sacrality and desecration in Bellocchio's work relies on what he calls "a double negation," explaining that the director's "irreverent gesture" aims, first, to reveal the hypocrisy and emptiness hidden behind certain rituals. In this sense, the operation is an "act of [the] denunciation" of the lack of authenticity. However, Fantuzzi senses a deeper meaning underlying Bellocchio's practice, namely an expression of regret for the loss of true values.¹⁰⁶

While this critical perspective has its merits, I find it to be more applicable to Pasolini than to Bellocchio. While it is true that Bellocchio's cinematic choices constitute an "act of denunciation," I do not believe that it is the director's intent to express longing for a more spiritually authentic dimension. If Pasolini, at least during the pontificate of Giovanni XXIII, advocates a stronger commitment on the part of the Catholic hierarchy in relation to social matters, Bellocchio considers any form of action by the institutional Church as constituting strong interference. Further, unlike Pasolini, Bellocchio does not believe that any stratum of society, be it the peasant world so dear to Pasolini, the bourgeoisie or the Catholic hierarchy, holds a moral and spiritual supremacy by fostering genuine values. For Bellocchio, no good can come from an uncritical adhesion to Catholicism. Therefore, his use of Catholic themes does not solve the need to find a purer, more genuine dimension to counter the current loss of values, nor does it express regret or nostalgia. Rather, it serves to pinpoint the ubiquitous presence of the institutional Church and shows the results of its incessant interference in the daily lives of the Italian populace.

The final chapter of this thesis analyses Zeffirelli's *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972). Released in Italy in the same year, the two films offer two completely opposite views of Italian Catholicism. Far from subscribing to Bellocchio's critical approach, Zeffirelli's film is perfectly compliant to Catholic guidelines and offers an extremely orthodox, even saccharine, portrait of the Catholic Church.

¹⁰⁵ Virgilio Fantuzzi, "Marco Bellocchio: tra sacrality e dissacrazione" ["Marco Bellocchio: Between Sacrality and Desecration"], in *Marco Bellocchio: il cinema e i film* [*Marco Bellocchio: His cinema and Films*], ed. Adriano Aprà (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), 70–91.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

Chapter 7 Zeffirelli's *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972)

Having offered another example of the splintered nature of Italian Catholicism through the analysis of *Nel nome del padre* in the previous chapter, I now explore Zeffirelli's *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972).¹ Born out of Zeffirelli's desire to celebrate the figure of the Umbrian saint in the aftermath of a vow, the film reflects the director's deep gratitude and admiration. It retraces the most important steps in the life of St. Francesco d'Assisi, including his conversion, the foundation of a new monastic order and the order's approval by Pope Innocenzo III. Focusing specifically on the saint's formative years and highlighting Francesco's generous and compassionate disposition as well as his cheerful spirit, the film offers a rather unproblematic account of the life of Italy's most beloved saint as well as his relationship with the institutional Church.

The celebratory, triumphal quality of *Fratello sole, sorella luna* is evident from the film's narrative and style, notably Zeffirelli's decision to limit the film to Francesco's youth as well as his characterisation of the saint. Indeed, not unlike in the case of Olmi's *Giovanni XXIII* (Chapter Three), Zeffirelli's protagonist is the ultimate Christ-like figure. To the essentially Christic attributes such as self-abnegation, generosity and solidarity with the poor, the director adds almost childlike enthusiasm as well as a docility that neither Jesus nor the historical Francesco displayed. Similarly, the film's luscious settings, the extremely curated composition, the casting of young, beautiful actors in the roles of Francesco and Chiara and the slow rhythm further enhance the romanticised, unproblematic take on Francesco's story. By focusing on these elements, this chapter seeks to highlight Zeffirelli's profound Catholicity as well as his view of Catholicism as a victorious, glorious religion.

As with the previous chapters, this last chapter is organised into four parts. The first section focuses on the cultural and religious context surrounding *Fratello sole, sorella luna*. It provides an insight into the extraordinary circumstances that prompted Zeffirelli to dedicate a film to Italy's most beloved saint and explores the relevance of Francesco's

¹ This analysis is based on the Italian version of the film. There are a number of significant differences between the Italian version and the international one. The latter, which is eight minutes shorter, begins with Francesco's return from the war. All the events preceding his return are narrated through flashbacks during his sickness. The editing of those first sequences also differs considerably from one version to the next. For more information, see *Fratello sole, sorella luna*, directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1972; Italy: Rai Cinema - 01 Distribution, 2014), DVD.

story to 1970s Italy. The second section assesses the film's narrative, while the third analyses how the film's style further contributes to creating an orthodox, essentially compliant portrait of Francesco. Finally, the fourth section focuses on the film's reception, with particular attention paid to the Catholic response. Overall, the chapter, by analysing the film's treatment of the subject matter as well as by delving into its reception, provides another insight into the splintered nature of Catholicism in Italy.

7.1 Cultural and Religious Context

It is admittedly rather difficult to establish a direct correlation between *Fratello sole, sorella luna* and the predominant atmosphere characterising the early 1970s in Italy. Those years presented a number of challenges from a political, economic and social point of view,² making it particularly hard to situate the film in such a context. If anything, the youthful, passionate enthusiasm that pervades *Fratello sole, sorella luna* seems to be more reminiscent of the 1960s North-American hippie culture, as acknowledged—and in many cases, lamented—by critics.³ Zeffirelli himself recognised this feature; in his autobiography, he admitted that,

Watching the various scenes cut together, I realized just how the film was rooted in the 1960s; yet, now that the 1970s were unfolding it was clear that a massive change had taken place. Young people were no longer espousing peace and love; they were out on the streets protesting against the Vietnam War, throwing bricks, burning draft cards and fighting with the police. Since the events in Paris in 1968, a creeping mood of anger and violence had spread through our major cities. Brother Sun began to look almost naïve in the face of such cynicism.⁴

² As outlined in the previous chapter, the social unrest that characterised the late 1960s had not ceased with the closing of the decade, but rather merged with the other motives of discontent, giving way to new, more radical forms of protests. A number of factors had concurred to create this situation. First, in spite of the almost mythical halo surrounding the protests of 1968, there was increasing frustration with the social and political status quo. Indeed, 1968 had not had any significant consequences on the electoral level, as the wins of 1968, 1972 and 1976 allowed the Christian Democrats to maintain their primacy throughout the decade. In addition, the DC leader, Aldo Moro, was attempting a process known as *Compromesso storico* (*Historic Compromise*), which entailed enlisting the participation of the PCI in the government. This tentative accommodation between the two major political parties in Italy was seen by more liberal forces as a major step forward in terms of political collaboration and cooperation. On the other hand, however, this proposal was met with hostility both by more conservative powers and by political extremists and terrorist fringes. Finally, the existing discord was worsened by the international economic crisis, which peaked between 1973 and 1975 as a result of the increase in oil prices. While the crisis had a huge impact on all capitalist countries, it influenced the outcome of these protests especially heavily in Italy; the worker and student militancy often took radical forms, with their protest actions frequently degenerating into violence and, in some instances, even into terrorism. See Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 354–356

³ See, for example, Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film* (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 212; Tom Milne, "Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 40, no. 471 (1973): 76; Aldo Scagnetti, "Fratello sole," *Paese Sera*, 30 March 1972, 17.

⁴ Franco Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 256–257.

I would, however, argue that if *Fratello sole, sorella luna* is indeed a “naïve” film, it is less because of a change in atmosphere from the 1960s to the 1970s than the particular circumstances surrounding its inception. In his autobiography, the director related how, in the aftermath of a near-fatal car accident in 1969, he vowed to dedicate a film to Francesco if the saint healed him.⁵ Similar practices are certainly not uncommon within Catholicism. As Carroll explains,

An *ex voto* is an object that has been brought to a church, usually a sanctuary, as the result of a vow. In the usual case, a person brings an *ex voto* to a sanctuary after having been saved from some danger by a saint or a Madonna. An *ex voto*, in other words, is not meant to solicit a favor but rather to testify the largesse and power of the saint or Madonna in question. As such, it must be publicly displayed.⁶

As Zeffirelli recuperated, his devotion and resolution only grew stronger, and he was determined to make good on his oath. The rest of his convalescence, first in Rome and then in London, was marked by a similarly mystical aura, as he recalled having visions of his deceased aunt as well as being visited by a stranger dressed in priest’s clothes.⁷ Further, during his stay in a London hospital, he would ask the chaplain, Father Callaghan, to sit with him and read passages from the Scriptures. In particular, Zeffirelli was adamant that the priest read the *Sermon on the Mount*,⁸ a passage whose spirit is found in the writings of the historical Francesco⁹ and as such liberally quoted in *Fratello sole, sorella luna*. As preposterous as this testimony may sound, it is of vital importance not only to understand the fabric of Zeffirelli’s Catholicism, but also to explain, at least partially, why the film has such a celebratory, triumphant quality about it.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the unique circumstances characterising the idea behind the film, it is still possible to establish a correlation between the film and the events taking place in Italy at the time. Indeed, to the young students and workers challenging the status quo, many aspects of Francesco’s preaching felt relevant and timely, even in Zeffirelli’s saccharine interpretation. In particular, it was the saint’s dislike for power and authority,

⁵ Orazio La Rocca, “Zeffirelli rivela: ‘Farò il sequel del film su San Francesco’” [“Zeffirelli Reveals: ‘I Will Make a Sequel of the Film about Saint Francis’”], *La Repubblica*, 19 December 2007, accessed 4 September 2016, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/12/19/zeffirelli-rivela-faro-il-sequel-del-film.html?ref=search>.

⁶ Michael Carroll, *Madonnas That Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 82.

⁷ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 233–235.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁹ Michael Robson, *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 133.

the strong focus on solidarity and equality, the use of music to communicate his message as well as, even if to a lesser degree, the attention and love for the environment and the non-violent quality of his message that appealed to the members of the protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

One of the most beloved saints in Italy—Pope Pio XII proclaimed Francesco patron of the country together with Caterina da Siena in 1939¹⁰—Francesco d’Assisi “is arguably the most attractive saint that the Catholic Church has ever produced.”¹¹ An incredibly complex and charismatic figure, he has long fascinated Catholics and non-Catholics alike and, as such, his moral legacy has often been instrumentalised and manipulated beyond his intentions. In relation to this, Sorrell comments, “Francis’ opinions have been the source of tremendous controversy and an equally great amount of misinterpretation and distortion. He has been seen as a pantheist, a Protestant, a devout Catholic, a Catholic liberationist, and a heretic who miraculously escaped the stake.”¹² While the extent of Francesco’s radicalism has long been debated, and often either down- or overplayed, his aversion to social power and hierarchies is undeniable.¹³ This disposition strongly resonated with the students’ rejection of authority as well as their contestation of the structures of representation and institutional powers.¹⁴ A special place in this contestation was occupied by the family, which became the first and most frequent target for being “a strategically decisive place for the perpetuation of the cultural paralysis and social subordination.”¹⁵ It is therefore not surprising that the saint’s refusal to conform to the expectations of his family and society, his repudiation of the dominant values of the time and his disavowal of the burgeoning middle-class ideology incarnated by his father, the wealthy merchant Pietro di Bernardone, struck a chord with the students. In addition, Francesco’s marked anti-individualism and the focus on egalitarianism and solidarity were also sources of fascination for the young people engaged in promoting a more democratic

¹⁰ Pio XII, “Breve Pontificio con il quale il Santo Padre proclama San Francesco d’Assisi e Santa Caterina da Siena Patroni Primari d’Italia,” Vatican website, 28 June 1939, accessed 2 February 2016, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/briefs/documents/hf_p-xii_brief_19390618_patroni-italia.html.

¹¹ Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches. St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

¹² Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.

¹³ Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, trans. Christine Rhone, (London: Routledge, 2004), 90–91.

¹⁴ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 342.

¹⁵ “luogo strategicamente decisivo per la perpetuazione dell’immobilismo culturale e della subalternità sociale.” For more information, see Giovanni De Luna, *Le ragioni di un decennio: 1969-1979, Militanza, Violenza, Sconfitta, Memoria [The Reasons of a Decade: 1969-1979, Militancy, Violence, Defeat, Memory]* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2009), ebook edition, 180.

society. As Le Goff explains, “The social idea to which Francis aspired was levelling, maximum equality at the humblest level.”¹⁶ A similar drive was behind the students’ fight to reform an extremely flawed and class-biased educational system¹⁷ as well as their support to the workers’ cause and their battle to reclaim new economic and regulatory employment conditions.

In addition, a characteristic that *Fratello sole, sorella luna* shares with the protest movement of the 1970s is the exaltation of the concept of “youth.” The film indeed focuses on the saint’s formative years, following him from the ages of twenty-two to twenty-nine. Similarly, Francesco’s passion and almost childlike enthusiasm are among his most prominent qualities. However, while the quality of youth is an entirely unproblematic notion in the film, this was not so for the movement of the early 1970s. In relation to this, Lumley observes,

The novelty of the new movements sprang from the assertion of a “youth identity”, which had been repressed or displaced in the student and worker politics of the late sixties and the seventies. That identity was not perceived exclusively in terms of a youth experience or situation; rather, it was taken to be emblematic of a situation typical of the modern metropolis. Youth was made to signify exclusion, marginality, and deviance.¹⁸

Another key trait of Francesco’s preaching was the non-violent nature of his message. While the values promoted by the saint could be considered to be progressive and even revolutionary in the context of thirteenth-century Italy, they were certainly not violent. Quite the contrary, in fact. According to Le Goff, Francesco’s emphasis on the values of obedience and submission made him somewhat a precursor of the non-violent movement. In the words of the historian: “It was through the subversive, shocking and revolutionary nature of this voluntary submission that Francis and his own hoped to transform society.”¹⁹ While the actions of the Italian student movement were occasionally radical, increasingly so after 1968,²⁰ pacifist values were circulating in the country thanks to the

¹⁶ Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 91.

¹⁷ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 298–300.

¹⁸ Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 296.

¹⁹ Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 92.

²⁰ According to Ginsborg, it is possible to identify two different strands within the youth movement of the 1970s: a more “spontaneous” fringe and a more “militarist” core. While the former was essentially pacifist, creative and sensitive to the notions of equality and solidarity as well as to the issues raised by feminism, the latter was characterised by an autonomist and somewhat militarist quality, reconnecting with and further emphasising the underlying culture of violence. While the fringe essentially sought to offer an alternative to the status quo without necessarily engaging in forms of open confrontation, the core was openly belligerent, as was evident in the modus operandi of revolutionary

activity of figures such as Aldo Capitini, Danilo Dolci and Pietro Pinna. In particular, Capitini, considered to be “the father of non-violence in Italy,”²¹ promoted a number of initiatives until his death in 1968. In 1961, he organised the first peace march from his birth town of Perugia to Francesco’s Assisi, a biannual event that became an Italian tradition and is still the most important peace gathering in the country.²² Together with Pinna, he also created the monthly review *Azione Nonviolenta* and the *Movimento Nonviolento*, still active today.

Moreover, what felt current at the time of the film’s release was also Francesco’s ecological sensitivity. Indeed, the Italian saint was pivotal in foregrounding a new attitude towards the environment. His most famous work, the *Canticle of the Creatures* or *Canticle of the Sun*—a song in which he praises God for His creations and refers to the natural elements as “brothers” and “sisters”—certainly attests to that. Zeffirelli strongly highlights this characteristic in the film, bringing it out in the saint’s admiration and deep respect towards nature. Such a disposition was also becoming common in Italy, albeit late compared with other countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Indeed, at the time of the release of the environmentalism manifesto, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which had appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1962,²³ ecology was still mostly considered to be “a middle class science [...] a diversion for members of the nobility, who were insensitive to messages being promoted by blue-collar workers and radical students”²⁴ in Italy.

(cont’d)

groups such as *Autonomia Operaia* and *Potere Operaio*. The ultra-left terrorism was responsible for numerous kidnappings, shootings and even murders between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s. The assassination of Chief of Police Luigi Calabresi by militants of Lotta Continua in 1972, the abduction and murder of DC leader Aldo Moro in 1978 and the kidnapping in 1981 and subsequent release in 1982 of NATO General James Lee Dozier are among the most prominent examples. For more information on the youth movement as well as left-wing terrorism in Italy, see Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 382; Donatella della Porta, “Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy,” in *Terrorism in Context*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 105–159; Marco Briziarelli, *The Red Brigades and the Discourse of Violence: Revolution and Restoration* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

²¹ Antonino Drago, “Peace Profile: Aldo Capitini,” *Peace Review* 26, no. 3 (2014): 437.

²² *Ibid.*, 438.

²³ Joni Seager, *Carson’s Silent Spring: A Reader’s Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 9.

²⁴ Marco Armiero and Marcus Hall, “Il Bel Paese. An Introduction,” in *Nature and History in Modern Italy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), eds. Marco Armiero and Marcus Hall, 4.

Over the next few years, however, there was growing interest in the topic, especially in left-wing circles.²⁵ In particular, a key role in fostering environmental values was played by biologist and member of the Communist Party, Laura Conti, who heralded a slow but steady change in attitude towards ecology.²⁶

Finally, a parallel can be traced between the function of music in the 1960s and that at the time of Francesco's life. Zeffirelli was certainly conscious of this, and stated:

How close it all seemed to what we felt in the 1960s—that the young would create a new world order based on love and gentleness after those fearful Cold War years. And how similar it seemed musically, with rock music being played in churches and the Jesus people singing in the streets. That was what I wanted to bring together: something that would unite the love-songs of Provence with the music of our day.²⁷

As attested to by early biographers, music was a constant presence in the life of Francesco.²⁸ If before his conversion music was another channel through which he expressed his worldliness and wanton behaviour,²⁹ after his spiritual awakening it became the privileged form of communicating his spiritual joy.³⁰ The saint would often sing his praises to the Lord in French,³¹ and referred his friars as “joculatores Domini,”³² that is, “the Lord’s jongleurs” or “the Lord’s minstrels.” He often resorted to the use of songs in his preaching³³—even his most famous work, the *Canticle*, was exactly that. Similarly, a key role was played by music in the lives of the young people of the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Giorgio Nebbia, “Un amore per la vita. Il Fondo Laura Conti,” *Altrionovecento*, 8 January 2004, accessed 25 January 2016, http://www.fondazionemicheletti.it/altrionovecento/articolo.aspx?id_articolo=8&tipo_articolo=d_saggi&id=179.

²⁷ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 253.

²⁸ Peter Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 18.

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ Ibid., 29.

³¹ Michael Robson, *St. Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), 228.

³² Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*, 31.

³³ Ibid., 17.

To them, pop and rock music represented a clean break from tradition, a way with which to set themselves apart from older generations.³⁴ Not only had music become something subversive,³⁵ but it “could also contribute to the shaping of society.”³⁶

Zeffirelli was so convinced of the pivotal role of music in Francesco’s story that he first thought of the film as a musical set in London, with the Beatles as protagonists,³⁷ as they stood for “the generation of peace in love, the gentle era of flower power.”³⁸ The director was enthusiastic about the prospect, which he defined as “an extraordinary idea, a crazy ensemble of characters and events for a film that could have been unforgettable, and foreshadowed the youthful unrest that characterized the late 1960s and 1970s.”³⁹ Despite the Beatles’ attested interest in the project, however, their involvement ultimately did not work out due to their many other engagements.⁴⁰ While this concept now sounds tremendously eccentric, one should not forget that Norman Jewison’s *Jesus Christ Superstar* and David Greene’s *Godspell* were released just a year after *Fratello sole, sorella luna*. It therefore seems that had Zeffirelli’s project gone ahead, it would have tapped into a contemporary taste for a blend of religious elements and popular music.⁴¹

Although his original idea of involving the Beatles was ultimately unsuccessful, Zeffirelli still dedicated meticulous attention to the role of music in the film. It was his desire to create a soundtrack that reflected the importance of medieval music by inserting *laudae* and Gregorian chants as well as resonated with the 1960s spirit.⁴² He approached Scottish folksinger Donovan, who subsequently created “an inspired combination of old and new music,”⁴³ thereby meeting the director’s requests.

³⁴ Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 110.

³⁵ Detlef Siegfried, “Music and Protest in 1960s Europe,” in *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*, eds. Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 57.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Caterina Napoleone, ed. *Franco Zeffirelli: Complete Works - Theatre, Opera, Film* (New York: Abrams, 2010), 54.

³⁸ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 239.

³⁹ Napoleone, *Franco Zeffirelli*, 54–55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Interestingly, Cavani conceived a musical in which Jesus was a black man from Alabama. However, the project was abandoned. The script is stored in the Historical Archives of the “Fondo Liliana Cavani” in Carpi. For more information, see Liliana Cavani, “Soggetto per Black Jesus,” ASCC, FLC, Materiale Relativo a Galileo, Schedatura “Gesù Negro 1966. Il progetto—documentazione,” doc. N. 3.

⁴² Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 253.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 254.

However, the songs—which, in the Italian version, were sung by Claudio Baglioni—also contributed tremendously to the film’s saccharine quality. As Haines points out:

Already by 1971, when Zeffirelli picked him, Donovan’s folk-rock style was out of date. And when, two years later, film critics sunk their teeth in the director’s soul-baring opus, the folk-rock of the mid-sixties had moved from on from acid rock to hard and progressive rock. The sweet and flower-power songs of the mid-sixties were now a distant memory.⁴⁴

Overall, while *Fratello sole, sorella luna*’s inception must be understood in relation to the unique circumstances of the director’s car accident and subsequent vow to the saint, Zeffirelli’s tale still presents significant links to the cultural and religious context of early 1970s Italy.

7.2 Narrative

Zeffirelli uses specific narrative choices to highlight two aspects of Francesco’s personality and preaching, namely his orthodoxy and his cheerful disposition. First, the director draws constant analogies between the saint and Jesus by focusing on one of the key elements of Jesus’s preaching, namely poverty, and downplaying the more radical quality of the saint’s message. Second, he limits the story to Francesco’s youth, thereby avoiding the depiction of the most trying events in the saint’s life. Further, the film’s insistence on Francesco’s *laetitia* (“joy”) and indiscriminate love for all God’s creatures also contributes to creating a feeling of gaiety and light-heartedness.

Plot and Structure

The film begins in 1203/1204, as Francesco (Graham Faulkner) prepares to leave for the war between Assisi and Perugia,⁴⁵ and ends, rather conveniently, with the papal approval of the Franciscan order in 1209. For instance, we do not witness Francesco’s long taxing trips to Egypt and Palestine on occasion of the fifth crusade, nor him receiving the stigmata, nor his suffering due to an eye illness.

⁴⁴ John Haines, *Music in Films on the Middle Ages: Authenticity vs. Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 117.

⁴⁵ The war between Assisi and Perugia lasted for several years, roughly from 1202 to 1209. According to sources, Francesco was captured in 1202 and imprisoned for a year or more. For more information, see Augustine Thompson, *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 9–10. Interestingly, Zeffirelli chose not to portray the war between Perugia and Assisi and only referred to the saint’s imprisonment by showing Francesco’s white horse wandering in a dark and misty forest.

However, it is not that Zeffirelli was unaware of the challenging nature of Francesco's later life. In fact, in his autobiography, he stated:

Although in the early part of this life, the part covered by our film, he promulgated the simple, holy life in tune with nature, his later years revealed a more complex, denser character. In old age he became a rather tortured mystic, uncompromising and tetchy. He passed into a realm of meditation and otherworldliness that after made him harsh and approachable.⁴⁶

The main narrative is preceded by a short but significant prologue, which serves the dual purpose of introducing the main characters and giving the audience a scale against which to measure Francesco's evolution. In fact, when we first meet Francesco, he is a rich and handsome young man, without a care in the world. His only passions are clothes, girls and war. As the only son of Pietro Bernardone (Lee Montague), a wealthy merchant, and Pica (Valentina Cortese), a French aristocrat, Francesco has grown up sheltered and spoilt, oblivious to the hardships of life. He and his friends run around Assisi, determined to make the most of what they consider "the last night of their youth."

After experiencing the horrors of war, the future saint goes through a spiritual awakening and a process of conversion that culminates with a public renunciation of his earthly possessions in front of the bishop of Assisi. After his renunciation, Francesco retires to the ruined church of San Damiano and begins to rebuild it with the help of his first followers. As his old friends gradually convert, the Franciscan order is born. The young friars lead a simple life, characterised by a strong focus on the Catholic virtues of humility, poverty and compassion as well as a great love of nature. They are often joined by the young Chiara (Judi Bowker), also on her path to sainthood.

However, the life of the embryonic religious community is threatened by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of Assisi, who do not approve of what they consider to be a group of unruly and disorganised individuals living outside the norms of civil and religious society. In an attempt to stop the exponential growth of the order, the authorities send guards to close the church of San Damiano, prompting Francesco to go to Rome in order to obtain Pope Innocenzo III's (Alec Guinness) approval and recognition of the order. Francesco's simple and honest speech deeply moves the Pope, and not only does he grant his approval, but he also kneels down before Francesco, thus acknowledging his value.

⁴⁶ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 255.

“The Most Christian Man after Christ”⁴⁷

A major way in which Zeffirelli demonstrates Francesco’s orthodoxy is by linking him to Jesus throughout the film. First, the director focuses on the episodes in the saint’s life that echo those of Jesus’s. Second, he emphasises certain Franciscan values such as poverty and solidarity with the poor and oppressed, which abound in the Gospel. Finally, Zeffirelli enhances the similarity between Francesco and Jesus through iconographic elements such as crosses and clothes as well as sacred music. The parallelism implied by the film begins with Francesco’s sickness and progresses throughout the young man’s conversion, which culminates in his renunciation. In fact, if the white tunic and sufferance were not enough to imply an analogy, Zeffirelli signals Francesco’s similarity to Christ through the use of the cross: for instance, the bishop blesses him using a crucifix, while above Francesco’s head a large cross hangs on the wall (**Image 7.1**).



Image 7.1 Francesco sleeping in his bed during his sickness

⁴⁷ The expression was used by Stanley Kauffmann in his book *Living Images: Film Comment and Criticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 189.

Further, it is possible, in these scenes, to trace a parallel between Francesco's mother, Pica, and St. Veronica, the woman who wiped Jesus's sweaty and bloody face with a linen cloth while he was carrying the cross during the Passion.⁴⁸ The imprint of Jesus's face would remain on this cloth, known as the "Veil of Veronica."⁴⁹ Aste points out how Francesco's mother also uses a linen cloth on her son. He argues: "By this identification it becomes clear that Francesco was called to carry the cross of Christ,"⁵⁰ prompting Kozlovich to conclude that "Pica is thereby turned into a St. Veronica-figure which autobiographically resonates with Zeffirelli's own loving mother, Adelaide Garosi, a saint in his reminiscing eyes."⁵¹

Another link with Jesus is underlined after his tormented and delirious period of sickness, when Francesco follows the sound of a bird chirping onto the roof, completely oblivious to the danger or the warnings shouted by his father and mother. Literally illuminated by a ray of sunshine, eyes wide with wonder and completely absorbed with admiring the beauty of one of God's creatures, the similarity is clear in that Francesco is still dressed in his white tunic and that he assumes a "cruciform posture" (**Image 7.2**). The posture is repeated twice more at highly significant junctures of the film: during the renunciation and at the end, when "the triumphant Francis spreads his arms in another cruciform pose to mystically embrace God and nature."⁵²

⁴⁸ David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 433.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Mario Aste, "Zeffirelli's Personal Encounter with St. Francis: Brother Sun, Sister Moon," *Romances Languages Annual III* (1991), quoted in Kozlovich "Saint Cinema," para. 10.

⁵¹ Kozlovich "Saint Cinema," para. 10

⁵² Ibid., para. 19.



Image 7.2 Francesco on the roof of his house after his long sickness

Another extremely important scene portrays Francesco as he visits the textile sweatshop, significantly located underground. Walking through the vapours and fumes of the shop, he grows increasingly upset at the sight of the poor conditions in which the labourers are forced to work the whole day. The camera lingers on the sad, resigned, haunted faces of the men, women and children as well as on their raggedy clothes. Francesco's empathy is underscored not only by his pained expression, but also by the fact that, by walking through the hanging textiles, he gets dirty, the colours staining his elegant and refined clothes as well as his beautiful, delicate face. As we learn from his father's angry comments to his mother in the next scene, he invites all the workers to follow him outside and spend the day resting in the sun. In relation to this, Kozlovich points out how the episode represents "the leading of suffering humanity from darkness into the light of God by one who was formerly 'in darkness' and now 'seeking the light.'"⁵³ Divinity as "light" is a frequent theme in the Scriptures, especially in the Gospel of John. In fact, Jesus often refers to himself as "the light" that came into the world to lead humankind out of darkness.⁵⁴ Further, Jesus's ability to enlighten is taken literally. The four Gospels describe episodes in which Jesus performs miracles and uses his healing powers to cure

⁵³ Ibid., para. 15.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Jn 1:9; Jn 8:12; Jn, 9:5; Jn 12:35–36 and Jn 12:46.

the blind.⁵⁵ In the film, Francesco is first subjected to this enlightening as he admits to Bishop Guido that “Brother sun illuminated my soul, and now I can see so clearly,”⁵⁶ only to then become the one who has the same effect on others. When Chiara meets him in the fields, she tells him: “You have enlightened me. I see so clearly now, finally!”⁵⁷



Image 7.3 Pope Innocenzo III kissing Francesco’s feet

Finally, during the papal audience, Francesco begins by reading a prepared document; however, he soon folds it, opting instead to give a heartfelt speech modelled on Jesus’s oration in the Gospel of Matthew. After hearing his speech, Pope Innocenzo III kneels before Francesco and kisses his feet as a sign of respect and humility (**Image 7.3**). In fact, in Catholic tradition, the practice of kissing another person’s feet has come to indicate an act of submission and devotion. The Scriptures relate different episodes in which the practice is associated with Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, a sinner washes and perfumes Jesus’s feet as an act of asking for forgiveness as well as demonstrating her admiration and obedience.⁵⁸ Another Gospel episode relates how, during the Last Supper, Jesus washed his apostles’ feet, physically demonstrating his disposition to humbly serve

⁵⁵ Jn 9:1–41; Lk 18:35–43; Mk 10:46–52 and Mt 20:29–34.

⁵⁶ “Io ero cieco, ma Fratello sole mi ha finalmente illuminato.”

⁵⁷ “Il tuo esempio mi ha illuminata. Ora vedo così chiaro finalmente!”

⁵⁸ Lk 7:36–50.

others.⁵⁹ This highly symbolic gesture has become part of Catholic Liturgy. In fact, every Holy Thursday, before Easter, celebrants wash and dry the feet of the faithful to symbolise the life of Jesus, “[...] the Son of Man [who] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁶⁰

Francesco’s Poverty

Another key aspect of Jesus’s preaching is the emphasis on poverty. While an appeal to choose poverty as well as a warning about attachment to material things are messages strongly present in the Scriptures (one has only to think, for example, of the episode of the rich young man in Matthew 19:24 or of the *Sermon on the Mount* as related both in Matthew and in Luke), the institutional Church has often strayed from its evangelical path. Therefore, the choice of poverty was arguably Francesco’s most revolutionary trait, and one that represented a major threat to the Catholic hierarchy. The saint’s constant reminder of evangelical poverty and his criticism of the opulence displayed by the Catholic hierarchy were the strongest values in his preaching, not to mention the aspects most often emphasised by his biographers, who variously referred to him as “Il Poverello,” “father of the poor”⁶¹ and “lover of the poor,”⁶² or even as being married to “Lady Poverty.”⁶³

In the film, Francesco’s reminder of evangelical poverty is emphasised constantly. One of the episodes in which it is portrayed at its clearest is Francesco’s attendance of Sunday Mass after his conversion, in a scene that strongly echoes the episode of Jesus and the rich young man.⁶⁴ When Francesco first arrives at the Basilica, he is surrounded by a group of beggars. Holding a coin in his hand, he hesitates, overwhelmed by their requests. Finally, he turns around and deposits the coin into the grasp of an ostentatiously dressed noble woman, causing scandal among those present.

⁵⁹ Jn 13:1–15.

⁶⁰ Mk 10:45.

⁶¹ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. Volume I: The Saint*, eds. William J. Short, Regis J. Armstrong and J. A. Wayne Hellmann (New York: New City Press, 2003), 248.

⁶² Thomas of Celano, “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano (1245–1247),” in *Francis of Assisi Early Documents. Volume II: The Founder*, eds. William J. Short, Regis J. Armstrong and J. A. Wayne Hellmann (New York: New City Press, 2001), 247.

⁶³ Tommaso da Celano relates an episode in which Francesco alluded to his marriage with a “noble and beautiful bride.” He wrote: “People thought he wanted to get married, and they would ask him: ‘Do you want to get married, Francis?’ He replied: ‘I will take a bride more noble and more beautiful than you have ever seen, and she will surpass the rest in beauty and excel all others in wisdom.’” For more information, see Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” 188.

⁶⁴ Mt 19:16–24.

The gesture, while not provocative per se, is extremely significant: Francesco understands that it is not the mendicants who are poor, but rather the woman, as she is rich in possessions, yet poor in spirit.

However, it is during Mass, surrounded on the one side by the opulence of the noble Assisi families and on the other side by the misery of the beggars, that Francesco's inner torment peaks. As he sits uneasily between his parents during the service, his gaze travels from the wealthy families around him to the mendicants confined to the back of the church, and ultimately to the opulent and ostentatious crucifix of Christ, with closed eyes, behind the altar. During the entire scene, the camera shows close-ups of an anguished Francesco, a puzzled yet understanding Chiara, the perplexed and mocking faces of Assisi's upper class and the sincere and devoted expressions of the beggars. Fixing his eyes once more on the face of the crucified Christ, whose eyes are significantly open, Francesco screams "No!" and flees the church. His flight terminates at the ruins of the church of San Damiano, where another much smaller, simpler and humbler crucifix hangs over the altar. According to legend, Francesco was then commanded by God to "Go and repair my house, which you see is falling down."⁶⁵ Francesco cannot help but smile, silently accepting the mission. Thereafter, he embraced poverty completely and commanded his brothers to do the same. In particular, chapter four of the *Regula Bullata*, the Later Rule, of 1223, prescribed that "they should not receive money," while chapter six clarified "that the friars are to appropriate nothing for themselves."⁶⁶ Thereafter, the friars would only wear cheap tunics and sandals; they could not acquire any possessions and their only form of maintenance would be begging.

Albeit extremely relevant, this episode pales in comparison to Francesco's renunciation, one of the most iconic moments in Catholic tradition. Francesco's father, fed up with his son's behaviour and nonsensical speeches about poverty, unceremoniously drags him in front of the consul of Assisi. The man, however, refuses to judge him. Francesco shouts: "It is not men who must judge me! God is my only judge!"⁶⁷ He is then referred to Bishop Guido. The prelate is annoyed about having to interrupt his meal to respond to such ridiculous questions. He complains to his servants: "So you think I should interrupt my meal for a silly family squabble? What nonsense! Tell them I'm not here; or rather: tell

⁶⁵ Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 172.

⁶⁶ Roberta Anderson and Dominic Aidan Bellenger, eds. *Medieval Worlds: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2003), 55.

⁶⁷ "Non sono gli uomini che devono giudicarmi! Dio è il mio solo giudice!"

them I'm praying!"⁶⁸ The film, once again, highlights the differences between Francesco's sincere, humble approach to the faith and the Catholic hierarchy's callous and insensitive attitude. The scene serves to link Francesco further to Jesus. In fact, according to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was first brought before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Roman Judea, to be judged. Pilate, however, refused to sentence him and sent him to Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea, who, in turn, sent him back to Pilate.⁶⁹



Image 7.4 Francesco after his renunciation

In an unforeseen turn of events, the ever-seraphic Francesco, after delivering another inspired speech about the importance of innocence and simplicity, declares his intention to renounce all his father's possessions, including his name. To underline his commitment, he undresses in front of a shocked, gasping audience. The bishop is quick to cover him with a mantle, but Francesco is even quicker in giving it to a poor man alongside him, "thus physically and symbolically rejecting opulence, worldly materialism and the official Church."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Quindi pensate che io dovrei interrompere il mio pasto per una stupida lite in famiglia? Ma che eresie! Dite che non ci sono, o meglio: dite che sto pregando!"

⁶⁹ Lk 23:1-16.

⁷⁰ Kozlovic, "Saint Cinema," para. 18.

He then walks away, literally leaving his old life behind. Kozlovich observes: “Since the gate is shaped like a birth canal, it also symbolises Francesco’s naked rebirth. He is now spiritually clean and ready to face the world anew”⁷¹ (**Image 7.4**).

Not only did Francesco’s renunciation bring “a radically new dimension to the history of religious life in the Western Church,”⁷² but it also had a huge impact on the collective imagination and, as such, it has been frequently portrayed in art and literature.⁷³ In particular, it is Francesco’s literal and symbolic nudity, and the vulnerability associated with it, that has left a strong impression (**Image 7.5**). Analysing nudity in the renaissance art, Panofsky acknowledges the existence of four states of symbolical *nuditas* according to theology. He states:

Medieval moral theology distinguished four symbolical meanings of nudity: *nuditas naturalis*, the natural state of man conducive of humility; *nuditas temporalis*, the lack of earthly goods which can be voluntary (as in the Apostles or monks) or necessitated by poverty; *nuditas virtualis*, a symbol of innocence (preferably innocence acquired through confession); and *nuditas criminalis*, a sign of lust, vanity, and the absence of all virtues.⁷⁴

Francesco’s nudity in the film represents the first three understandings of *nuditas*. Of course, his renunciation of his father’s patrimony refers specifically to *nuditas temporalis*; however, he is also portrayed as a sincere, innocent man (*nuditas virtualis*), who argues for a return to a simpler and poorer lifestyle (*nuditas naturalis*).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Robson, *The Cambridge Companion*, 4.

⁷³ On this topic, see Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁷⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 156.



Image 7.5 Francesco during his renunciation

Finally, another episode in the film is extremely significant. Francesco and his brothers are helping a group of peasants with the harvest. While the peasants are eating their lunch, one offers a slice of bread to the friars, only to be admonished by his companion. The exchange that follows highlights the various attitudes Francesco and his companions meet. One of the younger workers says: “But they are poorer than us!” To which, the older man replies: “Poor, poor! Those are the sons of landowners! The sons of the rich! Go ask for bread at home. What are you doing stealing bread from us, the real poor?” Francesco calmly replies: “We are all poor in the eyes of the Lord.”⁷⁵ Rendered speechless by this argument, the older man grumpily agrees to give the friars a loaf of bread. Francesco, in a way reminiscent of Christ,⁷⁶ takes the bread, gives thanks and breaks it in order to share it with his brothers. What was a valid objection—all the friars indeed come from rich families—and a reason for ideological concern is resolved in a way that has often been the *modus operandi* of the institutional Church. The placating function of religion was already acknowledged by Marx, who famously defines religion as “the opium of the people.”⁷⁷ In

⁷⁵ “Ma se sono più poveri di noi!” “Ma che poveri e poveri! Quelli sono figli dei padroni, sono figli dei ricchi! Andate a cercare il pane a casa vostra! Cosa venite a rubare il pane a noi che siamo i very poveri!” “Siamo tutti poveri agli occhi del Signore.”

⁷⁶ Lk 22:19.

⁷⁷ Despite—or maybe precisely *because of*—its fame, Marx’s sentence is rarely read and quoted in context. In the introduction to his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy Right*, Marx writes, “The wretchedness of religion is at once an expression of and a protest against real wretchedness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a

relation to this, Wisman and Smith observe that the “religious legitimation of inequality typically worked at two levels. Directly, it claimed that the status quo distribution was appropriate to the cosmic order. Indirectly, it diverted attention away from the material world to a spiritual or moral domain.”⁷⁸ In particular, in this second case, “it devalued a this-worldly existence in favor of a spiritual realm, and thereby depicted the greater hardships and suffering of the less well off as unworthy of serious attention.”⁷⁹ The polemic charge of the peasant’s words is neutralised by reference to an ultra-terrestrial dimension in which such things as material possessions are unimportant and all social and economic differences are erased. Disguised as a form of consolation for the less fortunate, this attitude perfectly serves the interest of the ruling classes in maintaining the social status quo as well as deferring any form of social justice indefinitely. In the words of Berger, “Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality.”⁸⁰

Francesco’s Obedience and *Laetitia*

While it is true that Francesco remained within the institutional Church, he was certainly a controversial figure, in open conflict with the prelates of his time, particularly with the papal Curia. In fact, the values fostered by Francesco during his short yet intense life made him not only the embodiment of the apostle and true follower of Christ, but also a courageous opponent of ecclesiastical corruption and the betrayal of the Gospel message. His speedy canonisation in 1228,⁸¹ only two years after his death, as well as the decision to entrust the general minister of the Franciscan order, St. Bonaventura, with the task of writing an official biography, attest to the Church’s desire to both put to rest possible disputes and mitigate the most controversial aspects of the saint’s life.

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heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” In relation to this, John C. Raines observes, “We tend to think that Marx had a monolithically negative view of religion. But that is not the case [...] No, for Marx in the hands and voices of the poor and exploited religion is ‘protest’: It is a crying out against ‘real suffering,’ not illusory sufferings such as fear of punishment from the gods or sufferings caused by some ‘impurity’ inherited from a previous incarnation.” For more information, see Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right.”* ed. Joseph O’Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 131; John C. Raines, *Marx on Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 5.

⁷⁸ Jon D. Wisman, and James F. Smith “Legitimizing Inequality: Fooling Most of the People All of the Time,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 70, no. 4 (2011): 974–1013.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Penguin, 1973), 41.

⁸¹ Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches*, 93.

His appeal to the Gospel message of poverty and solidarity with the poor and oppressed contrasted deeply with the intolerance and opulence of the Church at that time. As Green observes:

Two hundred years later that same Catholic church burned Joan [of Arc] for the same presumption; two hundred years more and that same Catholic church confined Galileo to his quarters for the same presumptions, and of the three it was Francis who must have seemed the most outrageous. For Joan was a country bumpkin with no suspicion of the implications of her behaviour; as for Galileo he was telling the church it was wrong about Astronomy, while Francesco was suggesting it might be wrong about religion, quite a different thing.⁸²

Overall, Zeffirelli's intention was to portray Francesco as a respectful, obedient and orthodox man by emphasising the bigotry and intolerance of the Catholic hierarchy, highlighting Francesco's obedience towards authority and downplaying his criticism of the Church as well as portraying his disobedience as a result of enthusiasm and youthfulness. First, the Church's intransigent and opportunistic attitude is underlined throughout the film. For example, during the renunciation sequence, the morally dubious Bishop Guido attempts to reason with Francesco: "Surely, you are smart enough to understand that the Holy Mother Church must punish those who subvert the existing order. Someone like you is a threat to our community. A criminal, a madman!"⁸³ Further, during the papal audience, when Innocenzo III grants Francesco his approval, one of the prelates in the court reassures those questioning the Pope's judgement: "Let it be. We finally have a man who will speak to the poor and bring them back to us,"⁸⁴ somehow suggesting the Church's strategic employment of Francesco in winning back the faithful. Here, according to Kozlovich,

Zeffirelli implies that the Pope's humility is not necessarily genuine or divinely motivated. Rather, it is a diplomatic expediency; a cynical political trick designed to recapture the allegiance of the drifting poor by a power player who was politically shrewd enough to latch onto what amounts to a revolutionary protest against the established order, and turned, judo-style, into a political advantage for the declining Church.⁸⁵

⁸² Benny Green, "Cinema," *Punch* 264, no. 6919 (1973): 552.

⁸³ "Certo hai sufficiente intelligenza per capire che la Santa Madre Chiesa deve punire coloro che sovvertono la stabilità dell'ordine. Uno come te è una minaccia alla nostra comunità! Un criminale, un pazzo!"

⁸⁴ "Lasciate fare. Finalmente abbiamo un uomo che parlerà ai poveri e li porterà di nuovo a noi."

⁸⁵ Kozlovic, "Saint Cinema," para. 37.

Second, Zeffirelli insists repeatedly on highlighting Francesco's obedience and respectful attitude towards authority. For instance, during the renunciation scene, Francesco kneels in front of the corpulent Bishop Guido and states: "I commit myself to your judgement."⁸⁶ Further, the director reiterates Francesco's conformity to Church authority by dedicating a large proportion of the film to his meeting with the Pope. Francesco and his brothers kneel respectfully in front of the business-like, no-nonsense Pope Innocenzo III. While Francesco does indeed abandon the pre-approved, conciliatory text in favour of an impromptu speech about poverty, "with the considerable risk of being labelled a heretic and burned,"⁸⁷ he remains nothing but respectful to the Pope and to his court. In fact, when Innocenzo asks him what their business here is, Francesco humbly answers that they have come to ask for the Pope's advice, clearly acknowledging his supreme authority both in religious and in political matters. The friar then asks: "Is it possible, Holy Father, to live in agreement with the Gospel teachings? Or have we sinned by arrogance? If that were the case, we'd like for you to show us the mistakes we've made."⁸⁸ The Pope reassures him and, in an act of supreme humility, kneels to kiss his feet.

Third, Francesco's radicalism is heavily mitigated and presented as enthusiasm, innocence and youthfulness. For instance, during the final stage in the conversion, Zeffirelli shows Francesco throwing his father's expensive clothes and garments into the streets "with almost childish glee."⁸⁹ This episode is purely the result of Zeffirelli's creativity and imagination, since according to Francesco's biographers, he stole the fabrics from his father's store and sold them in a nearby town, using the proceeds to renovate the church of San Damiano. According to Kozlovich, "Zeffirelli did not want to sully Francis' heroic reputation, and possibly to avoid cinematic association with his own theft accusation."⁹⁰ Further, in relation to the papal audience scene, Aste observes that Francesco's passionate speech is "a form of youthful rebellion toward the values of parents and the older generation," especially since the "climate of challenge was prevalent in the sixties when the film was shot."⁹¹ Moreover, this aspect is emphasised by the Pope's attitude in reassuring Francesco that he is, in fact, in the right. His speech leans towards the nostalgic,

⁸⁶ "Mi affido al vostro giudizio."

⁸⁷ Kozlovic, "Saint Cinema," para. 33.

⁸⁸ "E' possibile, Santo Padre, vivere in accordo con gli insegnamenti del Vangelo? O abbiamo errato per presunzione? Se fosse così, vorremmo che voi ci indicaste gli errori commessi."

⁸⁹ Kozlovic, "Saint Cinema," para. 16.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Aste, "Zeffirelli's Personal Encounter," quoted in Kozlovich, "Saint Cinema," para. 33.

as “He even admits to being young and idealistic once just like Francis, and subtly implies that he has been affected (corrupted?) by Church responsibilities,”⁹² turning into a benevolent grandfather rather than the supreme Church authority that he was.

In summary, the film emphasises Francesco’s joy and compassion as opposed to his single-minded determination to reform a Catholic Church plagued by corruption and indifference towards its followers and whose leaders had long strayed from the original Gospel message. While *Fratello sole, sorella luna* does portray certain innovatory aspects of Francesco’s character and preaching, such as the emphasis on poverty and solidarity, these traits are hardly depicted as radical qualities. Even his forceful rejection of his father’s values is somehow downplayed in the film, and, in some cases, presented as something akin to youthful disobedience. Indeed, instead of expanding on the criticisms made by the historical Francesco of the Catholic Church, the film insists on the saint’s “lightness.” In relation to this, Zeffirelli stated:

Francis was one the first to reject the fearful medieval world with its dark view of God, the first to go out in the countryside and to see the work of the Almighty in the natural world—flowers and God’s humbler creatures. As part of that new openness and lightness Francis composed new hymns, not in Latin but in Italian, which was an unheard provocation, and set them not as chants and dirges but to the popular tunes his mother had taught him. This was, of course, shocking to the traditionalists, the merchants and the Church of his day.⁹³

Certainly, Francesco’s *Canticle* and his other writings represented an incredible novelty and as such had a tremendous impact on Italian literary and religious tradition.⁹⁴ Further, this understanding of Francesco emanates from his own definition of himself and of his brothers as “*joculatores Domini*” (“the Lord’s minstrels”).⁹⁵ In chapter XX of his *Admonitiones*, he is invited to worship God “*cum gaudio et laetitia*” (“with delight and joy”).⁹⁶ Hence, the film’s emphasis on Francesco’s lightness builds an extremely tamed and unthreatening image of the saint.

⁹² Kozlovich, “Saint Cinema,” para. 35.

⁹³ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 253.

⁹⁴ Peter Brand and Lino Pertile, eds. *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5ff.

⁹⁵ Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*, 31.

⁹⁶ In his analysis, Italian philosopher Massimo Cacciari compares the figure of San Francesco as portrayed in Dante’s *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*) and in Giotto’s frescoes, underlining their very different interpretation of the Franciscan message: while Dante insisted on Francesco’s poverty (“*papupertas*”), Giotto underlined the saint’s joy and

At One with Nature

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the historical Francesco heralded a true change in the Christian perception of nature. Until that point, the prevalent Christian view of nature was essentially negative; nature was seen as matter as opposed to spirit, mundane as opposed to divine. This concept found its roots both in the Greek philosophical tradition and in the Scriptures. In particular, episodes in the Old Testament, such as God’s cursing of the earth in the aftermath of the actions of, first, Adam and Eve⁹⁷ and, later, Cain,⁹⁸ as well as the sending of the Flood,⁹⁹ concurred to create and maintain a view of nature as something cursed and evil.

Francesco, instead, proposed a new understanding of God’s creation, in tune with the spirit of the times. In fact, with the emergence of brotherhoods and mendicant orders, a shift in focus challenged traditional Catholic thought. As Binde explains, “As alternatives to formal scholastic theology were propose more personal, sensual (in the meaning of focusing on bodily experiences of suffering, pain and ecstasy), and intuitive approaches to come near and achieve communion with the divine.”¹⁰⁰ Historically, sources report Francesco not only showing the greatest respect for God’s creatures—as demonstrated by his *Canticle*—and therefore preaching their respect to men, but also actually preaching *to them*. In relation to this, Sorrell explains:

For Francis not only showed his high regard for creatures through his preaching to them and his sincere affection for them. He showed how much he valued them in the way he applied standards of chivalric behavior to them, in his beliefs about the proper use of creation’s bounty as food, and in his contemplative experiences amid the glories of creation.¹⁰¹

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light-heartedness (“hilaritas” and “laetitia”). For more information, see Massimo Cacciari, *Doppio Ritratto: San Francesco in Dante e Giotto [Double Portrait: St. Francis in Dante and Giotto]* (Milan: Adelphi, 2012), 70.

⁹⁷ Gen 3:17–19.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 4:8–2.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 6:9–22.

¹⁰⁰ Per Binde, “Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 19.

¹⁰¹ Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, 69.



Image 7.6 Francesco and Chiara sitting in a field

This aspect is certainly reflected in the film, where nature serves as an example of simplicity and humility and as a place of refuge and communion with God. In fact, throughout the film, Francesco is not only shown speaking to animals and natural elements, to whom he refers as “brothers and sisters,” as if they could understand, but he also uses them as examples of a pure and simple lifestyle. In front of both the bishop and the Pope, he expresses his desire to be as humble, as candid, as detached from material possessions as are the birds in the sky, once again modelling his speech on the Scriptures.¹⁰²

Further, after Francesco’s conversion, nature becomes the place for him to seek peace and find contact with God (**Image 7.6**). In fact, as Binde observes, “Unspoiled nature was thought to communicate to the Christian the transcendental, mystical, and unspeakable qualities of God much better than could be learnt from theological discourses based on written tradition.”¹⁰³ Not only is Francesco awakened after his prolonged physical and spiritual sickness by a bird chirping outside his window, but also, when he is finally well

¹⁰² Francesco models his speeches on the Scriptures, particularly on the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 6:26–29): “[26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

¹⁰³ Binde, “Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition,” 19.

enough to leave the house, he chooses to immerse himself in nature. In a large field, Francesco sits peacefully under a tree and contemplates the landscape around him; his blissful state is further underscored by Baglioni's voice singing *Fratello sole, sorella luna*.¹⁰⁴ The camera lingers on trees, plants and animals, conveying the image of a peaceful and harmonious world. Francesco walks through the grain fields and reaches the olive trees—another element clearly associated with both Jesus and the notion of peace. In this sense, the film also uses Francesco's interest in nature to underline his distance from mundane life as well as, of course, his humility and simplicity. This reading is supported by the director's statements. In an interview with Demby, Zeffirelli observed that

The essence of St. Francis was simplicity and humility. He approached God through the beauty of creation; he never wanted to explore the existence of God philosophically. He was very pragmatic, very literal. For this kind of saint, the beauty of creation was a perfect bridge toward understanding the beauty of the Creator, so nature was my guiding image in designing the production.¹⁰⁵

This idea of nature as a peaceful refuge is proposed twice more in the film: first, after the renunciation, and second, at the very end. On both occasions, Francesco is filmed from behind, in a cruciform posture, as he prepares to leave civilisation behind and immerse himself in nature (**Image 7.7**).



Image 7.7 Francesco contemplating nature in the film's last frame

¹⁰⁴ In the international version, Donovan's *On This Lovely Day* is playing instead.

¹⁰⁵ Betty J. Demby, "An Interview with Franco Zeffirelli," *Filmmakers Newsletter* 6, no. 11 (1973): 33.

7.3 Style

Just as with the film's narrative, its style strongly reinforces the image of Francesco as the champion of Catholicism, a victorious figure who, with his selfless deeds and joyous disposition, brings immense prestige to the Catholic Church. Much is achieved through the film's slow rhythm. The elliptical nature of the editing—many episodes are only alluded to through dialogue, such as Francesco's participation in the war—is counterbalanced by meticulously descriptive scenes in which the camera pans on serene imagery and pastoral scenes before then zooming in on flowers, animals and other natural elements. The film also makes expressive uses of camera angles: often, members of the Church hierarchy are shot from a low angle to convey feelings of authority and superiority, such as during the renunciation scene and the papal audience. Similarly, Francesco is shot from a high angle to further underline his obedience and docility.

Moreover, Zeffirelli insists on close-ups of the actors' bewildered or pensive expressions. The use of professional Italian (Valentina Cortese, Adolfo Celi) and English actors (Graham Faulkner, Alec Guinness), with their polished performances, adds to a highly stylised and static atmosphere. In particular, the casting of the two saints is extremely significant, with the childlike features of Faulkner and Bowker enhancing the idea of innocence and purity. Interestingly, in his autobiography, Zeffirelli explains that he was set to cast Al Pacino for the role of Francis, but was dissuaded after a screen test. He states: "He had pronounced features, which then seemed even more exaggerated, and he hadn't yet learned to moderate his more theatrical gestures for the camera."¹⁰⁶ It is almost ironic that Zeffirelli wrote off Pacino because of his emphatic acting given that Faulkner's performance is hardly restrained and subtle: throughout the film, his facial expressions are so pronounced that they appear almost parodic. On the other hand, Bowker's acting is rather stiff, with emotions that only range from serenity to wonder, and to benign curiosity.

¹⁰⁶ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 254.

Light, emanating from the “Brother sun,” plays a crucial role in the film and is always spiritually connoted. For instance, when the saint, freshly recovered from his sickness, follows a bird across the roof, he is hit by a ray of sunshine. Moreover, the next shot shows light filtering through the clouds, linking once again physical light to a spiritual superpower. Further, in a scene at the end of the film in which the Franciscan order obtains papal approval, Francesco is surrounded by a halo, once again signifying his divine nature.

Similarly, the use of religiously charged colours abounds in the film. As Aste observes, red, green and white have particularly allegorical meanings: “green for life; red for martyrdom, love and ‘charitas;’ white for purity and chastity.”¹⁰⁷ When we first see Francesco, he is sitting on his white horse wearing a red mantle. While this sequence precedes Francesco’s conversion, the choice of colours anticipates the saint’s holy path. Further, all these colours are present in nature: red poppies are disseminated across the green fields of Assisi; during winter, they are covered in snow.

The film script, developed by Zeffirelli alongside Lina Wertmüller and Suso Cecchi d’Amico, was based on an English version of the story of the saint’s life. Their desire was to find a British writer to develop the story and write the English dialogue, a process that the director described as “nightmarish.”¹⁰⁸ After consulting up to twenty writers, the three decided to rely solely on their own efforts.¹⁰⁹ The reasons behind the difficulty of finding a British scriptwriter for the film are, however, worth mentioning, as they reveal one of Zeffirelli’s most interesting assessments of Francesco. In his autobiography, he states:

The problem was that they kept seeing Francis in protestant terms. To them he was a pre-Lutheran revolutionary overthrowing the authority of the Pope, whereas the opposite was the case. Francis was in total obedience to the Church and would kneel in the mud as even the fattest, most corrupt priest walked by because he represented the authority of God. This duality of belief that we possess is completely alien to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant mind.¹¹⁰

The use of dialogue is accurate in mirroring Francesco’s inner evolution. Indeed, the rather trivial, even base, exchanges between the saint and his friends that characterise the beginning of the film are followed by Francesco’s refusal to utter any words during the

¹⁰⁷ Aste, “Zeffirelli’s Personal Encounter,” quoted in Kozlovich, “Saint Cinema,” para. 27.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

most tumultuous moments of his conversion. In particular, the future saint does not speak throughout the entirety of his sickness and convalescence. In one scene, Francesco is approached by Chiara, but he refuses to answer her questions. Only when she starts to leave does he stop her by shouting “No!” The same “No!” is later screamed during Sunday Mass in the Assisi Basilica. Francesco’s silence during this stage of the film is most likely linked to his newfound meditative and contemplative state. However, following the saint’s enlightenment, Francesco ultimately begins giving passionate, heartfelt monologues. Examples of those are his inspiring speeches in front of the bishop and the Pope, during which he declares his immense love for God and His creations, or His preaching.

Finally, music is an “essential”¹¹¹ part of *Fratello sole, sorella luna*. After having been in talks with the Beatles, Paul Simon, Leonard Bernstein and Leonard Cohen,¹¹² Zeffirelli tasked internationally acclaimed composer Riz Ortolani with composing the film’s score. A carefully balanced mix of tradition and modernity, the soundtrack alternates medieval chants, which “speak to St. Francis’—and, by implication, Zeffirelli’s—Catholicity,”¹¹³ with instrumental and sung pieces composed ad hoc. The song that stands out in the film is *Fratello sole sorella luna*. Written by Father Jean-Marie Benjamin and performed by Donovan in the English version and Baglioni in the Italian one, it is modelled on Francesco’s *Canticle*,¹¹⁴ “the final expression, the final synthesis, of Francis’ thought in the area of relationships between humanity, creation, and Creator.”¹¹⁵ The title of the song, just like the title of the film, comes in fact from Francesco’s prayer. In the *Canticle*, Francesco praises God for His creation, referring to the natural elements as “brothers” and “sisters,” beginning with the sun: “Laudato sie, mi Signore, cun tutte le tue creature,/ spezialmente messer lo frate Sole,/ lo qual e iorno, e allumini noi per lui” (Be praised, my Lord, with all your creatures,/ Especially Sir Brother Sun,/ Who brings the day, and you give light to us through him”).¹¹⁶ The moon, together with the stars, follows a few lines after: “Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora Luna e le Stelle:/ im cielo l’hai formate clarite e preziose e belle” (“Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars/ In heaven you have

¹¹¹ Ibid., 252.

¹¹² Marc Eliot, *Paul Simon: A Life* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 93; Napoleone, *Franco Zeffirelli*, 54; Sylvie Simmons, *I’m Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (New York: Ecco, 2012), 215.

¹¹³ Haines, *Music in Films on the Middle Ages*, 118.

¹¹⁴ “Fratello sole, sorella luna,” Cathopedia. L’Enciclopedia Cattolica, accessed 1 July 2016, http://it.cathopedia.org/wiki/Fratello_sole,_sorella_luna.

¹¹⁵ Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, 98.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 100–101.

formed them, bright, and precious, and beautiful”).¹¹⁷ The song features twice in the Italian version of the film: during the opening credits, thus setting the mood, and during Francesco’s first immersion in nature, right after his lengthy sickness. Here, the song is particularly appropriate, as Francesco, spiritually reborn, watches his surroundings in awe.

7.4 Reception

Fratello sole, sorella luna was released in Italy at Easter in 1972.¹¹⁸ Unlike the other films analysed in this research, its journey would have been rather smooth except for, according to Zeffirelli’s autobiography, the eighteen earthquakes that hit Tuscany during the shooting, which his superstitious nature ascribed to Francesco’s revenge.¹¹⁹ Unlike Olmi’s *E venne un uomo*, which was screened at the Vatican, as mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis, *Fratello sole, sorella luna* debuted in a rather more informal setting. It was first shown, arguably in a Franciscan act of altruism and attention towards the less fortunate, in the Roman prison of Rebibbia.¹²⁰ While we have no record of Pope Paolo VI actually seeing the film, there is no doubt that he held Zeffirelli in high regard, as he twice asked the Florentine to direct the production of a religious function filmed in St. Peter’s Basilica; the first was Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis* in 1970, while the second time was in 1974, for the *Apertura della Porta Santa*, namely the rite of the opening of the Holy Door.¹²¹

Zeffirelli received the *David di Donatello* for Best Director, tying with Sergio Leone for *Giù la testa* (*Duck, You Sucker*, 1971).¹²² Interestingly, the award for best film went to Elio Petri’s *La classe operaia va in paradiso* (*The Working Class Goes to Paradise*, 1971), a harsh critique of the Italian social and political struggles of those years, signalling a shift in interest, at least on the part of the judging panel.¹²³ The reviews in the Italian

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 257.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 255.

¹²⁰ Andrea Rapisarda, “Il Poverello di Assisi tra i detenuti di Rebibbia” [“The ‘Poverello’ of Assisi Among the Inmates of Rebibbia”], *Il Messaggero*, 31 March 1972, 7.

¹²¹ Napoleone, *Franco Zeffirelli*, 56.

¹²² “Vincitori 1972,” Accademia del Cinema Italiano - Premi David di Donatello, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.daviddidonatello.it/motore-di-ricerca/schedaanno.php>.

¹²³ The *David di Donatello* prizes are awarded by the cinema industry. According to the prize’s official website, the jury is composed of the nominees and winners, the partners’ meeting, the board of directors, the Academy Committee and representatives of the Italian world of culture, art, industry and entertainment. For more information on the selection and awarding process, see “Regolamento Giuria,” Accademia del Cinema Italiano - Premi David di Donatello, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.daviddidonatello.it/accademia/regolamento-giuria.php>.

press were mixed: whereas Catholic¹²⁴ and left-wing¹²⁵ publications were aligned in their reception, attacking the film's superficiality and accusing it of lacking a serious and informed approach to the subject matter, other newspapers such as *La Stampa*, *Il Messaggero*, *Il Tempo* and *Corriere della Sera* all offered very positive feedback.¹²⁶

In his review in *L'Espresso*, Moravia shows something akin to helplessness as he seeks a way in which to describe a film about which "there is nothing to say."¹²⁷ He opts to refer to Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle," concluding, "In this film, everything is spectacular, what you see as well as what you do not see. Yes, because there is not only a spectacular awareness; but also a spectacular ignorance or insensitivity."¹²⁸ Similarly, Scagnetti writes a scathing analysis of the film in *Paese Sera*. By comparing the film to illustrious Italian precedents such as Rossellini's *Francesco, giullare di Dio* (*The Flowers of St. Francis* or *Saint Francis, God's Jester*, 1950) and Cavani's *Francesco d'Assisi* (*Francis of Assisi*, 1966), he can only establish the film's "expensive emptiness."¹²⁹ He writes: "It reduces, with the air of having made a sensational 'discovery,' the figure of Francis to that of hippie 'antelitteram,' who criticises 'the consumer society' of his time, looking for the most secret truths in the love for Nature and Humanity."¹³⁰ The film, he continues, becomes something akin to "mystical music," which adds nothing "to the complex question of the Church and the world today, and to the subsequent political discourse."¹³¹

¹²⁴ See, for example, Francesco Bolzoni, "Quasi un musical per l'esportazione" ["Almost a Musical to Export"], *L'Avvenire*, 31 March 1972, 6; Luigi Saitta, "Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna" ["Brother Sun, Sister Moon"], *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 April 1972, 5.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Alberto Moravia, "Un'aureola di spettatori" ["A Halo of Spectators"], in Alberto Moravia, *Cinema italiano. Recensioni e interventi 1933-1990* [*Italian Cinema. Reviews and Comments 1933-1990*], eds. Alberto Pezzotta and Anna Gilardelli, (Milan: Bompiani, 2010). The article was originally published in *L'Espresso* in April 1972. See also Aldo Scagnetti, "Fratello sole," *Paese Sera*, March 30 1972, 17.

¹²⁶ See Leo Pestelli "Il S. Francesco più giovane nel 'Frate Sole' di Zeffirelli" ["The Youngest S. Francis in Zeffirelli's 'Brother Sun'"], *La Stampa*, 31 March 1972, 7; Guglielmo Biraghi, "Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna." *Il Messaggero*, 31 March 1972, 7; Giovanni Grazzini, "'Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna' di Franco Zeffirelli," *Corriere della Sera*, 31 March 1972, 13; Gian Luigi Rondi, "Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna," *Il Tempo*, 31 March 1972, 7.

¹²⁷ "di cui non c'è niente da dire." Moravia, "Un'aureola di spettatori," 882-3.

¹²⁸ "In questo film tutto è spettacolare, così quello che si vede come quello che non si vede. Già, perché esiste non soltanto una consapevolezza spettacolare; ma anche una ignoranza o insensibilità spettacolari," 883.

¹²⁹ "la sua costosa vacuità." See Scagnetti, "Fratello sole," 17.

¹³⁰ "Esso riduce, con l'aria di aver fatto una clamorosa 'scoperta,' la figura di Francesco a quella di hippie 'antelitteram,' il quale contesta 'la società dei consumi' del suo tempo, cercando le più segrete verità nell'amore per la Natura e per l'Umanità." Ibid.

¹³¹ "un musical mistico" and "alla complessa problematica della Chiesa e del Mondo, oggi, ed a un conseguente discorso politico." Ibid.

While it has been suggested that Zeffirelli's cinema is immune to change,¹³² it is clear that the director's interpretation is inscribed in the contemporary context, characterised by a religious point of view based on the post-conciliar spirit of openness and innovation and by a socio-political perspective rooted in countercultural movements. As Wood points out, "What was appealing in Zeffirelli's films of the 1960s and 1970s was his foregrounding of the ideals or idealism of his characters, their sexual awakening or revolts against social convention."¹³³ However, while the director seemed to be aware of how his film could come across, as attested to by his autobiography, his reading still accounts for an eschewed or, at least, simplistic understanding of the complexity of both the late 1960s and the early 1970s in Italy and globally. While it could be argued that this was the result of naiveté rather than awareness and calculation, what is undeniable is that the film suffers from a lack of in-depth analysis and reveals a strong penchant for the most superficial and spectacular aspects of Francesco's story. This characteristic, however, seems to be rather inexplicably lost on certain critics. Grazzini's review in *Corriere della Sera* is full of praise for the film and its director. Even its undeniable theatricality is "a feast for the eyes" in his opinion.¹³⁴ He writes, "Rejecting the hagiographic and preachy tones, the miracles, the ecstasies, the simpering mannerisms of the Franciscan tradition, and instead referring back to the Little Flowers, Zeffirelli persuades us of the harmonious relationship between characters and places [...]."¹³⁵ This excellent feedback is echoed by both Biraghi and Rondi. In his piece in *Il Messaggero*, Biraghi applauds Zeffirelli for his ability to produce a sophisticated yet compelling film as well as for his care and attention to detail, as demonstrated by the *mise-en-scène* and music. The fact that he considers the depth of the characterisation and brilliant acting the film's strongest qualities might leave other reviewers perplexed. In spite of this praise, however, he cannot avoid conceding that Zeffirelli's direction "is not Franciscan in the least."¹³⁶ Similarly, Rondi in *Il Tempo* writes a positive review.¹³⁷ Not unlike those who criticised the film, he draws a positive parallel between Francesco and modern hippies. However, Zeffirelli's greatest merit,

¹³² Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from Its Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 216.

¹³³ Mary P. Wood, "Sixty Years a Celebrity Auteur: Franco Zeffirelli," *Celebrity Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012): 142.

¹³⁴ "una gioia per gli occhi." For more information, see Grazzini, "'Fratello sole, sorella luna' di Franco Zeffirelli," 13.

¹³⁵ "Rifiutando i toni agiografici e predicatori, i miracoli, le estasi, i vizzi leziosi della tradizione francescana, e riallacciandosi piuttosto ai fioretti, Zeffirelli persuade soprattutto per l'armonioso rapporto tra i luoghi e i personaggi [...]" Ibid.

¹³⁶ "Una regia che a dire il vero di francescano non ha nulla [...]" Biraghi, "'Fratello sole, sorella luna,'" 7.

¹³⁷ Rondi, "'Fratello sole, sorella luna,'" 7.

Rondi argues, is the ability to balance realism and symbolism, “dressing up the chronicle as a fairy-tale.”¹³⁸

Even more surprising than these positive reviews are the reactions of the Catholic press. Bolzoni titles his article in *Avvenire* “Quasi un musical per l’esportazione” (“Almost a Musical to Export”), making his opinion of the film abundantly clear.¹³⁹ The film, he argues, “has no substance,” and he even goes as far as saying that “we are not too far away from the old, and controversial, hagiographic cinema.”¹⁴⁰ While he at least does not doubt the sincerity of Zeffirelli’s intentions, the same cannot be said for Saitta who in his extremely critical piece in *L’Osservatore Romano* refuses to find in the film the premise for “the spiritual rebirth” of Italian cinema announced by Zeffirelli.¹⁴¹ Saitta accuses the Florentine director not only of a lack of genuine spiritual participation, but also of inadequate historical and religious preparation. This prevents him from giving a critical interpretation and from understanding the subject matter, turning the film into a mere chronicle of events. That is to say, the film does not achieve a “metaphysical dimension,”¹⁴² but is rather limited to a mere description and depiction; he does not, however, clarify what the said dimension is like, nor does he suggest how Zeffirelli could have done that. He concedes that the film’s *mise-en-scène* is very good, only to immediately amend that it is “perhaps even too good,”¹⁴³ echoing the diffuse opinion that a film on Francesco should have been somehow more restrained and less sumptuous. Even the judgement expressed by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico confirms this tepid feedback:

The film does not follow the way of biography, nor does it try to deepen the psychological and mystical themes of the religiosity of the “Poverello of Assisi.” Its focus is rather on aspects of “human anticonformism” and “contrast to fatuity,” clearly relating its message to the spirit that characterises the most serious youth protests [in contemporary Italy]. It follows that if on some level the work can be considered lacking, one still cannot refute its values, especially the grandness and relevance of St. Francis and of Clare.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ “vestendo di favola la cronaca.” Ibid.

¹³⁹ Bolzoni, “Quasi un musical per l’esportazione,” 6.

¹⁴⁰ “non ha sostanza” and “[...] non siamo troppo distanti dal vecchio, e discutibile, cinema agiografico.” Ibid.

¹⁴¹ “rinascita spirituale.” Saitta, “Fratello sole, sorella luna,” 5.

¹⁴² “dimensione metafisica.” Ibid.

¹⁴³ “forse pure troppo.” Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ “Il film non segue la strada della biografia e neppure si sforza di approfondire le tematiche psicologiche e mistiche della religiosità del Poverello di Assisi; preferisce coglierne quegli aspetti di “anticonformismo umano” e di “contrasto

However, there is something to be said about the popularity of *Fratello sole, sorella luna* in spite of its negative feedback. Indeed, these well-argued and informed reviews appear not to have tainted the film's reputation in the Catholic world, especially at local and parish levels, as confirmed by its still numerous parish and festival showings.¹⁴⁵ This discrepancy between its critical and popular reception is characteristic of the Florentine director. Indeed, there seems to be a certain reticence in granting Zeffirelli's work serious, informed and unbiased attention, as attested to by the scarceness of the bibliography on his films. Wood observes how a plurality of factors such as Zeffirelli's flamboyant personality, political beliefs and eclectic filmography have concurred to create this situation, making it difficult for the director to fit neatly into the category of the Italian *auteur*.¹⁴⁶ She states, "The serious critics recognise his visual talents and sumptuous designs based on his considerable cultural capital drawn from Italy's artistic heritage, whilst criticising the emotionality and camp elements in his films."¹⁴⁷ This observation also seems to apply in the case of the Italian press, with the difference in opinions not running along the usual Catholic and non-Catholic divide, but rather along the line of more and less circulated newspapers and magazines.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

Fratello sole, sorella luna is a highly romanticised and glorified tale of the historical saint. This hagiographical quality is achieved through a number of narrative and stylistic choices, which aim to offer an unthreatening, compliant portrait of one of the key figures in Catholic tradition. By focusing on the saint's youth—thereby leaving the later, more

(cont'd)

con le fatuità" avvicinandone visibilmente il messaggio a certi fermenti della contestazione giovanile più seria. Ne consegue che, se l'opera può venire considerata carente ad alcuni livelli, non se ne possono tuttavia refutare i valori, soprattutto la grandiosità e l'attualità, riproposte di un S. Francesco e di una Chiara." Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, ed. *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche. Volume LXXIII—1972* (Rome: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1972), 34.

¹⁴⁵ Online research on these parish programmes reveals that in 2014, *Fratello sole, sorella luna* was shown in a large number of parish cinemas across Italy, from small parishes to religious film festivals, and even including the prestigious *Duomo* in Milan. For more information, see, for example, "Nuovo Cinema Castel Guelfo - Programma 2013/2014," Comune di Castel Guelfo, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.comune.castelguelfo.bo.it/notizia/279/nuovo-cinema-castel-guelfo--programma-20132014>; "Imbersago: al cinema con 'Fratello Sole Sorella Luna' il 23," MerateOnline, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.merateonline.it/articolo.php?idd=44805>; "Duomovie, il grande cinema sulle terrazze della cattedrale," Duomo di Milano, accessed 1 July 2016, <http://www.duomomilano.it/it/article/2014/06/19/duomovie-dal-14-luglio-film-sulle-terrazze-per-adotta-una-guglia/432ab68b-11c2-43c9-b14a-a99c08aaf900>.

¹⁴⁶ Wood, "Sixty Years a Celebrity Auteur," 139. By Wood, see also *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 129 and "Delivering the Quality Experience: Franco Zeffirelli," in *Valuing Films. Shifting Perceptions of Worth*, ed. Laura Hubner (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 188–189.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴⁸ While no official data are available for 1972, the newspaper circulation data available for 1971 reveal that the most circulated newspaper was *Corriere della sera* (603,703 daily copies), followed by *La Stampa* (504,352) and *Il Messaggero* (325,804). For more information, see Paolo Murialdi, "Giornale e giornalismo, IV Appendice" *Treccani Enciclopedia Italiana*, accessed 1 July 2016, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giornale-e-giornalismo_res-7e54d2a9-87e9-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29.

complex years out of the narrative—and insisting on Francesco’s similarity to Jesus as well as his compassion, love for God’s creations and *laetitia*, the film portrays an enthusiastic and joyful young man whose positive, non-violent message appears to be the result of a cheerful and generous disposition rather than a meditated critique of the medieval Church. While the film does not spare the institutional Church entirely—the members of the Catholic hierarchy of Assisi and Roma are criticised for their greed and corruption—the potential polemic charge is blunted by Francesco’s characterisation as well as the film’s saccharine quality. Such features were certainly not lost on the majority of critics, including those writing for Catholic publications such as *L’Avvenire* and *L’Osservatore Romano*, who deemed *Fratello sole, sorella luna* a rather superficial and naïve product.

The same kind of unmindfulness seems to characterise Zeffirelli’s relationship with Catholicism. Indeed, the director’s religious adherence is hardly mediated through any form of theological reflection and is instead a rather visceral and unproblematic affiliation. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, before his near-fatal car accident in 1969, Zeffirelli was enjoying a purely formal, essentially hypocritical relationship with Catholicism (“I had been a typical lazy Italian Catholic, an unthinking believer who performs the minimum religious observance necessary to remain in the Church”¹⁴⁹). It does appear that Zeffirelli’s conversion was spurred by difficult circumstances rather than it resulting from journeying a thoughtful path—not unlike Francesco’s conversion portrayed in the film. And while Zeffirelli does at least show a certain degree of awareness of how his conversion may seem to some to be a sudden and somewhat convenient change,¹⁵⁰ he nevertheless rejects any accusation of unmindfulness and reaffirms his complete faith in God and the divine providence, to the point of sounding almost fanatical:

If, before, I had often considered that the role of destiny was important in my life, now I began to reinterpret this as Providence, as if there was a guiding hand directing my decisions [...] But, looking back, it is possible to see that there was a pattern to events which led inexorably to the point where I was able to be of use to the Faith on a vast international scale.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 238.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

This complete trust in providence and the idea that things are, in a sense, “out of our hands” are typical attitudes embedded in Catholic tradition. In particular, providence is a key concept in Catholicism, as we saw in the third chapter of this thesis in relation to Olmi’s *E venne un uomo*. Providence operates in what appears to be a random fashion, but is actually ordered by the mysterious plans of God, whose ultimate goal is the good of humankind. This hidden order is not demonstrable by reason, but can only be recognised by an act of faith. This concept, already expressed in numerous passages of the Scriptures,¹⁵² was further elaborated on and theorised by medieval Christian thinkers such as Augustin of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is also enlightening in this respect:

[321] Divine providence consists of the dispositions by which God guides all his creatures with wisdom and love to their ultimate end. [322] Christ invites us to filial trust in the providence of our heavenly Father (cf. Mt 6:26-34), and St. Peter the apostle repeats: “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you” (I Pt 5:7; cf. Ps 55:23). [323] Divine providence works also through the actions of creatures. To human beings God grants the ability to cooperate freely with his plans.¹⁵³

Zeffirelli’s logic, however, appears to be inscribed more in a game of shirking responsibilities than in absolute confidence in God. Similarly, while the director seems to be conscious of the incompatibility of his lifestyle with Catholic precepts, he is not prompted to change his ways, but rather only confess, as if admitting to a sin would automatically erase it.¹⁵⁴ Again, a passage in his autobiography is enlightening in this respect and offers an insight into a trait that, although not limited exclusively to the “Italian mentality,” is highly typical of it:

We Latins have always been able to accommodate the rigours of belief with the needs of the body without forgoing one or the other, and I see no reason for the Church to bend to the easy solution of changing its age-old morality to suit the promiscuity of our day. We can draw comfort from the belief that the sins of the flesh are not mortal sins unless accompanied by violence or corruption.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² See, for example, Mt 6:25–34; Eph 1:7–10; Col 1:24–27.

¹⁵³ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), n. 321, n. 322 and n. 323.

¹⁵⁴ Zeffirelli, *An Autobiography*, 241.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

In the same vein is Zeffirelli's later defence of Italian entrepreneur turned politician Silvio Berlusconi extramarital affairs and his distasteful comments about Berlusconi's former wife Veronica Lario.¹⁵⁶ What transpires from these words, as well as from Zeffirelli's more general attitude, is not only the director's attribution of a consolatory, soothing function to Catholicism, but also a hypocritical and convenient interpretation of its precepts.

¹⁵⁶ Franco Zeffirelli, "'Zeffirelli: 'Due o tre cose che so su Silvio e Veronica'" ['Zeffirelli: "Two or Three Things I Know about Silvio and Veronica,"'] *Il Giornale*, 7 June 2009, accessed 3 September 2016, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/zeffirelli-due-o-tre-cose-che-so-su-silvio-e-veronica.html>.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to assess how the fragmented quality of Italian Catholicism is reflected in *E venne un uomo* (*A Man Named John*, dir. Ermanno Olmi, 1965), *Galileo* (1968, dir. Liliana Cavani), *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini), *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1972, dir. Marco Bellocchio) and *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972, dir. Franco Zeffirelli). The analysis of the use of Catholic themes and symbolism in each film highlighted five contrasting approaches to religion, validating Gramsci's claim about the variegated nature of Catholicism in Italy.¹ The ideological drive characterising these films also emerged. On the one hand, Cavani, Pasolini and Bellocchio employ a vast repertoire of people, quotes, places and symbols of the Catholic tradition to heavily criticise the status quo, albeit in very different ways. On the other hand, Olmi and Zeffirelli make use of the same repertoire to uphold the values of Catholicism.

The analysis of the reception of each film uncovered a multiplicity of different readings and understandings, linked not only to taste preferences, but also to religious sensitivities and, often, ideological agendas, further reinforcing the notion of the splintered quality of Italian Catholicism. Such a result, while certainly not surprising to those familiar with the Italian context, serves not only to challenge the image of Italy as a religiously uniform country, but also to highlight the tremendous cultural and social relevance of Catholicism, regardless of the directors' involvement in the practice itself.

The selection of the films examined in this thesis has met a number of criteria, including a precise geographical and historical timeframe, as investigations on the topic of religion and film should coincide, for matters of coherence, with a specific religious tradition within a specific period of time. As a result, I focused on Italian feature films released within the twenty-year period of "the new secularisation" (1958–1978). In particular, I resolved to focus on those directors who have employed religious themes and symbolism on multiple occasions throughout their careers and have repeatedly and openly discussed their relationship with Catholicism, as this approach provided a higher degree of reliability of their keen interest in the question. Within this framework, I selected five case studies in which Catholic themes and symbolism are openly addressed, all of which employ a vast

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 420.

repertoire of Catholic figures, places, rituals, values and symbols. Further, I based my analysis on the methodology suggested by Wright by organising it around the four areas of narrative, style, cultural and religious context, and reception. Given the importance and uniqueness of the Italian context as well as the pivotal role played in the country by the Church and the myriads of Catholic organisations, I paid meticulous attention to the contexts and receptions of the studied films.

Chapter One situated this study within the body of contemporary literature on religion and film. A rather young discipline, the research domain of religion and film remains characterised by a high degree of uncertainty and subjectivity. Nonetheless, an analysis of the existing methodologies revealed the presence of four common trends within the field, namely story-oriented, style-oriented, ethics-oriented and audience-oriented. After describing the relevant literature in each of these categories, I pointed out their issues and suggested an alternative based on previous works that have highlighted the relevance of the context surrounding the production and reception of films, such as the studies of Wright, Miles and Treveri Gennari.²

Chapter Two focused on the official Catholic policies in relation to cinema, from their origins to the 1970s. Since the very beginning, the not-so secret agenda of the Church has been to create a Catholic-oriented production, while at the same time seeking to educate authors and audiences through official documents as well as the activities of various organisations, associations and publications. The analyses of documents such as encyclicals, apostolic messages and exhortations uncovered the rather ambivalent attitude displayed by the Catholic hierarchies towards cinema, which ranges from diffidence and hostility to curiosity and admiration. Nevertheless, while the Church has developed a more sophisticated approach to cinema over time, it has never abandoned its pragmatic view of the medium as a vehicle for fostering Catholic ideology.

Catholic ideology is certainly expressed in Olmi's *E venne un uomo* (Chapter Three). The director identifies the peasant world as privileged interlocutor and repository of true Catholic values, namely genuine beliefs and commitment, solidarity, tolerance, obedience to authority and respect for all God's creations. For this purpose, a strong focus is placed on Roncalli's childhood spent in rural Lombardy as well as on his familial ties, with the

² See Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

portrayal of the Pope's summoning of the Second Vatican Council omitted altogether. Indeed, with the actual events still so fresh at the time of the film's release, Olmi felt compelled to use narrative and style to offer an extremely edifying portrayal of the Pope. Nonetheless, his efforts failed to impress the Catholic and non-Catholic worlds alike.

Orthodoxy and dogmatism are not witnessed in the case of Cavani's *Galileo* (Chapter Four), an extremely sharp, lucid portrayal of the Church's persecution of the Pisan scientist. Cavani, with insight and finesse, is able to condemn the ruthless and repressive nature of religious power, without denying or devaluing the social and cultural importance of Catholicism. Especially relevant in this sense are her decisions to dedicate a large proportion of the film to the "heretic" Giordano Bruno as well as portray Galileo as a profoundly and substantially Catholic man whose intentions were merely to understand the laws regulating our universe, without however disavowing God. In spite of this balanced and respectful approach, the film suffered a particularly unhappy fate, as it endured trouble with the censors and was banned from public television, effectively becoming one of the most poignant examples of the strength of the censorial forces at work in Italy.

A similar fate characterised Pasolini's *Teorema* (Chapter Five), with the director and producer even brought to trial before finally being acquitted. Further, the film, much like *Galileo*, highlights the variety of religious sensitivities within the Catholic world; for instance, despite being awarded the OCIC prize, it was condemned by the Vatican. The Catholic hierarchies took issue both with Pasolini's juxtaposition of traditional Catholic themes and symbolism with unorthodox elements and with the implications of *Teorema*'s message, namely the irrecoverable loss of a sacred dimension and spiritual authenticity. Indeed, the film reveals the director's ideological and ethical concerns for contemporary Italy, a country dominated by capitalist and middle-class values, in which Catholicism—until that point the only force able to provide an alternative to burgeoning consumerism—had buckled under the pressure of social, cultural and economic conformism.

This original and provocative association of the traditional Catholic repertoire with unorthodox elements and the consequent constant oscillation between the poles of sacralisation and desacralisation are also hallmarks of Bellocchio's *Nel nome del padre* (Chapter Five). The film is an unapologetic and imaginative attack on a number of different facets of Italian Catholicism such as the intellectual and sexual repression typical of Catholic education, the hypocritical attitude of the clergy and superstitious beliefs

embedded in the peasant world. Despite being set in 1958/1959, its timeliness and references to contemporaneity are undeniable, making its criticism even more poignant. Quite predictably, the Catholic press did not appreciate Bellocchio's biting satire and openly condemned the film.

Finally, *Fratello sole, sorella luna* (Chapter Seven), an interpretation of the life of Francesco d'Assisi, denounces its *ex-voto* inception and as such reveals not only Zeffirelli's celebratory intent, but also his rather superficial understanding of religion. This lack of problematisation is certainly reflected in the film, as Francesco is portrayed as a champion of Catholicism, encountering few obstacles both in his inner and in his outer journeys. Not only is his conversion a rather sudden change, taking the form of an intense yet short sickness, but the protagonist also displays little awareness of the mechanisms regulating social and religious power in his world. Overcoming all difficulties with his enthusiasm, playfulness and forgiving attitude, Francesco even manages to impress Pope Innocenzo III, as the film terminates with the papal recognition of the Franciscan order, underlining once again the saint's orthodoxy and conformity. This film also divided the press: while those newspapers with the widest circulations such as *Corriere della sera* and *Il Messaggero* praised it, both left-wing publications and *L'Osservatore Romano* criticised its lack of depth.

These five contrasting works are united in demonstrating the key importance of the cultural and social legacy of Catholicism to Italian cinema. Catholicism is not only relevant in its political implications, as a manifestation of the authority of a Catholic Church that could condemn the films through its various organisations and publications, thus affecting their visibility and circulation, but also because it shows the very strong appeal Catholicism has to the five directors. The fact that not only Catholic filmmakers such as Olmi and Zeffirelli, but also self-professed atheist and agnostic directors such as Pasolini, Bellocchio and Cavani repeatedly approach religious topics in their works is certainly testament to the key role played by Catholicism in Italian society, even during a more secular historical juncture such as between 1958 and 1978. While the directors' relationships with Catholicism may have evolved over time, manifestly so in the cases of Pasolini and Olmi, religion remained a crucial theme in their works and throughout their careers. Further, the different approaches taken in these five films reflect the fragmented and pluralistic quality of Italian Catholicism, as already acknowledged by Gramsci.

What emerges from the analysis of the films is not only the existence of two streams of ideologically opposed orientations to “the religious question,” but also, and more importantly, the unique and personal quality of each director’s relationship with Catholicism.

This fragmented character of Catholicism was further highlighted by an analysis of the films’ reception. The films have acted as prisms, further multiplying and illuminating a variety of religious identities in Italy. In many cases, the outcome was incredibly surprising. Not only are differences in reception particularly evident in the Italian and international Catholic press, as demonstrated by the fact that *Teorema* was awarded the OCIC prize in Venice yet condemned uniformly by the major Italian Catholic publications, but also among Italian Catholic press, as attested to by *Galileo*. Indeed, while the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico gave Cavani’s film a harsh judgement in *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, Cavallaro in *Rivista del Cinematografo*, Sorgi in *L’Osservatore Romano* and Rondi in *Il Tempo* gave it overall positive reviews. Furthermore, what is also rather perplexing is the rather tepid, or in some cases even outright negative, Catholic reception of *E venne un uomo* and *Fratello sole, sorella luna*. Given the strong emphasis placed by the Catholic Church on orthodoxy, as seen in Chapter Two, it would be legitimate to assume that two films so openly ideologically committed to Catholicism would be greatly and universally appreciated by the Catholic world. Yet, that was hardly the case: Olmi’s work was applauded by Paolo VI, *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche* and *L’Osservatore Romano*; nevertheless, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, while commending the directors’ efforts, could not help but point out the films’ shortcomings. The Catholic responses were even more unenthusiastic in the case of *Fratello sole, sorella luna*, which stood accused of a lack of depth and even genuine spiritual participation. Ultimately, the institutional Church’s efforts to create a monolithic, unequivocal and coherent system through its appeals and guidelines appear fruitless when confronted with the reality of the myriads of Catholic sensitivities existing in the country.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the impact that *Teorema*, *Galileo* and *Nel nome del padre* had, as well as the repressive and censorial reactions they prompted. These three films were not only condemned by a large part of the Catholic world, but also incurred considerable trouble with the censorial *apparatus* of a secular state. They were all declared “VM18” at the time of their release, with Pasolini even brought to trial for “obscenity,” only to later be acquitted. While the veto was lifted rather promptly in the case of *Galileo*, after Cavani consented to shorten the sequence of Bruno’s execution,

Teorema would remain “VM18” until 1991 and “VM14” until 1994, while *Nel nome del padre* would remain forbidden to minors until its DVD release in 2011. Further, *Nel nome del padre* and *Galileo* also encountered distribution problems: Bellocchio’s work was initially refused distribution through *Italnoleggio*, while Cavani’s film, after being sold by RAI to Cineriz, stayed in cinemas only very briefly. Finally, the implications of this censorship remain relevant today: while *Nel nome del padre* was broadcast by RAI in 1972, and *Teorema* in 1996, *Galileo* has yet to be broadcast on public television, almost fifty years after its release, a fact that has inexplicably received little attention. The contemporary relevance of *Galileo*, *Teorema* and *Nel nome del padre* is also evident by the fact that they have been shown on the big screen in recent times. Both *Galileo* and *Nel nome del padre* were re-presented in recent editions of the Venice Film Festival, in 2009 and 2011 respectively, with the two directors stressing the contemporaneity of their works. Similarly, *Teorema* has been shown in cinemas many times in the past few years, with a concentration in 2015, on the occasion of festivals and retrospectives for the fortieth anniversary of Pasolini’s death.

In addition to these crucial elements, a number of more significant and far-reaching conclusions can be drawn, which relate more generally to the relationship between Catholicism and film. Considering both *E venne un uomo* and *Fratello sole, sorella luna*, one cannot help but reflect on the consequences of the necessity to be faithful and compliant to Catholic guidelines. Indeed, strict religious adherence would compel artists to a more marked faithfulness to Catholic principles and a stronger hesitancy over straying from the path of a respectful portrayal. As a consequence, such products may end up being stifled in their creative potential, reduced to essentially dull professions of faith and declarations of allegiance, as indeed happened in both films. In particular, in the case of *E venne un uomo*, its director’s orthodoxy and zeal may be responsible for such an unimaginative product. Certainly, the enormous responsibility of doing justice to the very recently deceased Pope combined with the director’s genuine admiration for Roncalli and commitment to Catholicism ultimately translated into rather perplexing narrative and stylistic choices. This is evident in Olmi’s hesitancy to fully commit to either fiction or documentary and opting for the safer, yet problematic hybrid genre of “docu-fiction” as well as in his casting of Rod Steiger in the dual role the “mediator” and “narrator.” The result is not only a rather dull product, but also an uneven film, as there is an evident discrepancy between the first half, portraying a young Roncalli growing up in Sotto il Monte, and the second half, spent in the institutional Church. The first half, during which Olmi relied on what he knows and does best, focuses on the unglamorous daily lives of

ordinary people rather than on the realms of officialdom, while in the second half he is bound to faithfulness not only by using biographical constrictions but especially because of this adhesion to Catholic guidelines.

At this point, it might be useful to recall Pasolini's words in relation to *E venne un uomo*. Commenting on the rather one-dimensional portrayal of the Pope, Pasolini stated that, "There cannot be sainthood without contradiction and scandal."³ As discussed in Chapter Three, Pasolini's use of the word "scandal" refers to the revolutionary quality embedded in the Gospel message. Jesus's behaviour is scandalous insofar as it breaks with established traditions and expectations by fostering principles such as equality and solidarity and even advancing the promise of a heavenly overturning of the worldly social hierarchy, as attested to by his repeated reminders that "so the last will be the first, and the first the last."⁴ In light of this, one is left to reflect on the supposed incompatibility of provocative works such as *Galileo*, *Teorema* and *Nel nome del padre* with Catholicism. While remaining within the visual and narrative grammar of the traditional Catholic repertoire of themes and symbolism, they employ such a repertoire in the most innovative of ways. At the same time, however, they reiterate the importance and timeliness of radical Gospel values such as solidarity to the less fortunate, criticism of pharisaic and hypocritical behaviours and an emphasis on tolerance for different beliefs and convictions. That is to say, while they do break with certain Catholicism conventions, they are also in line with some of those aspects present in the Gospel and recently reiterated during the Second Vatican Council. This not only further illustrates the fragmentation and plurality embedded within Catholicism, but also challenges the narrow identification of Catholicism with orthodoxy, zeal and devotion, and possibly even the notion of what "being Catholic" might mean.

Limitations of the Research and Future Perspectives

While I sought to pursue a rigorous, coherent investigation, I am aware that a number of issues need to be addressed. First, this research does not aim to exhaust all possible approaches to religion, but rather to concentrate on five relevant examples in order to understand Catholicism in a limited geo-historical context. In addition, determining a

³ Non c'è santità senza la contraddizione e lo scandalo." For more information, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, "E venne un uomo," in *E venne un uomo [A Man Named John]*, eds. Giacomo Gambetti and Claudio Sorigi. (Milan: Garzanti, 1965), inside front cover.

⁴ See Mt 20:16 and Mt 5:3–12.

person's religious attitude from their films is a delicate operation that raises questions of authorship as well as of periodisation. I have already addressed the question of authorship in the Introduction, arguing for the validity of considering the films selected in this research as reflective of their directors' positions in relation to Catholicism and also reflecting the notion of "accountability" and its relevance to the Church, which has a history of displaying a prosecutorial—even scapegoating—attitude towards individuals. Further, a person's beliefs are hardly crystallised in an eternal formula, but rather they continuously evolve, taking different shapes and forms. However, it is not my intention to define the directors' relationships with religion once and for all, but rather to consider what the film selected tells us about the person's approach to Catholicism within a precise historical, social and cultural framework. Moreover, situating the question of religion and film within a specific religious tradition may exclude non-Catholic audiences, who might find the practice of recognising the repertoire of Catholic themes and symbolism rather difficult. However, in my work, this was a theoretical necessity in order to avoid generalised claims of what religion in film is. Nevertheless, my intention is not to foreclose additional, different readings of the five films selected, nor to limit their interpretation to only one possible meaning.

Finally, as mentioned in the Introduction, other films by Italian directors could have been included in this project, such as Federico Fellini's *Roma* (1972), Marco Ferreri's *L'udienza (Papal Audience)*, 1972), Giuliano Montaldo's *Giordano Bruno* (1973) and Elio Petri's *Todo Modo* (1976). In particular, the exclusion of Fellini may appear strange given the regularity with which his relationship with Catholicism has been studied.⁵ In particular, the academic literature has focused on his friendship with religious figures such as the Jesuit Father Angelo Arpa as well as the presence of Catholic elements in his work—one has to think only of his portrayal of religious processions in *Le notti di Cabiria (Nights of Cabiria)*, 1957), the "miracle scene" in *La dolce vita* (1960) and the hilarious sequence of the Vatican "fashion show" in *Roma* (1972). However, while Fellini's films do present references to Catholic themes and symbolism, such elements are rarely central to the narrative. I would argue that Catholicism in Fellini's films acts as a background, or

⁵ Among the most recent studies, see Tomaso Subini, "Il Caso de 'La Dolce Vita'" ["The Case of 'La Dolce Vita'"], in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia. Vol. II* [Through the Screen. Cinema and Catholic Culture in Italy. Vol. II], eds. Ruggero Eugeni and Dario E. Viganò (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2006), 239–256; Andrea Minuz, "'Mariofanie.' Religiosità popolare e riti dello spettacolo nel cinema di Fellini degli anni Cinquanta" ["'Mariofanie.' Popular Religiosity and Spectacular Rites in Fellini's Cinema"], in *Le religioni e le arti. Percorsi interdisciplinari in età contemporanea*, eds. Sergio Botta and Tessa Canella (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2015), 31–47; Victoria Surliuga, "The 'Fantastic' Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema." In *Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery*, ed. Regina Hansen (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 219–231.

rather, as *one of the many* aspects of Italian culture and society, never quite granted the role of the protagonist. While Fellini is certainly fascinated by the Church's penchant for spectacle and ritualisation as well as by popular folklore, his works are not cinematic reflections on aspects of Catholicism in the way in which the five films analysed in this research are.

This research set out to inaugurate a mode of analysis that not only grants equal attention to the filmic and religious components, but also allows a dialogue between the film and the context of its inception and reception, thus shedding light on the lesser known ties and connections between them. Similarly, by focusing on a plurality of approaches and bringing the inherent fragmentation of Catholicism to the forefront, I hope to have suggested a more dynamic alternative to the analysis of religion limited to a single director and thus discussed the broad portrayal of Catholicism in a particular period. In this sense, this research also suggested a model for the analysis of films presenting Catholic themes and symbolism during different junctures in Italian history, such as the papacy of Giovanni Paolo II (1978–2005), or even in relation to a “post-secular society.” While the latter has been investigated at the European level by the book *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema*,⁶ a similar examination in Italy is lacking. A large number of films would certainly constitute interesting case studies for such a research project. These films include other works by the directors explored in this thesis, such as Olmi's *CamminaCammina (Keep Walking, 1983)* and *Il villaggio di cartone (The Cardboard Village, 2011)* and Bellocchio's *L'ora di religione (My Mother's Smile, 2002)* and *Bella addormentata (2012)*, or films such as Nanni Moretti's *La messa è finita (The Mass Is Ended, 1985)* and *Habemus Papam (2011)*, Renzo Arbore's *Il pap'occhio (In the Pope's Eye, 1980)*, Pupi Avati's *Magnificat (1993)*, Ferzan Ozpetek's *Cuore sacro (Sacred Heart, 2005)* and Alice Rohrwacher's *Corpo Celeste (2011)*.

⁶ Costică Brădăţan and Camil Ungureanu, eds. *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

Appendix I

Email from Settore Service Teche RAI re: *Galileo's* broadcast on RAI channels

[CG] Settore service teche  18 aprile 2016 10:12 

A: Silvia Angeli
R: trasmissione del film "Galileo" sui canali RAI

Gentile utente
Purtroppo proprio il film no abbiamo un assemblamento del 13 settembre 1968 con varie sequenze del film
Cordiali saluti.

[Mostra di più da Silvia Angeli](#)



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Appendix II

Email from Settore Service Teche RAI re: the broadcast of *Teorema* and *Nel nome del padre* on RAI channels

[CG] Settore service teche  23 maggio 2016 08:30 

A: Silvia Angeli
R: trasmissione "Nel nome del padre" e "teorema"


[Gent.ma](#) Sig.ra Angeli possiamo confermarle che i due film sono stati trasmessi in Rai "Nel nome del padre" nel 1972, mentre "Teorema" ne abbiamo traccia nel 1996 film 35 quindi l'originale, ma non abbiamo altre messe in onda precedenti.

Cordiali saluti

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Fratello sole, sorella luna, directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1972; Italy: Rai Cinema - 01 Distribution, 2014), DVD.

Galileo, directed by Liliana Cavani (1968; Italy-Bulgaria: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

Nel nome del padre, directed by Marco Bellocchio (1972; Italy: CG Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

Teorema, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1968; Italy: Medusa Home Video, 2012), DVD.