

# Martin Scorsese's Divine Comedy

Movies and Religion



Catherine O'Brien

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# Martin Scorsese's Divine Comedy

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## Introduction

A statue of a Madonna and Child in a New York kitchen appears in the opening shot of Martin Scorsese's *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1967–9); and the final image of *Silence* (2016) is of a handmade crucifix glowing in the flames of a crematory fire in seventeenth-century Japan. It is inarguable that there is a Catholic dimension to Scorsese's filmography that can be traced from the Marian icon in his first full-length feature right through to his movie about Jesuit priests that was released around fifty years later. With due respect paid to the scale of the task, the following chapters engage with that particular cinematic trajectory and take seriously the oft-quoted words of the director himself: 'My whole life has been movies and religion. That's it. Nothing else.'

Scorsese was born in 1942, educated by the Sisters of Charity and received his religious instruction before the mood of *aggiornamento* that was heralded by Pope John XXIII's instigation of Vatican II (the Second Vatican Council of 1962–5), which was an effort to modernize the Catholic Church. Indeed, religion(s) played a role in the young boy's life, even down to the fact that his father Charles earned pragmatic money by lighting the stoves for his Jewish neighbours on the Sabbath. Although a cradle Catholic himself, Scorsese does not recall his parents being particularly devout, although he once revealed that 'there were cardinals, way back when' on his mother's side of the family (in Wilson 2011: 91). However, he clarifies that his mother and father 'were working out how one lives a good life on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour basis, with responsibilities, and obligations and decency' (in Martin 2016).

Many critics muse over the detail that Scorsese was an altar boy at St Patrick's Old Cathedral on Mott Street – the first Catholic cathedral for the diocese of New York (and now a basilica) – that was only one block away from his family's home in Little Italy. In those days the Mass was in Latin and the altar server recited the responses. Fr Principe, a diocesan priest whose influence on the young Martin Scorsese is repeatedly acknowledged by the director himself, once explained the overwhelming effect of the dramatic liturgy on his protégé 'in this very large church with this absolutely mind-boggling, beautiful sanctuary,

with these magnificent statues and magnificent organ' (in Wernblad 2011: 18). Scorsese talks about his interest in the drama of Holy Week, which he would eventually strive to capture in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988); and he has now adapted the novel *Silence* by Shusaku Endo (1923–96), a writer who has been characterized as 'a Holy Saturday author describing the darkness of waiting for Easter light to break into our world' (Fujimura 2016). Before the young Scorsese was 'discharged' from his duties (reportedly because he was late for Mass), he served at a number of funerals, and he evidently gained an early introduction to the rituals of death – a memory that he incorporates into *The Departed* (2006) when the young Colin Sullivan (Conor Donovan) swings the thurible of incense during a Requiem Mass.

Much is also made of Scorsese's one year in the Minor Seminary on 86th Street in the Archdiocese of New York, when he felt that he had the calling to become a Catholic priest, although he obviously found that he did not have a traditional religious vocation – a change of heart (as he readily admits) that was provoked by a growing interest in the female sex. As a result of his low grades, Scorsese was not admitted to Fordham (the Jesuit institution) but found a place to study Liberal Arts at New York University; and, enthused by one of the tutors called Haig Manoogian, he chose to focus on cinema. But filmmaking can be regarded as a vocation as well as an industry, and it is one to which Scorsese has dedicated his life. He famously admitted: 'I guess the passion I had for religion wound up mixed with film, and now, as an artist, in a way, I'm both gangster and priest' (in Kelly 1996: 31) and he has expressed a 'fascination, not necessarily with the Church, but with the teachings and trying to understand what the teachings are about' (in Kakutani 1999: 103).

Scorsese has remarked on his adherence to Catholicism in his younger days: 'Well, I did believe it, every word of it. I wouldn't touch meat on Friday, and I believed I would go to hell if I missed Mass on Sunday' (in Flatley 1999: 5). Discussing his faith during conversations that accompanied the release of *Silence*, he commented: 'I trusted the church, because it made sense, what they preached, what they taught. I understood that there's another way to think, outside the closed, hidden, frightened, tough world I grew up in' (in Elie 2016).

However, Scorsese was a young man at a time that the Catholic Church was 'struggling though an agonized period of growth and transition' (Greeley 1967: 295). Vatican II resulted in a number of key constitutional documents (see Tanner 2012) and, for the Catholic in the pew, there were changes to the liturgy that were coming into force at the same time as American society was

experiencing the Sexual Revolution and the war in Vietnam. Although Scorsese stopped being 'a regular churchgoer' in the 1960s, he stated in an interview in 2016 with the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*:

I believe in the tenets of Catholicism. I'm not a doctor of the church. I'm not a theologian who could argue the Trinity. I'm certainly not interested in the politics of the institution. ... But the idea of the Resurrection, the idea of the Incarnation, the powerful message of compassion and love – that's the key. The sacraments, if you are allowed to take them, to experience them, help you stay close to God. (In Spadaro 2016)

In 1966, Scorsese wrote a screenplay called *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* that begins with a quotation from Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951): 'God is not a torturer. ... He only wants us to be merciful with ourselves' and involves a group of eighteen-year-olds, including one called J.R. (Scorsese's alter ego) who appears in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* and then reappears renamed Charlie (both roles played by Harvey Keitel) in *Mean Streets* (1973). The teenagers go on a three-day Catholic retreat (as Scorsese himself did) run by Jesuit priests – thereby introducing a reference to the Society of Jesus, founded by St Ignatius Loyola, in this early artistic effort that will reach its apogee in *Silence*. As Richard McBrien explains, 'The Catholic sacramental vision "sees" God in all things (St. Ignatius Loyola): other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the environment, the world at large, the whole cosmos' (1994: 9); and many critics of Scorsese have identified an immanentist and analogical sensibility in his films (see, for example, Blake 2000: 30–1; and Casillo 2006: xii) and the kind of approach that tends 'to emphasize the presence of God in the world' and 'the dangers of a creation in which God is only marginally present' (see Greeley 2000: 5). Indeed, Scorsese once confirmed that his 'films would be inconceivable without the presence of religion' (in Monda 2007: 151).

In *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* a scene takes place in a Chinese restaurant when a character named Bud cradles a cup of hot tea in his hands and raises it, as the priest would lift up the chalice at the consecration during Mass, and says mockingly, 'Introibo ad altare Dei' (in Kelly 1980: 43) ('I go unto the altar of God'), the Latin words spoken by a priest at the start of the Tridentine Mass. In *Silence*, a Jesuit missionary named Fr Sebastian Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) utters those very words as he begins to say Mass for the hidden Christians in Tomogi village; and Fr Francisco Garupe (Adam Driver) takes on the role of the altar server, with which Scorsese would once have been familiar, and responds, 'Ad deum qui laetificat juventum meum' (To God who giveth joy to my youth).

As he wrote his *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* script, Scorsese presumably did not realize that he would one day make a film about Catholic missionaries that would premiere in Rome at the Palazzo San Carlo to an audience of Jesuits, or that the director himself would be granted a private audience with (the Jesuit) Pope Francis the following day.

### A contemporary Dante

While many books on Scorsese take a chronological approach to the films of this celebrated Italian American director, I have chosen a thematic structure that was inspired by a remarkable Italian from a much earlier era: Dante Alighieri. Although Dante (1265–1321) never visited New York for several very obvious reasons, he is honoured by a sculpture erected in 1921 that stands in a small garden across from the Lincoln Center in Manhattan – it is a symbol of the historical links between the United States and Italy, spanning the thousands of miles that were traversed by Scorsese's grandparents as they sailed across the Atlantic to make a new life for themselves. This geographical bond with Italy has been repeatedly recognized by Scorsese, most obviously in the moving documentary that he made about his parents, *Italianamerican* (1974), and in his own tribute to Italian cinema entitled *My Voyage to Italy* (1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that commentators have frequently made allusions to one of Italy's cultural heroes in their analyses of Scorsese's work, with notable intertextual links between Scorsese's films and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the poem in 100 *cantos* that charts a pilgrimage through the realms of the Afterlife towards God. First guided by the poet Virgil, the Pilgrim spirals down through the darkness of the nine circles of Hell in *Inferno*; in the morning light he begins to climb the steep Mountain of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Purgatorio*; and he finally encounters heavenly glory in *Paradiso*.

In his biography of Scorsese, Vincent LoBrutto finds inspiration in *The Divine Comedy* for his early chapter headings. Relating events from the director's childhood, LoBrutto describes the 'Paradiso' of an idyllic life in the house in Queens where Scorsese was born, followed by the 'Purgatorio' of illness. In 1950, when the Scorsese family had to move back (for undisclosed reasons) to the Lower East Side, the director witnessed the 'Inferno' conditions in the Bowery – an area that would eventually figure in his film *Gangs of New York* (2002). Scorsese himself describes the change as traumatic: "Thrown into that

area at that point, having severe asthma, it was a difference of day and night. It was something in my mind that was idyllic: suddenly cast out of Paradise, so to speak, into the diaspora' (in Martin 2016). Commenting on the violence that he saw in the streets as a child, the director explained that 'the worst thing was the thinking, the medieval kind of tribal way of thinking' (Scorsese 2017a) – a way of thinking with which Dante would have been familiar.

In fact, the Dantean allusions have been frequently made by commentators throughout Scorsese's career. In his student film *It's Not Just You, Murray!* (1964), Scorsese's mother Catherine plays her first cinematic maternal role and encourages her onscreen son, the eponymous Murray, to 'Eat first' – a line that 'has heavy antecedents in [La Pia's] note in *The Divine Comedy* [Purg. V] where Dante is told, in effect, to take care of the body' (see Kelly 1980: 72).

The streets of New York in *Taxi Driver* (1976) receive particularly 'hellish' comparisons in the observations of Christopher Deacy (2001: 115), among others. Comparing *Raging Bull* (1980) to *Rocky* (Avildsen 1976) would be like the difference 'between Dante's Inferno and Hollywood heaven,' claimed Andrew Sarris (in Rausch 2010: 82–3); while Roger Ebert described Frank Pierce (Nicolas Cage) 'as a paramedic whose runs through Hell's Kitchen are like a bus route through Dante's Inferno' (2008: 231) in *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999). When *The Wolf of Wall Street* was released in December 2013, several reviewers made explicit reference to Dante's vision of Hell. Indeed, in reflecting on his role as Jordan Belfort, Leonardo DiCaprio described Mark Hanna (Matthew McConaughey) as 'the devil that leads me to Dante's Inferno' (in Dean 2013: 4).

The dialogue of *Cape Fear* (1991) markedly foregrounds the Dantean theme when Max Cady (Robert De Niro) confirms that he has indeed read *Inferno* (a copy of which is visible among the books on the shelf of his prison cell) when he informs Sam Bowden (Nick Nolte): 'I'm Virgil, and I'm guiding you through the gates of Hell.' Serendipitously, for the purposes of my argument, Scorsese himself drew attention to his personal knowledge of *The Divine Comedy* when he commented on his first impressions of Nicholas Pileggi's book *Wiseguy*, which was the source text for *GoodFellas* (1990): 'It seemed that Nick was taking us through the different levels of purgatory and hell in the underworld, like Virgil or like Dante' (in Schickel 2013).

Drawing on this popular analogy, this study expands these brief inferences and envisions Martin Scorsese as a contemporary Dante, with his *oeuvre* offering the dimensions of an onscreen *Divine Comedy*. Scorsese offers visions of (a Living) Hell; (a Daily) Purgatory and a striving for Paradise that contemplates

the Divine, from the perspective that Hell and Heaven 'can be anticipated even now. And this can help us to make sense not only of the existence of hell but also of the compatibility of hell with the infinity of the divine love' (Barron 2011: 256). Scorsese's films present a range of human virtues, understandable foibles and outright wickedness that would enable a twenty-first-century poet to imagine the protagonists' post-mortem positions in colourful terms, as Dante did with the characters in his epic fourteenth-century poem.

Obviously, with the exception of Lazarus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and Rose (and her ghostly companions) in *Bringing Out the Dead*, Scorsese's focus is on his characters' mortal existence. However, earthly actions have consequences whether or not one believes in life after death. David Sterritt considers *Shutter Island* (2010) to be 'an inspired instance of cinema *hauntology*' which 'displaces its near-homonym *ontology* (i.e. that which is grounded presence and being) with the figure of the ghost as an incomprehensible intruder on our world' (2015: 106). When the inhabitants of Dante's Hell recount their own tales, 'the sins they describe reveal that life on Earth is just as horrific as the experience of Hell – that the world, like the *Inferno*, is full of damned and tormented souls' (Parker and Parker 2013). The screenwriter and director Paul Schrader, whose Calvinist upbringing has served as a dynamic counterpoint to Scorsese's Catholicism during their collaborations, has pointed out: 'We are both quite moral, we believe decisions have consequences. There is right, there is wrong, and in the end, there is a price to pay' (in Wernblad 2011: 21).

While Dante was known for the *dolce stil novo* – the sweet new style that indicated 'a unique poetic voice' (Shaw 2014) – Scorsese brought a fresh dynamism to New Hollywood as one of the Movie Brats, alongside Francis Ford Coppola and Brian De Palma in the 1970s. It was the poet Boccaccio who added the adjective 'divine' to the title of Dante's poem (Reynolds 2006: 116), but one of the reasons that this epic medieval work is called a 'Comedy' is that it is written in Italian (rather than Latin), using the language of everyday life, including vulgar vocabulary. One of the infernal demons, Barbariccia, 'sounds the advance, not with a bugle but a fart' (Reynolds 2006: 178); and while Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (whose version is used throughout this book) translates a line in Canto XXVIII of *Inferno* as 'His heart was visible, and the dismal sack / That maketh excrement of what is eaten' (Dante Alighieri 1867), other translators are not afraid to use the word 'shit'.

Scorsese's films have been criticized for the recurrent deployment of expletives, most obviously in the depictions of the gangster community and the stockbrokers of Wall Street. Indeed, at the opening night of *Mean Streets* (1973),

Mrs Scorsese was keen to talk to members of the audience and say, 'I just want you to know, we never used that word in the house' (in Schickel 2013). It is a stance that she reprises in *Casino* (1995) in her role as a gangster's mother, when she reprimands her son Piscano for his repeated use of bad language. As a result, Scorsese's 'family film' *Hugo* (2011) was something of a surprise to many viewers (see, for example, Keyser 1992: 159).

One of the Pilgrim's most joyful meetings in *The Divine Comedy* is with Beatrice – a character who is reportedly based on Beatrice Portinari, a young woman who captivated Dante's heart when he was aged nine. He was about eighteen when he next saw her, but she 'then later still cut him dead, to his great sorrow' (Shaw 2014). Dante wrote:

Whenever and wherever she appeared, in the hope of receiving her miraculous salutation I felt I had not an enemy in the world. Indeed, I glowed with a flame of charity which moved me to forgive all who had ever injured me; and if at that moment someone had asked me a question, about anything, my only reply would have been: 'Love,' with a countenance clothed with humility. (In Royal 1999: 19–20)

As a result, Beatrice left the poet sorrowful when she married another man and died at the age of twenty-four in 1290. In capturing Beatrice in verse, Dante transformed his lost love into a representation of 'ideal virtue, incomparable beauty, a paradisiacal being' and, therefore, 'a new form of allegory: it is not personification or symbolism, but the realisation that actual persons can be images of qualities beyond themselves, ... leading to the creation of the convincing, unforgettable characters who people the *Commedia*, and at the same time represent sins or virtues' (Reynolds 2006: 24).

Throughout Scorsese's feature films there are a number of beautiful women (usually in the form of illusive blondes) who entrance the male protagonists as well as leading them to despair. Although Scorsese's celluloid heroines do not share the exceptional sanctity of Dante's Beatrice, they manifest a magnetism that generates male heartache when they leave the scene, including the Girl (*Who's That Knocking at My Door*); Betsy (*Taxi Driver*); Vickie (*Raging Bull*); Paulette (*New York Stories: Life Lessons*); Countess Ellen (*The Age of Innocence*); Ginger (*Casino*) and Naomi (*The Wolf of Wall Street*). Explaining that he understood the tone of *The Age of Innocence* (1993), Scorsese mentioned 'the spirit of the exquisite romantic pain. The idea that the mere touching of a woman's hand would suffice. The idea that seeing her across the room would keep him alive for another year. That's something I guess that is part of me' (in Ebert 2008: 117).



In *Casino*, Ginger (Sharon Stone) is first spotted on a TV security monitor and Sam Rothstein (Robert De Niro) is shown 'falling so instantly in love that the image becomes a freeze-frame' (Ebert 2008: 144). However, as Barbara Reynolds points out, 'For all his idealization of women in his love poems, there was an element in Dante of what is now called chauvinism' (2006: 336). Some feminist critics of Scorsese would have no difficulty in applying such an appellation to the director.

While Dante engaged with the society around him in his magnificent poem, he was also concerned 'with the state of his own psyche' (Turner 1993: 133) and offers a confessional approach to which Scorsese could relate. Discussing the 'religious stuff' in his first films, Scorsese admitted that he found it embarrassing to watch because 'it's just so personal'; but he clarified that he would continue in this vein because 'it's got to be done, and you just have to be honest with yourself' (in Kelly 1980: 19–20). He once stated that he 'became a director in order to express my whole self, and also my relationship with religion, which is crucial' (in Monda 2007: 155). Having revealed that he had not been to the Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation since 1965, he added: 'I've been confessing most of the time on film since then, so it doesn't matter. My own friends who are priests, they look at my films and they know' (in Rensin 2006: 354).

It has frequently been reported that Fr Principe, who encouraged Scorsese's love of motion pictures, once remarked on the director's first productions: 'I've always told you, "Too much Good Friday, not enough Easter Sunday."' As Dante's Pilgrim enters Hell on the evening of Good Friday, such a viewpoint would suggest that Dante's *Inferno* (rather than his *Paradiso*) would be the chief reference point for a Scorsese audience. However, in 2012 Scorsese himself contacted the Jesuit publication *America* (which had incorrectly attributed the 'Good Friday' comment to his university teacher Haig Manoogian) to identify the precise source of the citation and to add a further clarification:

This remark has often been repeated, but seeing it once again in print in *America*, I remembered Father Principe's exact words to me, and I would like to take this opportunity to correct the record. It was after a small screening of my movie *Taxi Driver* in 1976. My then publicist had invited a small group of friends to the Plaza Hotel afterward, including Father Principe. His response to the movie after the screening was, 'I'm glad you ended it on Easter Sunday and not on Good Friday.' This was a personal remark to me, as he knew me well. But over the years it has often been quoted in a shorter version, which has quite a different meaning. (In Reidy 2012)

Indeed, the revised quotation does markedly change the perspective. In the first season of *The Sopranos*, there is a humorous scene in the episode entitled '46 Long', in which 'Martin Scorsese' (played by Anthony Caso) arrives at a nightclub and hears Christopher Moltisanti (Michael Imperioli) shout out, 'Marty! *Kundun*, I liked it!' Although Scorsese has indicated that members of the Mafia have spoken positively about *Mean Streets*, it is less certain whether his 1997 film about the Dalai Lama is a firm favourite within the criminal fraternity, but the joke in *The Sopranos* serves as a playful reminder that Scorsese has not only set his sights on gangsters. The bloodletting and profane language, for which the director is particularly well known, are only part of the story.

\* \* \*

This monograph is divided into three main spheres; but while key films and characters may predominate under a particular heading, there are certainly overlaps and intersections in relation to the analysis. Dante's Pilgrim noted that members of one family might end up in different realms of the Afterlife, and the same holds true for various aspects of the movies that make up Scorsese's earthly *Divine Comedy* as the protagonists struggle with issues of morality and faith. Scorsese himself chooses not to distinguish between his works of fiction and documentaries: 'You can't say one is better than the other. It's apples and oranges, I guess. But in a sense, in the documentaries, there is more of a truth that you get at. Something happens that you can't really do in dramatic films' (in Kelly 1980: 31). However, this study focuses on his feature films (with some tangential references to religious themes in his documentaries) out of a (no doubt wise) sense of reluctance towards allocating real human beings to places within a Heaven and Hell structure. Many of Scorsese's characters in feature films are based on recognizable people, but they are roles created for the screen. As Scorsese explained when discussing *GoodFellas*, he is creating the story of 'Henry Hill' as opposed to the real Henry Hill – on film it is 'purely an imaginative version of this guy' (Smith 1999a: 149). Dante himself had no qualms about putting living people into hot places, even leaving a couple of popes in his *Inferno*. I am not so bold.

\* \* \*

**Part One: Inferno: Visions of Hell** presents the infernal environments in Scorsese's filmography via the 'Hell on earth' approach recognizable in his mise en scène and the murderers and/or double-crossers who play a significant role in this landscape. Here are Scorsese's most ruthless protagonists who commit

violence and fraud (often with a sideline in avarice, lust and gluttony); and the overshadowing theme of treachery, which can be identified in films that range from Scorsese's student production *It's Not Just You, Murray!* to *Silence*. Dante places murderers, fraudsters and traitors in the lowest reaches of his Hell – the most famous region described in his poem. For some viewers, it is the villains in Scorsese's films who also endure in the memory, such as Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* and Max Cady in *Cape Fear* (two memorable personalities interpreted by Robert De Niro); Tommy DeVito in *GoodFellas* and Nicky Santoro in *Casino* (both played by Joe Pesci); Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson) in *The Departed*; and Andrew Laeddis in *Shutter Island* and Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (with Leonardo DiCaprio taking on two roles that cause suffering by death and deception, respectively).

**Part Two: Purgatory: The Three Story Mountain** reflects on the Deadly Sins; and on the protagonists whose everyday struggle to find happiness might be reflected in the lyrics of the song 'You Can't Always Get What You Want' by The Rolling Stones – a group of musicians who have also been the topic of a Scorsese documentary, *Shine a Light* (2008), and whose music often enhances his soundtracks.

**Part Three: Paradise (Lost or Found?)** contemplates Scorsese's direct cinematic engagement with organized religion (notably Christianity and Buddhism) and the nature of the Divine. In the words of Thomas Aquinas: 'Of a pair of opposites, one is understood by means of the other, as darkness is understood in terms of light; so we come to understand what evil is by considering good' (in McCabe 2010: 53).

The Episcopal bishop of New York, Paul Moore, gave Scorsese a copy of *Silence* after a screening of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and he eventually read it while travelling in Japan, where he had gone to act in a Kurosawa film about Vincent van Gogh: '*Last Temptation* was where I was at that time in my own search, and that left off on one track, and this took up another track. This went deeper' (in Martin 2016). Discussing *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese admitted: 'I've always taken that Word – the idea of love – very seriously. It may not be a stylish thing these days to say you're a believer, especially to say it so often in the papers, as I've been saying it. But I really think Jesus had the right idea' (in Corliss 1999: 117).

In taking the particular journey of writing this book I am indebted to many of the leading film scholars and the experts on Dante (such as Lansing 2000) who have paved the way, especially as a study of the biography of Dante offers an opportunity to draw some interesting parallels between the medieval Italian poet and the Italian American film director: ‘The enduring image of love that Dante uses is that of light’ (Casey 2009: 282); and cinema is a way of painting with light.

During Dante’s lifetime Florence was ‘a vibrant and prosperous city, an international mercantile and banking centre’ with a ‘flourishing textile trade’ (Shaw 2014) – a description that would fit Scorsese’s home town of New York where his parents, who were the children of immigrants, worked in the garment industry. Dante is believed to have been about five feet five inches in height and ‘may have indulged in herbal stimulants which induced a heightened state of consciousness’ (Reynolds 2006: xiii); and Scorsese – not a tall man himself as he underlines by calling himself ‘Shorty’ in his cameo role in *Mean Streets* – was reportedly not a stranger to narcotics (see Ebert 2008: 61). Dante’s famous line: ‘All hope abandon, ye who enter in!’ might be contrasted with the memorable quotations from Scorsese’s films: ‘Are you talkin’ to me?’ or ‘Funny how?’ in *Taxi Driver* and *GoodFellas*, respectively.

While Scorsese considered joining the priesthood, Dante is reported to have become a novice of the Franciscan Order for a short period when he was young (Reynolds 2006: 93). While families were open to religious vocations in the Old Country during medieval times, there was less enthusiasm among Italian American Catholics in the twentieth century for the priesthood, with the realization that ‘children could better serve the family and themselves by building economic and political roles in the secular world, the primary site of power in American society’ (Gambino 2011: 231). However, the loss to the religious life is compensated by the artistic legacy that both poet and director have provided. As Andrew Greeley argues, it is ‘unlikely, although not absolutely impossible, that a person who is not Catholic could be responsible for such monumental exercises of Catholic sensibility’ as *The Divine Comedy* and *Mean Streets* (2000: 18).

In *The Divine Comedy* the Pilgrim finds himself lost in a dark wood in the year 1300 (when the poem is set) in the middle of his life – which would be around the age of thirty-five, given the biblical lifespan of seventy years (as revealed in Ps. 90.10). Robert Royal points out: ‘It is precisely at the height of his human life that he finds himself deeply lost. In the modern world, successful people often feel a hollowness at midlife about the achievements and possessions supposed to make us happy’ (1999: 37). As Dante scholar Prue Shaw (2014) indicates, the

poet's words speak to anyone who is 'facing the future with confusion, anxiety, despair. Anyone (in modern terms) who has sought counselling, seen a therapist, had a breakdown.' Scorsese was thirty-five in November 1977. He had enjoyed success with *Taxi Driver* but was soon to enter a troubled period, with the poor critical reception of *New York, New York* (1977), relationship troubles and an addiction to drugs that led to hospitalization, and his own dark days.

Dante loved music and there is evidence that 'his poems were set to music, one at least by his friend Casella, who was a singer as well as a composer' (Reynolds 2006: 8) – and no one could ignore the importance of music in Scorsese's films (with his friend Robbie Robertson sometimes working on the soundtrack), as well as the documentaries that deal specifically with musicians such as *The Last Waltz* (1978) and *George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (2011). In particular, there is a good deal of music in Dante's *Purgatorio*, with reports of memorable celestial melodies.

Dante also drew pictures – in *La Vita Nuova* 'he speaks of himself drawing figures of angels on wooden boards' before he would create angels in his poetry in words (Reynolds 2006: 8) – a detail that might evoke Scorsese's own use of storyboards before transferring his ideas to the screen. In *La Vita Nuova* Dante accompanies his poems with 'a commentary in prose' (Reynolds 2006: 18) that records his feelings when he wrote the work and his own analysis of its content – a forerunner of the director's commentaries that are now available on many DVDs.

Of course, one of the obvious dangers with this Dante/Scorsese analogy is to rejoice in glib parallels and to do injustice to the intricacies of Dante's poem or to the richness of Scorsese's filmography. When one reads that Dante 'was trained in horsemanship for battle and in the use of the lance, the sword and the mace' or that he enjoyed hunting with hounds and hawks and regretted 'spending too much time in such masculine pursuits, to the neglect of the company of women' (Reynolds 2006: 9), any analogy with the famously asthmatic, five-times married New Yorker admittedly breaks down. (Although the director's admirers certainly rejoice that the young Scorsese learnt his craft by passing more time in the cinema than on the sports field.) In embracing this structure, my intention (and it is too much of a cliché to mention which road is paved with the good ones) is to underscore the ongoing influence of the Italian poet, while demonstrating a fresh way of exploring the complexities of the Italian American director's films.

Part One

# Inferno: Visions of Hell



## Hell on Earth

Midway upon the journey of our life  
I found myself within a forest dark,  
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say  
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,  
Which in the very thought renews the fear.

So bitter is it, death is little more;  
But of the good to treat, which there I found,  
Speak will I of the other things I saw there. (*Inf.* I)

Finding himself lost in a gloomy forest at the start of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the Pilgrim is heartened when he sees the sun and believes that he has found an escape route, only to be thwarted by a panther, a lion and a she-wolf who impede his path. As a result, he 'must begin by descending into an understanding of the evil in which he has become unconsciously entrapped before he will be free for the ascent' (Royal 1999: 41).

In *Inferno*, which is the first part of his epic journey into a landscape of sin and redemption, Dante presents a vision of human existence in which 'Hell abides both in the afterlife and on Earth. ... Hell is as much a spiritual condition as a physical space of bodily punishment' (Parker and Parker 2013). On the cinema screen Martin Scorsese has also succeeded in depicting an earthly environment in which men and women perform the type of evil deeds that ensure that Hell becomes 'a metaphor of present human experience' (Deacy 2012: 129), and the kind of state in which people currently live 'rather than simply a punishment imposed from the outside' (Casey 2009: 289). With the odd exception, Scorsese's films do not feature the Afterlife itself, but his protagonists are already living an Eternal Life that begins at birth according to Christian teaching: 'The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, "Look, here it



is," or, "There it is." For behold, the kingdom of God is among you' (Lk 17.20-21). St Paul writes of Heaven as appearing 'to embrace both a future reality and a spiritual sphere or realm that coexists with the material world of space and time' (in Deacy 2012: 79).

Catholic teaching 'affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. ... The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom man [*sic*] alone can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 1035). There are passages in the Bible that make explicit reference to Hell as the destination for people who have lived a wicked life: Isa. 66.22-24; Dan. 12.2; Mt. 18.6-9; 25.31-46; Mk 9.42-48; 2 Thess. 1.6-10; Jude 7, 13; and Rev. 14.9-11; 20.10, 14-15. All artistic visions of Hell depend 'on a dialectic, the essential content of which Dante exposed, and this he carried out with extreme and relentless clarity, even though it was not he who invented the dialectic' (Balthasar 1986: 90).

Indeed, the forerunners of Dante's *Inferno* have been identified in a number of literary and religious texts, including the pagan poet Virgil's descriptions of the Underworld in the *Aeneid* as a place of torment. There have been visions that included the 'immersion of souls at different levels in foul rivers or marshes or streams of blood' (Reynolds 2006: 140) that had a major influence on Christian theologians; and in the apocryphal third-century *Apocalypse of Paul*, the Archangel Michael shows St Paul 'the souls of the godless and sinners' in a hellish landscape of flames and ice, where people are immersed in 'a boiling river of fire' and 'a pit of pitch and sulphur' (in Elliott 1993: 633-5). By giving sermons on Hell in the fourth century, St Basil and St John Chrysostom 'only popularized a doctrine that was understood since the beginning of Church history both by simple believers and ... by many theologians, as the straightforwardly literal interpretation of the "two-fold judgment" in Mt. 25 and other New Testament statements' (Balthasar 1988: 64). For St Augustine, 'hell was an everlasting site of punishment from which no-one was exempt but for the grace of God' (Deacy 2012: xi), and Book XXI of *City of God* focuses on punishments in Hell.

There are images in Scorsese's film *Silence* about the persecution of Christians in seventeenth-century Japan that would not be out of place in Dante's visualization of the Underworld. Shusaku Endo's novel, which Scorsese has adapted for the screen, has a historical basis as it relates to a real-life Jesuit missionary called Christovao Ferreira (1580-1650) who went to Japan during the rule of Inoue Chikugo (c.1584-1661), the Inquisitor who was dedicated to rooting out Christianity. Founded by St Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) in 1540, the Jesuit order strove 'for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the

progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine' (in Dougill 2015: 12). Francis Xavier (1506–52) arrived in Japan in 1549 and saw a promising opportunity to spread the Gospel. In a letter written on 5 November 1549, he wrote that the Japanese 'are a people of very good manners, good in general, and not malicious; they are men of honor to a marvel, and prize honor above all else in the world' (in Boxer 1993: 37). By 1590 there were 136 Jesuits in Japan (Boxer 1993: 114), usually dressed as Buddhist priests.

Oda Nobunaga (1534–82), who strove to unify Japan, was a major influence, and extended his patronage to the Christians although he himself did not convert (Dougill 2015: 51). The atmosphere in Japan began to sour when the ruler Hideyoshi turned against the Christians and accused them of 'disrupting social harmony through forced conversions and the destruction of temples' (Dougill 2015: 59). On 24 July 1587, there was an edict to expel the missionaries from Japan (although the religion itself was not banned) and, as few of the priests departed, the Jesuits made 10,000 new converts in 1589 (see Dougill 2015: 65). However, when Hideyoshi heard a suggestion that the Catholic priests had come to Japan 'as the king of Spain's advance guard' (in Dougill 2015: 78) and that the converts were 'being used as a "fifth column"' (Boxer 1993: 151), the bloodshed began. Twenty-six Christians were crucified in Nagasaki on 5 February 1597, with the bodies of the martyrs being pierced with spears. One was San Felipe de Jesus (whose image is seen in Max Cady's cell in *Cape Fear*), the first Mexican martyr. In 1612 there were 300,000 Christians but that number had halved by 1625.

Ferreira himself went underground in 1614 to carry out his mission until his arrest. It is recorded that he apostatized after being tortured in 'the pit', a form of torture that the Japanese employed:

The victim was tightly bound around the body as high as the breast (one hand being left free to give the signal of recantation) and then hung head downwards from a gallows into a pit which usually contained excreta and other filth, the top of the pit being level with his knees. In order to give the blood some vent, the forehead was lightly slashed with a knife. Some of the stronger martyrs lived more than a week in this position, but the majority did not survive more than a day or two. (Boxer 1993: 353)

Evidently, the persecution of Christians by the Samurai is an extreme case, and critics of the film *Silence* did not fail to point out the macabre treatments that were used during the Inquisition to encourage devotion to the Catholic faith in medieval times. Indeed, there are rumours that there was one piece of equipment

called a 'Judas chair' which involved lowering a naked prisoner 'onto what was in effect a sharpened pyramid, fixed on top of a stool' so that 'the weight of the body was pressing down onto the spike' (Stanford 2015: 173). However, the historically verifiable Japanese 'pit' would certainly find a home in Dante's *Inferno*, in which many gruesome physical torments are described as people are pushed into holes:

Out of the mouth of each one there protruded  
The feet of a transgressor, and the legs  
Up to the calf, the rest within remained.

In all of them the soles were both on fire;  
Wherefore the joints so violently quivered,  
They would have snapped asunder withes and bands. (*Inf.* XIX)

After his apostasy, Ferreira took the Japanese name Sawano Chuan. He was reportedly present at the interrogations of Japanese Christians, and he is said to have written a tract called *A Disclosure of Falsehoods* that criticized the Catholic faith (see Dougill 2015: 143–4). The record of the real Ferreira's burial was destroyed when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki in 1945, but there were Chinese sailors at Macao who 'testified that prior to his death he had revoked his apostasy, dying a martyr's death in that pit which had previously conquered him' (in Endo 1969: xiii) although there is no other evidence to support this assertion. Taking this story as a foundation, Endo adds the fictional characters of the young Jesuit priests Francisco Garupe and Sebastian Rodrigues, who travel to Japan to discover the fate of Ferreira, who was once their highly regarded teacher.

The film opens with the sound of insects, reaching a deafening crescendo before falling into silence. It evokes the description of Scorsese's experience of a Catholic retreat when he was a teenager: 'I was also a city boy, so anything in the country, a noise, seemed scary. It became like an auditory hallucination where I heard crickets that got louder and louder and louder until they made me feel like I was going to burst' (in Keyser 1992: 21). The cut to silence in the auditorium is dramatic. It is then that a Dantean vision appears on screen. In Canto XXXI of *Inferno*, the poet writes:

As, when the fog is vanishing away,  
Little by little doth the sight refigure  
Whate'er the mist that crowds the air conceals,  
So, piercing through the dense and darksome air,  
More and more near approaching tow'rd the verge,  
My error fled, and fear came over me.

In the opening scene of *Silence*, terrifying forms of human suffering emerge through the mist as decapitated heads gradually come into view. Ferreira (Liam Neeson) is led into the scene of horror, so that his vantage point initially reflects that of the cinema audience. The first words in English are spoken by one of the prisoners – ‘Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ’ – as five men are being tortured.

Dante had envisaged the wicked souls in his *Inferno* suffering in scalding water:

We with our faithful escort onward moved  
Along the brink of the vermilion boiling,  
Wherein the boiled were uttering loud laments. (*Inf.* XII)

In *Silence*, the boiling water is dripped onto the prisoners’ flesh through ladles filled with holes so that the liquid pours out more slowly and painfully, and a priest cries out in anguish as his skin is burnt red. When the victims are taken down from the stakes, the action evokes a Deposition scene in a New Testament film in which Jesus’s body is lifted down from the cross.

In Scorsese’s first full-length film, *Who’s That Knocking at My Door*, the central protagonist J.R. enters St Patrick’s Old Cathedral and the camera focuses on the wounded bodies of the plaster statues of the saints. There is St Lucia (**Figure 1.1**) with her eyeballs on a plate – a popular female martyr who reportedly plucked



**Figure 1.1** The statue of St Lucia in St Patrick’s Old Cathedral – an image of sainthood in *Who’s That Knocking at My Door*.

out her own eyes rather than renounce her vow of chastity; and the *Pietà*, in which the Virgin Mary holds the corpse of Jesus in her arms. In *Silence* Scorsese is now depicting the living flesh of the future saints (as a person may be canonized who has died for the Catholic faith) in the throes of martyrdom. The voice-over of Ferreira underlines the horror: 'The Japanese call them "hells," partly I think in mockery, and partly, I must tell you, in truth.' The obvious irony of the 'Hell' revealed in *Silence* is that the people writhing in torment are devout Christians, rather than 'the damned' who fill Dante's *Inferno*. Ferreira recounts: 'Some remained on the mountain for thirty-three days.' The gruesome images in *Silence* are not purely the result of Endo's and Scorsese's fantasy but are inspired by historical records that confirm that thirty-three Christian prisoners were killed and sixty others tortured (Dougill 2015: 110) in the boiling waters (120 degrees) of Unzen between 1627 and 1633.

However, Scorsese's own version of misery is not restricted to such obvious scenes of torment, as Hell may take many different forms in the human imagination. Tony's Bar, which is a primary location in *Mean Streets*, has been described by many critics as a hellish setting with its predominantly red lighting. In fact, Michael Powell – whose use of colour in *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger 1948) had inspired Scorsese – actually wrote to the director and told him that he 'had used too much red' (in Stern 1995: 18). When Charlie (Harvey Keitel) enters the bar with his hands raised in a mock priestly blessing, the mobile camera ensures that 'we begin to feel drunk and dislocated ourselves, as if we were under water in a red grotto or gliding around one of the upper circles of hell' (Denby 2005: 38). The environment has an air of immorality, ranging from the picture of a nude woman amid a background of leaves – an Eve-type figure who symbolizes temptation – to the semi-naked dancing girls whom Charlie joins on stage with a finger-clicking swagger. George the bouncer is walking around with a flashlight, as an indication that illicit acts may be taking place in the even darker shadows.

In the Book of Job 'the netherworld is characterized primarily by extreme darkness' (Balthasar 1988: 180), and the fear of a place of 'outer darkness' is continued in the New Testament (Mt. 8.12; 22.11-14; 25.30). In Scorsese's films an infernal environment may be represented by the low-lit rooms in which gangsters plan their murders in *Casino*; the rainy streets of Manhattan at night in *After Hours* (1985); the screening room into which Howard Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) is pursued by his demons in *The Aviator* (2004); or the stormy river that serves as the climactic location in *Cape Fear*, when the cinematographer Freddie Francis had to use 'customer's moonlight' so that he

could make the scenes ‘absolutely pitch black but so that everybody can see it’ (in Stern 1995: 199).

Nevertheless, Scorsese’s hellish settings are, arrestingly, not always dark: indeed, Murray Pomerance argues that ‘when his narratives do not fill nocturnal moments they are structured furtively, as though they do’ (Pomerance 2015: 313). Hell may be represented by the cold, grey housing estate in suburbia in *GoodFellas* to which Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) is exiled as part of the Witness Protection Programme when he gives evidence against his fellow gangsters; the dazzling lights of a casino in Las Vegas; the Five Points in *Gangs of New York* where Protestants and Catholics strive to slaughter each other in daylight in the inappropriately named Paradise Square in nineteenth-century New York; or the illuminated trading floor of Stratton Oakmont, the stockbroker firm owned by Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

Notably, given Scorsese’s Italian heritage, one of the entrances to the Underworld was believed to be Mount Etna and ‘sailing to Sicily’ became a euphemistic term for going to Hell (Turner 1993: 102). Consequently, the animated work of art featuring a volcano on the wall of the drug den in *Bringing Out the Dead* provides a suitable backdrop for the ‘trips’ that are experienced in its vicinity, given that the effect of drug taking is often compared to a voyage into an otherworld – an adventure that is captured in Rimbaud’s poem ‘Le Bateau ivre’ in which the poet loses ‘control of his vomit-stained body, his boat, to the drug or drink which carries him higher and faster down the river’ (Turner 1993: 229). It is an image that recalls Henry Hill’s sweat-stained face in his drug-fuelled panic as he drives through the streets in *GoodFellas* in fear of arrest, pursued by a helicopter; or Jordan Belfort’s uncoordinated attempt to crawl down the steps to reach his Lamborghini and careen home from the Country Club while high on Quaaludes in *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

The boat journeys through the mist made in daylight by (supposed US Marshal) Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) to the asylum in *Shutter Island* and by the Jesuit priest, Rodrigues, at night in *Silence* are also reminiscent of images of the mythical Charon, who cries, ‘Woe unto you, ye souls depraved!’ and transports the dead across the river in Dante’s *Inferno*:

Hope nevermore to look upon the heavens;  
I come to lead you to the other shore,  
To the eternal shades in heat and frost. (*Inf.* III)

Scorsese manages to fuse these elements together in *Silence* with a threatening drum beat that accompanies Rodrigues as he is rowed through the darkness to

the Japanese island of Goto. The sense of fear that Rodrigues feels is reflected in the anxiety of Dante's Pilgrim in Canto VIII:

My Guide descended down into the boat,  
 And then he made me enter after him,  
 And only when I entered seemed it laden.  
 Soon as the Guide and I were in the boat,  
 The antique prow goes on its way, dividing  
 More of the water than 'tis wont with others.  
 While we were running through the dead canal,  
 Uprose in front of me one full of mire,  
 And said, 'Who 'rt thou that comest ere the hour?'  
 And I to him: 'Although I come, I stay not;  
 But who art thou that hast become so squalid?'  
 'Thou seest that I am one who weeps,' he answered.  
 And I to him: 'With weeping and with wailing,  
 Thou spirit maledict, do thou remain;  
 For thee I know, though thou art all defiled.'  
 Then stretched he both his hands unto the boat;  
 Whereat my wary Master thrust him back,  
 Saying, 'Away there with the other dogs!'

When a group of Japanese men appear in the sea in *Silence*, reaching out their hands towards his boat through the mist, Rodrigues is likewise afraid. It is only when the strangers make the sign of the cross, clinging onto the side of the boat, that the priest realizes that they have come to welcome him.

On Rodrigues's second journey to the islands when he is fleeing for his life, his fear is intensified: 'Father in Heaven, praised be Your name. I'm just a foreigner who brought disaster. That's what they think of me now.' Reynolds points out that a 'tale of a journey across the sea to an unknown island was almost as widespread in folklore as the tale of the underground journey into Hell' (2006: 245). When Rodrigues arrives on the beach he cuts a lonely figure, as if shipwrecked (**Figure 1.2**).

The opening shots of *Taxi Driver*, in which the taxicab emerges through the steam, offer a twentieth-century version of this watery journey. The river Styx of Dante's *Inferno* is replaced by the city streets as Travis Bickle drives the shadowy passengers through New York in the 1970s, and dollar bills and a ticking meter substitute the payment given to the mythical boatman. In the legend of Charon,





**Figure 1.2** Rodrigues's hellish journey to Goto in *Silence*.

'one had to pay him a coin or be condemned to wander the banks for a hundred years' (see Wernblad 2011: 60); and the failure of Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne) to pay his fare, when his \$20 flies out the taxi window, certainly appears to sentence him to roam through the dark, rain-soaked streets of SoHo in *After Hours* in which the clouds of steam that escape from the pavement would indicate 'that Hades lurks just below the field of vision' (Ebert 2008: 82).

In Dante's *Inferno* there are also desert sands that might evoke the terrain of Nevada, with the twinkling lights of Las Vegas in *Casino* as 'a glittering, festering latterday Babylon' (Christie 1999: 222). Sam Rothstein, who runs the casino called The Tangiers, describes the city as a 'morality car wash' that reportedly promises its own form of healing as 'Lourdes does for hunchbacks and cripples'. However, his vision of 'paradise on earth' is darkened when events take a downward turn and Las Vegas is transformed into 'Sodom and Gomorrah' (Christie 1999: 224) from his own perspective, as well as for the ordinary people who are liberated from their cash – a fate undergone by some of the residents of Dante's Hell:

Man may lay violent hands upon himself  
 And his own goods; and therefore in the second  
 Round must perforce without avail repent  
 Whoever of your world deprives himself,  
 Who games, and dissipates his property,  
 And weepeth there, where he should jocund be. (*Inf.* XI)

At the end of *Casino*, there is an image of ruination as the old gambling houses are razed to the ground – not by fire and brimstone and the wrath of God but by





**Figure 1.3** The world of Stratton Oakmont: Heaven or Hell in *The Wolf of Wall Street*?

the developers. Scorsese saw the scene in apocalyptic terms: 'I'm not asking you to agree with the morality – but there was the sense of an empire that had been lost, and it needed music worthy of that. The destruction of that city has to have the grandeur of Lucifer being expelled from heaven for being too proud. Those are all pretty obvious biblical references' (in Christie 1999: 332–3).

Controversially, the stockbrokers appear to be having a whale of a time in *The Wolf of Wall Street* during their bacchanalian dwarf-tossing contest in the offices of Stratton Oakmont. In his autobiography, the 'real' Jordan Belfort describes his firm as 'a little slice of heaven on earth' (2007: 51). Yet, when his onscreen manifestation, Leonardo DiCaprio, takes to the microphone to rally his troops during his weekly 'act of debauchery', the entwined bodies of his employees (**Figure 1.3**) are eerily reminiscent of the suffering souls who writhe in agony in Dante's *Inferno*:

Of naked souls beheld I many herds,  
Who all were weeping very miserably,  
And over them seemed set a law diverse.

Supine upon the ground some folk were lying;  
And some were sitting all drawn up together,  
And others went about continually. (*Inf.* XIV)

When Belfort travels to Geneva to hide his ill-gotten gains, he is informed by the Swiss banker Jean Jacques Saurel (Jean Dujardin), 'From a financial standpoint, you are now in heaven' – although he is carrying out the type of fraud that would see him condemned to the lower reaches of Dante's *Inferno*. In the words of John Milton in *Paradise Lost* (1667): 'The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n' (2003: 9).

## Fire

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ‘Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire”’ (1993: 1035). Fire is obviously a common dimension in the Underworld and the ‘pool of fire’ in the Book of Revelation (19.20, 20.10, 21.8) is a memorable image for Christians. The New Testament has several descriptions of Hell fire (Mt. 5.22) and of the unquenchable fire (Mk 9.43). In *City of God*, St Augustine wrote of ‘a lake of fire and brimstone’, and Thomas Aquinas also preached ‘a real fiery Hell with physical torments’ (Turner 1993: 89). In his own era, Dante would have seen public executions, including death by fire, as his Pilgrim will recall later when he reaches *Purgatorio*:

Upon my clasped hands I straightened me,  
 Scanning the fire, and vividly recalling  
 The human bodies I had once seen burned. (*Purg.* XXVII)

Given that Scorsese was raised in the pre-Vatican II era, it is the ‘fire and brimstone’ motif once popular in Catholic preaching that marked his early years. The apparitions of the Virgin Mary to three children at Fatima in Portugal in 1917 were a powerful tool for Catholic sermons, given that the young seers had a terrifying vision of Hell as ‘a sea of fire. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration’ (in Apostoli 2010: 60). These Marian visionaries provided Catholics with a new prayer (‘Save us from the fires of Hell’) to add to the traditional Rosary devotion, as well as a warning from the Virgin Mary about the Soviet threat: ‘If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church’ (in Apostoli 2010: 74).

During the air raid drills in the Cold War era, the pupils at Scorsese’s school would take shelter in the catacombs under St Patrick’s Old Cathedral and pray the Rosary. After the Second World War, nuclear attack remained a genuine concern for American citizens – ‘We were told that this was what the fire of Hell would be like,’ explains Scorsese (in Keyser 1992: 8) – with evidence of the effects of atomic weapons being fresh in the memory. In *Kundun*, the young Dalai Lama watches footage of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and hears the news reporter repeat the words of a scientist: ‘An atom bomb explosion is the nearest thing to doomsday one could possibly imagine.’

As a young boy, Scorsese would observe the world from his apartment's outdoor fire escape – a practical metal structure that is notable in New York tenements as a visual reminder of the danger of fire in confined spaces. Indeed, conflagration is a repeated theme in Scorsese's filmography, beginning with his Roman-epic-inspired amateur effort entitled *Vesuvius VI* (1959) in which his friends performed in togas made of bed sheets. Reportedly, the words 'Directed by Martin Scorsese' in the credits ignited in flames – a special effect that was created on (and unsurprisingly damaged) a coffee table (see LoBrutto 2007: 57). In the treatment for the uncompleted *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* there is a priest who delivers a sermon on the dangers of sex before marriage, relating the tragic tale of a young engaged couple who give in to their sexual urges two weeks before their wedding and are killed while making love in a car: 'As fate would have it, the trucks collided, sliding an infernal mass of flames into the car parked on the side of the road. The young couple was killed ... burned to death in each other's arms.' If the film had been made, the sermon would have been accompanied by shots of 'a conglomeration of flame and steel and what we can make out of two writhing flaming bodies' (in Kelly 1980: 53–4). Instead, the priest's warning becomes an anecdote in *Mean Streets* that reveals Charlie's struggles with his Catholic faith. Pauline Kael looks at the gangsters in *Mean Streets* and thinks: 'They know they're going to burn in eternity, so why should they think about things that are depressing?' (in Kelly 1980: 166).

Throughout Scorsese's filmography, the fiery concept develops with variations in scale and intensity, ranging from the small votive candles in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* to the burning pyres on which Christians are executed in *Silence*. When storyboards were released before the completion of *Silence*, it was noticeable that flames figured prominently in the main apostasy scene. In Scorsese's second full-length feature, the exploitation movie *Boxcar Bertha* (1972), one of the characters named Rake (Barry Primus) sets fire to his drink and his associate, Bill (David Carradine), blows out the flame – an action that is also taken up in *Mean Streets* by Charlie, who is clearly concerned by thoughts of the pain of Hell. Standing in a church, Charlie reaches out and touches a candle flame with his finger (**Figure 1.4**) as a reminder of the physical suffering that is to come if his vision of Hell turns out to be real: 'The burn from a lighted match increased a million times. Infinite. Now you don't fuck around with the infinite. There's no way you do that.' (As an aside: the interior scene appears to have been shot in St Joseph's Church at 218 E 12th Street Los Angeles, which burnt down in September 1983, adding a fiery footnote (see Metzler 1983).)



**Figure 1.4** Charlie ponders on the fires of Hell in *Mean Streets*.

Charlie goes on to explain a key distinction: ‘The pain in hell has two sides: the kind you can touch with your hand; the kind you can feel in your heart’; and his voice continues: ‘Your soul, the spiritual side. And you know, the worst of the two is the spiritual.’ The theme persists throughout the film: Charlie will later torment himself by holding his hand over an open flame in a restaurant kitchen; and he goes to the cinema with Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro) and watches *The Tomb of Ligeia* (a Roger Corman film starring Vincent Price) in which fire also features.

While the concentration on Hell fire ‘probably comes from [James] Joyce. But we did hear sermons like that – the sermons about sex, for instance’ (in Schickel 2013), Scorsese reveals that the idea for Travis to burn his arm over a flame as he gets into training in *Taxi Driver* came from screenwriter Paul Schrader. Scorsese himself admits: ‘You see, that’s why I said it’s almost as if I’d written it. He’s a Calvinist and I’m a Roman Catholic – it’s very interesting’ (in Morrison 2005: 74). Travis will create his own hellish environment in his living space when he sets fire to the flowers that were ‘returned to sender’ by his (very short-lived) girlfriend Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), while Howard Hughes will burn his clothes when Katharine Hepburn (Cate Blanchett) eventually ends their relationship. The fires of cremation are an outer manifestation of the men’s inner torment. There is also an image of singed flesh that finds an outlet in *After Hours* when Paul Hackett meets a young woman named Marcy (Rosanna Arquette) whose skin is reportedly covered in burn marks. As Paul massages the shoulders of Marcy’s roommate, Kiki (Linda Fiorentino), he recounts a childhood memory of a visit to a hospital Burn

Ward when he was forced to wear a blindfold, but he uncovered his eyes and saw ... (Frustratingly, the audience never finds out as his massage has sent Kiki to sleep.)

In *Cape Fear* the central antagonist, Max Cady, is set alight with lighter fluid in the climactic scene on a boat, so that he jumps into the river to extinguish the flames. In the story of paramedic Frank Pierce, *Bringing Out the Dead*, the ambulance dispatcher (voiced by Scorsese himself) reads the list of current cases over the radio, including a man who has unfortunately 'set his pants on fire' in the men's room at Grand Central (although the background to this incident is never revealed but it is presumed that the patient was wearing his trousers at the time if an ambulance is required). More poignantly, Hugo's father is killed in an accidental fire at the museum in the children's film *Hugo* (2011), leaving his child an orphan.

While the pain of burnt skin was touched upon in *Mean Streets*, death by fire reaches an apogee in *Silence* as burning alive was a common form of execution for the Christians in seventeenth-century Japan. The victims were sometimes loosely tied in the hope that they would 'jump and hop around in a ludicrous manner' for the amusement of the spectators (Boxer 1993: 349). When the priest's Japanese guide, Kichijiro (Yosuke Kubozuka), reveals that his family (unlike himself) had refused to renounce their faith, the audience sees one of his relatives tortured in this way, while the others are fastened to a stake or bound in straw mats and set alight. Having stayed to witness the death of his loved ones, Kichijiro remembers the horror of the scene: 'Wherever I go, I see the fire and smell the flesh.'

Like John Martin, who illustrated the works of John Milton, Scorsese manages to convey 'the sense of vast underground gloom lit by dim fires but all somehow enclosed' (Turner 1993: 188) at the beginning of *GoodFellas*. There is a reddish ambience when the gangsters are engaged in criminal activity at night, which points to the use of red as 'an obvious reference to blood and hell ... but it is also used to establish a theme of carnality and ruthlessness' (Ennis 2015: 193). In *Inferno*, Virgil tells the Pilgrim:

But fix thine eyes below; for draweth near  
The river of blood, within which boiling is  
Whoe'er by violence doth injure others. (*Inf.* XII)

There is a sense of this fiery bloodbath in the opening scene of *GoodFellas*, which serves as a flash forward to the burial of gangster Billy Batts (Frank Vincent). At first there appears to be life after death when Henry and his friends hear sounds coming from the boot of the car in which the body of the (supposedly)

murdered man is stowed. There is a red glow on Henry's face as he explains, 'As far back as I can remember I always wanted to be a gangster,' so that there is an incongruity between the appalling violence (as Batts is stabbed and shot) and The Dream (better than being president) alongside the lyrics of a song about 'rags to riches'.

It later becomes clear that during his early forays into crime in *GoodFellas*, Henry is often accompanied by smoke and flames as he pours petrol into the cabs owned by business rivals and sets them alight; or when he burns the Bamboo Lounge to the ground for the insurance. Harry Nilsson's song 'Jump into the Fire' is heard during Henry's last day as a wiseguy as an appropriate musical accompaniment. The horror will be magnified when Henry has to unearth the putrid body of Batts at a later stage – a nauseating event that evokes the stench from the tomb when Jesus raises Lazarus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* but without the attendant miracle resurrection. Terrible smells are an unpleasant and memorable feature of the journey through Dante's *Inferno*.

In *Casino* there are many religious references, including the Holy of Holies (the Count Room), but in this shiny, glittering Hell the fires burst forth unexpectedly. Sometimes there are figurative explosions of anger by Nicky (thereby recalling the violent outbursts of Tommy in *GoodFellas*). However, there is also a literal fire caused by the car bomb that appears to kill Sam 'Ace' Rothstein at the start. Giuliana Muscio claims that the fiery flames in the opening credits indicate 'both the director's obsession with the flames of hell of his Catholic upbringing and of the impersonal yet pulsating new world of gambling of the 1980s' (2015: 269). The vision of flames is accompanied by Bach's *St Matthew Passion* so that 'a tumultuous drama of crime, love, money, and violence becomes a heartfelt religious allegory' (Sterritt 2015: 99). In *The Aviator* Howard Hughes escapes from the flames that dramatically engulf his plane but, like Sam Rothstein, his delayed entry into the Afterlife does not leave him in an earthly paradisiacal existence.

## The city as inferno

Dante's Lower Hell is a city called Dis that creates a landscape made up of towers, gates and bridges in which there are eternal flames. In *Gangs of New York*, the final image of the Twin Towers has an additional poignancy, given that the buildings were destroyed in tragic circumstances with ostensibly a religious cause at the heart of the terrorist act. The visual effects supervisor, Michael Owens, reveals

that there was some debate about what to do with this image (i.e. 'including no towers, having the towers be there and then fade out, and cutting the shot entirely') as the film was to be released after the attack: 'The movie is not about September 11; it's about New York City and its people, and about how those two entities made it what it was at that time' (in Kredell 2015: 350).

The Jesuits – whose connection with Scorsese is evidently seen most clearly in *Silence* – played a part in changing the scenery of Hell by adding 'urban squalor' (Turner 1993: 173). One of the most vivid images of misery is seen in *Gangs of New York* when the camera pulls back to reveal 'the inside of a tenement, with families stacked on top of one another in rooms like shelves' (Ebert 2008: 237), or enters into the catacombs below the city. There is an operatic scale that brings home the extent of the suffering for the poor citizens in the Bowery.

Scorsese has explained that he experienced himself the poverty-stricken area of the Lower East Side but that the situation had been much worse in the past: 'Elizabeth Street at the turn-of-the-century was noted in New York as the highest rate of infant mortality, and that was because of cholera and all these diseases. ... And there was an underworld element that was there that was brought over from the old world' (in Martin 2016). In the film, these labyrinthine caves are revealed as a 'torch-lit Hades' (Ebert 2008: 235). Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio) leaves this Underworld to be incarcerated in the Hellgate House of Reform. It is an environment in which people have the kind of 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' mentality (Mt. 5.38) that runs counter to Christian teaching.

In exploring ideas about the Afterlife, Turner also indicates the influence of William Blake, who presented 'the negative side of the industrial revolution; in "London" and "Jerusalem" the city slums are represented as Hell for the neglected poor' (Turner 1993: 222). The presence of unlicensed animals in cages in the bar in *Mean Streets* provokes an oblique reference to Blake's poetry – Tony (David Proval) wanted a tiger because of 'William Blake and all that' – and serves as 'the infernal image of beings trying desperately to break out, but remaining, in the end, trapped by what surrounds them' (in Kelly 1980: 151). The fact that Tony's bar is called 'Volpe's' (the Italian for a fox) continues the animal theme.

Prue Shaw (2014) notes the influence 'of the moral squalor of Florence' in 1300 in Dante's description of Upper Hell: 'The gluttons lie on the ground under a relentless barrage of icy rain, hail and snow. The ground they lie on stinks.' A Scorsese audience might easily think of New York here as represented in *Taxi Driver* or *Bringing Out the Dead*, given that the latter film (released in 1999) is set in an earlier era before there was an effort to cleanse the streets in the 1990s



by Mayor Rudy Giuliani, so that the impression remains of 'a moral and spiritual rollercoaster ride' through the urban inferno (see Jolly 2005: 241). Dante's Pilgrim is also struck by misery that awaits him:

Soon as I was within, cast round mine eye,  
 And see on every hand an ample plain,  
 Full of distress and torment terrible. (*Inf.* IX)

Commenting on the shooting of *Taxi Driver* on its fortieth anniversary in 2015, Scorsese recalled a headline in the *Daily News* in 1975: 'Ford to City: Drop Dead.' He explained: 'Apparently, the city felt like it was falling apart, there was garbage everywhere, and for someone like Travis, who's come from the Midwest, the New York of the mid-'70s would *be* hell – [that] must have prompted visions of hell in his mind. But one thing I can tell you: We didn't have to "dress" the city to make it look hellish' (in Ebiri 2015). The taxi in *Taxi Driver* has also been compared to 'the snout of a huge beast rising up out of some subterranean lair' (Stern 1995: 47), prowling through the streets, with the grill forming its angry jaws; and sometimes the streets are observed through the 'eyes' of the Taxi as there is no windscreen to distort the audience's view. Travis reports in voice-over that 'the animals come out at night,' but here he means human beings, making no distinction between prostitutes, drug addicts and homosexuals in his condemnatory comments about his surroundings.

Paul Schrader envisioned Travis Bickle 'as a sort of a young man who wandered from the snowy waste of the midwest into an overheated New York cathedral. My own background was anti-Catholic in the style of the Reformation and the Glorious Revolution' (in Kelly 1996: 90). In the hands of Scorsese, the city becomes a tenebrous labyrinth, which the cinematographer Michael Chapman saw as 'a decadent vision of Catholicism'; while Scorsese himself remarked: 'I think there is also the sense of the camera sliding or crawling all through the streets, oozing with sin' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101). Travis describes New York as 'an open sewer' that is 'full of filth and scum' – the blood and semen that he wipes from the back seat of his vehicle are the residue of the sins of lust and violence that he appears to witness passively.

As the taxi makes its appearance accompanied by Bernard Herrmann's threatening music, the red glow of the light on the extreme close-up of Travis's eyes ensures that the hellish environment is certainly discernible. Jack Kroll remarks that Dante had a word for it: 'the city as inferno' (in Kelly 1980: 186). Pauline Kael noted that Travis 'hates New York with a Biblical fury: it gives off the stench of Hell, and its filth and smut obsess him' (in Kelly 1980: 183). Schickel



bucks the trend by remarking: 'The backgrounds against which [Travis] moves never transcend the documentary category, never fuse into an artful vision of urban hellishness' (in Kelly 1980: 189) – but it is a view with which most critics disagree.

'The Jesuit Hell was unbearably, suffocatingly, repulsively crowded' (Turner 1993: 173) – it is the Hell that is found in James Joyce. In *Taxi Driver*, the slow motion and distorted images of the coloured lights through the wet windscreen of the taxi offer a dream-like quality as if the vision is melting. The people crossing the New York streets are bathed in a red glow as if they, too, are in Hell; and the words 'Directed by Martin Scorsese' are imprinted against the red fog as if the filmmaker is also not immune to the danger. Later the taxi passes a cinema that is showing *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Return of the Dragon* – both violent films of death – while the neon lights spell out the word 'Fascination'. Despite the razzle-dazzle of Times Square, 'God's lonely man' is travelling through a world that he describes as 'sick, venal' and he hopes for the day that 'a real rain will come and wash all the scum off the streets'. But while the rain and water from the hydrants could be seen as cleansing, there is little sense that the situation has improved.

The steam is still visible on the screen as Travis enters the Taxi firm – as if to confirm that the office is part of a Dantean Hell. On the peeling wall there is advice about how to deal with personal injury accidents because, as in the *Inferno*, the pain never stops. In response to Travis's sleep deprivation, the Personnel officer suggests pornography rather than a healthy cure. Once out in the daylight after his shift, Travis avoids the sunshine and remains on the shady side of the street, and he goes to the cinema to see an X rated movie – seeking the darkness even during the day.

In *The Age of Innocence* set in nineteenth-century New York, Countess Ellen (Michelle Pfeiffer) expresses surprise at the idea that the city is 'a labyrinth', given that the design is supposedly so straight with the cross streets. However, 'Scorsese's New York films primarily take place within the tangled streets of old New York and the residential neighbourhoods of the outer boroughs. The meanness of Scorsese's streets can be read largely as a function of their opposition to the grid' (Kredell 2015: 336). As Robert Casillo remarks, Scorsese's audience has the opportunity to ponder on Prov. 2.15 and 21.8 that warn that 'the way of the guilty is crooked' (2006: 203).

Difficult journeys are a common theme. When the painting by Lionel Dobie (Nick Nolte) is finally revealed in *New York Stories: Life Lessons* (1989), the artist has created a darkened structure called *The Bridge to Nowhere* – another

construction that would cause delay. The streets of SoHo in *After Hours* are also transformed into a terrifying maze for Paul Hackett when he leaves his place of work in search of female company: ‘You think you’re going to heaven, but it’s hell that awaits you!’ explains Scorsese (in Wilson 2011: 123); and the director would cut repeatedly ‘to extreme close-ups for no reason, just to build up paranoia and anxiety – total anxiety’ (in Kelly 1996: 185). Paul has a feeling of entrapment and futility in his computer job, with its programs and codes; and it might be appropriate for the grand gates that lead into his office building to bear the sign found at the entrance to Dante’s Hell: ‘All hope abandon, ye who enter in!’ (*Inf.* III).

Paul’s outing to meet Marcy is beset by obstacles, just as in *The Divine Comedy* when Virgil and the Pilgrim are told (incorrectly) by one of the devils that one of the bridges has been broken as they cross the Malebolge in the eighth circle, lengthening their passage through the *Inferno*:

Then said to us: ‘You can no farther go  
 Forward upon this crag, because is lying  
 All shattered, at the bottom, the sixth arch.  
 And if it still doth please you to go onward,  
 Pursue your way along upon this rock;  
 Near is another crag that yields a path.’ (*Inf.* XXI)

The name ‘Bridges’ is crossed out on the intercom sign outside Marcy’s apartment building despite the fact that Kiki Bridges is actually in residence. David Sterritt regards the events in *After Hours* as ‘Paul’s dark night of the soul’ (2015: 100) and finds parallels with the myth of Orpheus, and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* when Bloom follows Stephen Dedalus into Nighttown (Sterritt 2015: 101); while the story of Lot and his wife might provide a biblical reference (Sterritt 2015: 103). Indeed, the Old Testament link would fit with the idea of Paul as a twentieth-century Job, crying out, ‘I wanted to meet a nice girl and now I’ve got to die for it.’ Scorsese himself appears on screen operating a search light in the Club Berlin, playing his part in Paul’s persecution: ‘As in a medieval miracle play, I put him through torture,’ explained the director (in Wilson 2011: 124). Yet, while Scorsese was ‘engaged by the game, the trap, the maze’ of *After Hours* (in Stern 1995: 74), the filming was having a cathartic effect off screen. Amy Robinson, one of the producers, saw the film as ‘a creative way for Marty to exorcise his demons’ (in Kelly 1996: 189) after the aborted attempt to make *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1983; and Scorsese himself claimed, ‘It’s renewed my faith’ (in Peachment 2005: 148).

## Filming the Underworld

Dante once explained ‘that the need to find a rhyme never forced him to say something he had not intended to say, but that he made language do things it had not done before, things that other writers were not able to do’ (Shaw 2014). One might compare this approach with Scorsese’s efforts to capture a particular effect on screen, such as the overhead shot after the bloodbath in *Taxi Driver* in which the ceiling of the building was removed in order to position the camera; or when cinematographer Michael Ballhaus devised ‘a terrifyingly fast crane move’ to capture the keys falling through the air in *After Hours* (Ebert 2008: 86).

Scorsese’s films are, of course, admired for some particularly extended camerawork, including the Steadicam shot in *Casino* that takes the audience into the inner sanctum of The Tangiers to the theme of ‘Moonglow’. The fallout from the days in which the young Scorsese took refuge beneath St Patrick’s Old Cathedral in school drills to prepare for an atomic attack is clearly visible in his artistry: ‘The camera movement in a lot of my films certainly comes from creeping around those catacombs, with the sound effects of the echoing rosary’ (in Keyser 1992: 8). Indeed, Robert Kolker argues that Scorsese’s films involve ‘constant movement, even if that movement is within a tightly circumscribed area that has no exit’ (2011: 189).

The common reference point for aficionados of Scorsese occurs in *GoodFellas*. In *The Divine Comedy* the precipitous journey through Hell on the back of the monster called Geryon is considered to be Dante’s ‘greatest feat so far in imaginative visualization’ (Reynolds 2006: 161):

I seated me upon those monstrous shoulders;  
I wished to say, and yet the voice came not  
As I believed, ‘Take heed that thou embrace me.’

But he, who other times had rescued me  
In other peril, soon as I had mounted,  
Within his arms encircled and sustained me,

And said: ‘Now, Geryon, bestir thyself;  
The circles large, and the descent be little;  
Think of the novel burden which thou hast.’

Even as the little vessel shoves from shore,  
Backward, still backward, so he thence withdrew;  
And when he wholly felt himself afloat,

There where his breast had been he turned his tail,  
And that extended like an eel he moved,  
And with his paws drew to himself the air. (*Inf.* XVII)

One might compare this famous descent to the celebrated tracking shot as Henry and his girlfriend Karen (Lorraine Bracco) enter the Copacabana that forms part of a moral downward spiral.

Scorsese describes the Copacabana as ‘the top of the line for Henry – it was Valhalla’ (in Schickel 2013); and the extended sequence ‘is not simply a cameraman’s stunt, but an inspired way to show how the whole world seems to unfold effortlessly before young Henry Hill’ (Ebert 2008: 282). When Karen is whisked through the kitchen on her date with Henry, the audience is rightly enthused by the magnificent Steadicam shot by Larry McConkey just as the young woman is dazed by the speed, the warm greetings, the slick exchange of gratuities and the apparent smoothness of her *beau*. However, while the spectator is justifiably impressed by the filmmaker’s technical prowess, Karen is erroneously blinded by Henry’s *modus operandi*. Perhaps a truly significant player would have led his girlfriend to the front of the queue ‘above ground’ (as happens in the aforementioned Scorsese tribute in *The Sopranos*), rather than guided her through the service entrance past the mural of a tropical paradise (a pale echo of the Garden of Eden). (**Figure 1.5**) They enter the subterranean passages and witness a man eating his sandwich, a couple canoodling in the shadows, and the ‘behind the scenes’ kitchen with its heat and aromas. It was



**Figure 1.5** The entrance to the Underworld in *GoodFellas*.

reportedly Michael Ballhaus who suggested that the actors go into the kitchen because 'the light is beautiful'; and McConkey points out that they 'structured events within the shot that covered the limitations of not being able to cut in order to give it pace and timing' (in Mulcahey 2015). The young woman is entering a murky world in which the snowy white cloth that covers the table is a misleading sign of purity. *GoodFellas* foregrounds 'an ironic disjuncture' (Haggins 2015: 446) through the use of voice-over; and 'Karen's experience of being drawn to Henry parallels the spectator's attraction to this cinematic world' (Haggins 2015: 449). After Henry marries Karen, her seat will be taken by another woman on Friday/girlfriend nights and one act of deception leads to another. Scorsese himself admits that the film had 'the sense of going on a ride, some sort of crazed amusement-park ride, going through the Underworld, in a way' (in Smith 1999a: 155), and the Copacabana is the entry point for Karen.

There are many 'cells' within Scorsese's filmography, offering further entrapment within the outer hellish setting. The camera pans around Travis Bickle's accommodation as he writes his diary in *Taxi Driver*, taking note of the door that is covered with cracks and scratches, the bars at the window and the bare light bulb. Later, the young prostitute Iris (Jodie Foster) takes Travis into a building with a narrow stairway and dingy walls covered with graffiti, and he has to pay an additional \$10 to the Gatekeeper if he wishes to rent a room for sex. Paul is encased in papier-mâché in *After Hours*, as if he is buried alive. In *GoodFellas*, Tommy thinks that he is to become a 'made man' but he is taken to a basement and shot in the head as revenge for the murder of Billy Batts, with the wood panelling on the walls prefiguring his coffin; and in *Casino* Nicky is buried in a hole in the desert by the men he once considered to be his friends.

While Travis, Paul, Tommy and Nicky are supposedly free men, there are several protagonists who find themselves officially incarcerated in Scorsese's filmography from *It's Not Just You, Murray!* onwards, including *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Cape Fear*, *The Departed* and *Hugo*. Some prison cells are more appealing than the others. In *GoodFellas* the gangsters live a comfortable life, bribing the guards and dining on supplies that Karen smuggles in under her coat. Indeed, one of the criticisms of Scorsese's treatment of the stockbrokers in *The Wolf of Wall Street* is that Jordan Belfort's incarceration appears to take place at a tennis club.

However, there are examples of more terrifying forms of captivity, evoked by the period of paranoia during the McCarthy era that overhangs *Shutter Island*, in which the criminally insane are sent to Ashcliffe hospital. Its gloom is enhanced

by the threatening music, the oncoming storm and the fact that there is only one way on and off via the dock. Teddy and his 'partner' Chuck Aule (Mark Ruffalo) pass a cemetery with a broken sign: 'Remember us for we too have lived, loved and laughed' – an inscription that would not be out of place in Dante, where the sixth circle of Hell looks like a cemetery:

The sepulchres make all the place uneven;  
 So likewise did they there on every side,  
 Saving that there the manner was more bitter;  
 For flames between the sepulchres were scattered,  
 By which they so intensely heated were,  
 That iron more so asks not any art. (*Inf.* IX)

Teddy notices the electrified perimeter and remarks that he has 'seen something like it before'. The archways and iron gates would certainly evoke a concentration camp (which Teddy saw during his wartime service) as well as the city of Dis in *The Divine Comedy*. In *Shutter Island* the most dangerous patients are held in Ward C, an old Civil War fort made of grey stone that looks like a prison rather than a hospital, and the groaning of the inmates recalls the misery in Dante's *Inferno*:

And now begin the dolesome notes to grow  
 Audible unto me; now am I come  
 There where much lamentation strikes upon me. (*Inf.* V)

Sometimes the incarceration is self-imposed, as in *The Aviator* when Howard Hughes's mother feeds her fear of infection with her own rules on quarantine; or when her adult son locks himself away in his screening room with his bottles of urine. In the novel of *Silence*, Endo's description of Rodrigues in prison could relate to the appearance of Howard Hughes at his lowest ebb: 'Now he felt more keenly than ever what a vagabond he was, his hair and beard grown long, the flesh hanging loose around his bones, his arms thin like needles' (Endo 1969: 103). However in comparison to the self-inflicted trauma endured by the billionaire, there is the terrible (and sometimes terrifying) environment of the onscreen jail in which Rodrigues is held in *Silence*, although it does not manifest the full horror contained in the historical reports that the Japanese prisons were the scenes of death from hunger and disease: 'There was no wind or breeze which could penetrate the dank and dark central cage, so that the heat and stench were insupportable' (Boxer 1993: 349).

Gnosticism offered the belief that human beings are in Hell 'even as they proceed about their daily life' by drawing on the myth of Sophia, a misguided angel who tried to imitate God and, consequently, gave birth to the Demiurge or Lower God who created the troubled planet on which we reside (Turner 1993: 46–7). While Scorsese does not wander down that kind of heretical route, which suggests that the world is under the power of the devil, he provides many memorable examples of 'Hell on earth.'

## Sympathy for the Devil

Defending his decision to deal with the dark side of human nature and the consequences of evil actions in the Afterlife, Dante sets out his methodology in the opening canto of *The Divine Comedy*:

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say  
 What was this forest savage, rough and stern,  
 Which in the very thought renews the fear.  
 So bitter is it, death is little more;  
 But of the good to treat, which there I found,  
 Speak will I of the other things I saw there. (*Inf.* I)

The sinners who are permanently residing in the *Inferno* are responsible for many of Dante's more celebrated poetic verses. It is also undeniable that several of Scorsese's unforgettable protagonists are killers and/or double-crossers, and that one of the most significant topics in his films is betrayal. On the printed page Dante reveals 'the depths of depravity and self-willed flight from the light of which we are capable' (Royal 1999: 42); and, over seven centuries later, Scorsese has illuminated commensurate murky dimensions in human behaviour.

Scorsese explains that he finds 'the antagonist more interesting than the protagonist in drama, the villain more interesting than the good guy. Then there's what I guess is a decidedly Christian point of view: "who are we to judge, to point out the speck in our brother's eye, while we have a beam in our own eye"' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 78). He admits that he presents people who are 'doing bad things. And we condemn those aspects of them. But they're also human beings. And I find that often the people passing moral judgment on them may ultimately be worse' (in Christie 1999: 225). Scorsese explains that the central character Teddy in *Shutter Island* 'was literally taking the weight of the cross, that character, the guilt that he had, what he did, what he experienced in his life, and if he did experience it, even, we don't even know, because some of



it was in his head, but that guilt was real, and that is interesting to me' (in Aftab 2013). Teddy's last words are: 'Which would be worse – to live as a monster, or to die as a good man?' It is a dilemma that links to the paradoxes of Plato's *Gorgias*: "to escape punishment is worse than to suffer it" (474b); to suffer punishment and pay the penalty for our faults is the only way to be happy' (Ricoeur 1967: 43).

## The upper circles

In the upper levels of the *Inferno* Dante finds room for a number of lustful, gluttonous, avaricious and wrathful personalities (who are guilty of four of the Seven Deadly Sins that he also addresses in *Purgatorio*). Reynolds points out that 'Dante speaks so seldom of marriage that the slightest reference to it is intriguing' (2006: 267). In Canto V are the famous Italian lovers Paolo and Francesca, whose passion leads to their death. (Scorsese's equivalent couple are Newland Archer and Countess Ellen in *The Age of Innocence*, but as their infidelity is curtailed through a sense of duty, they are placed in Chapter 6 of this book.) When Francesca falls in love with her handsome brother-in-law, the couple are killed by Francesca's husband on discovering the affair. 'To medieval eyes the relationship was thus doubly illicit, incestuous as well as adulterous, since a married couple became one flesh' (Shaw 2014), so that 'Dante's art lies in this complexity, the impossibility of categorising [Francesca] as purely good or purely bad' (Shaw 2014). There are a few examples of long-lasting marriages in Scorsese's filmography (most notably with the focus on his parents in *Italianamerican*) but many more instances of blazing marital arguments about infidelity, such as Henry Hill and Karen in *GoodFellas*, and Jordan Belfort and Naomi (Margot Robbie) in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. When the boxer Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro) suspects that his brother Joey (Joe Pesci) has had an affair with his wife Vickie (Cathy Moriarty) in *Raging Bull*, the fraternal bond increases the rage; and the 'blood brother' relationship between Sam and Nicky adds an extra *frisson* to the latter's adultery with Ginger in *Casino*.

Scorsese regards *Casino* as offering a well-known narrative: 'Gaining Paradise and losing it, through pride and through greed – it's the old fashioned Old Testament story' (in Christie 1999: 224). He explains, 'Ultimately it's a tragedy. It's the frailty of being human. I want to push audiences' emotional empathy with certain types of characters who are normally considered villains' (in Christie 1999: 225). Evidently, the Bible is filled with the narratives of people

'doing wrong' in the Old Testament – such as the story of King David, in which Scorsese has expressed an interest. Hans Urs von Balthasar remarks: 'Guilt or sin is contrary to right, and because it is the disruption of that ordered right or right order (*recitudo*) implanted by the Creator in the nature of things, it contains within itself its own punishment' (1986: 83). In *Casino*, Sam has large signs bearing the words 'Yes' and 'No' in his office. Balthasar points out: 'Indeed, the order perverted by the creature still affirms itself in its very perversion: when No is said to God, the louder Yes resounds; in the pain of chastisement, the unity of goodness and pleasure is acknowledged' (1986: 83).

Below the lustful are the gluttons, the greedy and the prodigal – notable examples being found in *GoodFellas*, *Casino* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. When Karen asks her husband Henry for money for shopping in *GoodFellas* the amount is measured by the thickness of the wad of cash; and despite the warnings from the local mafia boss, Paulie Cicero (Paul Sorvino), Henry earns money from selling drugs and buys a new home whose décor speaks of excess. When Henry and his friends carry out the Lufthansa robbery, the stolen money leads to visible extravagance (one gangster spends the money from the 'Biggest Heist' on a pink Cadillac and a fur coat for his wife) that would attract unwanted attention from the authorities. Scorsese explains that a gangster's job is not to commit murder but to make a lot of money: 'Someone gets out of line, and it ruins making the money for everybody, and he's got to go' (in Ebert 2008: 110–11).

However, the rows of suits and dresses in the wardrobes in *GoodFellas*, and the expensive jewellery that Sam lavishes on Ginger in *Casino*, are outdone by the immoderation in *The Wolf of Wall Street* – from money, to clothes, to drink, to drugs:

The soul thinks first that it can find this goal in all the paltry little good things of life; what is nearest seems to be the pinnacle of all that is worth striving for, while he who is truly the most high, God, seems far away. This false evaluation leads to the vice most severely censured by Dante, the 'thirst for more and more', avarice and *auri sacra fames*. (Balthasar 1986: 78)

In the words of Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*:

For all the gold that is beneath the moon,  
Or ever has been, of these weary souls  
Could never make a single one repose. (*Inf.* VII)

Howard Hughes is obviously caught up in the lure of riches in *The Aviator*, with Juan Trippe (Alec Baldwin) acting as a tempter. Annette Wernblad points



**Figure 2.1** The devil at work: Trippe toys with his prey in *The Aviator*.

out the first time that the audience sees Trippe ‘is the precise moment when Scorsese chooses to go from the abstraction of two-color to the heightened reality of three-strip Technicolor’ (2011: 198) – an artistic decision that reflects the historical development of colour film at the same time as making Hughes’s devilish nemesis more vibrant. As Trippe toys with Hughes, puffing on his pipe as he sits outside the screening room in which Hughes has incarcerated himself, he takes on a satanic aura. (**Figure 2.1**)

In Ps. 73 the psalmist writes of ‘the happiness of sinners secure in their good fortune. ... The world appears to be so perverse that the only rational course is to live like them, to have done with God and to make common cause with the cynical potentates of the earth, the successful people, those human “gods” who seem hardly mortals at all’ (Ratzinger 1988: 88). Yet Dante ‘sets himself out to refute the opinion that nobility is derived from wealth and possessions. Riches, being base, are the very opposite of what is noble. To begin with, there is no justice in the distribution of wealth. It can be acquired by chance, by inheritance or by unlawful means’ (Reynolds 2006: 83). Several of Scorsese’s films underline this point, from the world of the Italian Mafia to Wall Street.

Further below in the *Inferno* are those who have been malicious, including the heretics – a label that was applied to Dante, whose publication *De Monarchia* remained on the Index until 1881, as well as to Scorsese when he brought Kazantzakis’s once ‘Indexed’ novel *The Last Temptation* to the screen. There were orthodox clerics who burnt and banned Dante’s work and saw him as a radical, so that it became dangerous to possess *De Monarchia*, just as cinemagoers found it to be perilous to attend a screening of *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988 when the cinema on St Michel Boulevard in Paris was set on fire in protest.

## Lower hell: The violent

The seventh circle of the *Inferno* is the home for those who have committed violence in one of three ways: against one's neighbour, one's self or God:

All the first circle of the Violent is;  
But since force may be used against three persons,  
In three rounds 'tis divided and constructed.

To God, to ourselves, and to our neighbour can we  
Use force; I say on them and on their things,  
As thou shalt hear with reason manifest.

A death by violence, and painful wounds,  
Are to our neighbour given; and in his substance  
Ruin, and arson, and injurious levies;

Whence homicides, and he who smites unjustly,  
Marauders, and freebooters, the first round  
Tormenteth all in companies diverse. (*Inf. XI*)

Here is the abode of the murderers – and there are plenty of those in Scorsese films who have broken the commandment 'that forbids direct and intentional killing as gravely sinful. The murderer and those who cooperate voluntarily in murder commit a sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 2268).

However, one of the criticisms aimed at Dante was that he had created some rather 'sympathetic sinners' so that the reader's task is to make the distinction between the narrator of *The Divine Comedy* and the Pilgrim. Rather than offering moralizing judgements, Dante 'uses irony to undercut the alluring words of sinners who present themselves rather as victims than as perpetrators of outrage in the eye of God' (Hollander 1998) and queries whether it is wrong to feel pity for the damned:

Who is a greater reprobate than he  
Who feels compassion at the doom divine? (*Inf. XX*)

Indeed, Scorsese has explained his own dilemma when filming stories about the gangster community, as he was familiar with such an environment as a child: 'I can't make a picture where they're bad guys. They can't be bad guys to me' (in Ebert 2008: 111). Many of his characters are multidimensional murderers who would reside in the *Inferno* but have odd loveable quirks: in *Casino*, Nicky is a man who will hurry home to make breakfast for his son after committing

a crime. This is the world that Scorsese grew up in, as represented by Charlie's uncle in *Mean Streets*, who is based on a gangster whom the director once knew: 'The way he moved, what happened when he came out of his doorway – it was the parting of the Red Sea' (in Schickel 2013).

In taking on the role of Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, Robert De Niro aimed to never let the audience know he was crazy, and his additions to the script were intended to 'win over the audience's sympathies' (Tait 2015: 308). Scorsese once described the role as a cross between Charles Manson and Saint Paul (see Cieutat 1986: 115), an idea reflected in the fact that Travis carves a cross into his bullets as if he is on a sacred mission.

In applying for a job as a taxi driver, Travis tells his potential boss that his licence is 'clean. Real clean, like my conscience.' He smiles as he apologizes for his 'joke' and looks down at the man he calls 'sir', who does not look like a successful man himself. Here is a twenty-six-year-old former marine with an honourable discharge (or so he claims), appearing to 'honour his father and mother' by sending a card for their wedding anniversary. Yet he lies about his life and omits his address, consoling his parents with the words: 'Don't worry about me. One day there'll be a knock on the door and it'll be me.' He evidently does not keep the Sabbath (as he sometimes works seven days a week) and he admits to dishonesty by not using the meter.

When Travis shaves his head and sports a Mohawk (as favoured by the Special Forces in Vietnam), there is no doubt that he intends to kill. 'All through the *Commedia* there is a personal agenda of vendetta' (Reynolds 2006: 276), and the theme of 'revenge' clearly echoes through *Taxi Driver*, both in the actions of the central protagonist and in the cameo role of a taxi passenger (played by Scorsese by accident rather than design when the nominated actor was unavailable), who utters some of the vilest dialogue heard in any of his films. Anger, misogyny and racism combine when the passenger explains that his wife is with 'a nigger' and that he is going to exact retribution by killing and mutilating her. 'You must think I'm pretty sick?' is presumably meant as a rhetorical question, although the passenger would not realize that his listener has violent plans of his own. Illuminated by a red glow, Travis will explain to his colleague Wizard (played by Peter Boyle, an actor who had studied theology himself), 'I just want to go out and really, really do something' and 'I've got some bad ideas in my head.' Wizard's onscreen advice is 'get laid, get drunk' but off screen Peter Boyle commented on the Calvinist script: 'It's predestination. In Calvinism, you're predestined, and human nature is so hopeless that it can

only be saved by grace. So it's a triumph of faith over works and of grace over nature' (in Kelly 1980: 98).

Scorsese admits that 'Travis wants to clean up the sin, and yet he's immersed in it himself. What he really wants to do is to clean *himself* up' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101). Roger Ebert compared the film to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and explained: 'The existentialist hero wonders if life is worth living. The ironic hero is greatly amused by people who wonder about things like that. And there you have the difference between the work of Paul Schrader and Quentin Tarantino' (in Raymond 2015: 33). Schrader, who describes Travis's personality as 'built like a Protestant church' (in Wilson 2011: 10), identifies both Catholicism and Calvinism as being 'infused with the sense of guilt, redemption by blood, and moral purpose – all acts are moral acts, all acts have consequence' (in Kelly 1996: 90).

The film offers the audience a subjective view of New York through the eyes of a psychotic man. When Travis tries to flirt with the unresponsive cashier (Diahnne Abbott, De Niro's own wife at the time) at a cinema showing 'Adult movies', the soundtrack of the porn film can be heard in the background, undermining his romantic overtures. He asks for Jujubes but has to settle for Goobers – there is obviously no wish fulfilment at the confectionary counter in this Hell – and his bloodshot eyes stare at the screen without emotion. Beside his bed are bottles of pills, presumably to help him sleep, but he exists in a 'waking nightmare'. 'Whenever I shot Travis Bickle, when he was alone in the car, or whenever people were talking to him, and that person is in the frame, then the camera was over their shoulder. He was in everybody else's light, but he was alone,' explains Scorsese (in Kelly 1996: 92). The celebrated scene when the camera pans away from Travis in embarrassment as he telephones an unresponsive Betsy is a case in point. Scorsese notes the focus on the deserted corridor and asks, 'Is it about the emptiness of his heart or his soul?' (in Wilson 2011: 57).

Jesuit James Martin mentions the famous quotation from St Augustine: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee'; and he continues: 'In their drive to fill this hole, some are pulled toward addictive behaviors, anything to fill them up: drugs, alcohol, gambling, shopping, sexual activity, compulsive eating. But those addictions lead only to a greater sense of disintegration, a more cavernous emptiness and, eventually, to loneliness and despair' (Martin 2010a). As Travis lies on his bed in his room, the camera places Travis under a celestial gaze – an approach that Scorsese will also adopt when Rodrigues is praying at night in *Silence*. In fact, Travis's inner

thoughts could be a form of daytime prayer (there is light through the blinds) as he ponders the fact that he needs 'some place to go', and articulates his own kind of Creed in which he offers his personal articles of faith: 'I don't believe that one should devote his life to morbid self attention. I believe that someone should become a person like other people.' However, Scorsese describes Travis's actions as relating to the kind of person 'who will level a village because its inhabitants don't believe in the God that he believes in' (in Schickel 2013). Travis will come to the help of a shopkeeper named Melio, who is attacked by a robber, but this Good Samaritan narrative is undermined by the excessive violence in this scene, as Melio beats up the black gunman whom Travis has already shot. These actions add to the horror of this Hell in which the pain is ongoing, as in Dante's vision of the *Inferno*.

Several commentators make an intertextual link between the script of *Taxi Driver* and the writing of Dostoyevsky, given that the Russian writer was 'a deeply religious artist with an apocalyptic vision of suffering. He perceived the criminal as having a twisted relationship – an affinity – with the saint' (Horsley 2005: 75). Scorsese explains that he wanted to make a film out of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (see Kelly 1996: 90), and Travis has been compared both to Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and to the narrator of *Notes from the Underground* because of 'the way he twists everyone and everything to fit his own sordid vision of the world, and slowly turns his madness into a kind of divine inspiration, and finally, a demonic calling' (Horsley 2005: 76).

When Travis meets Easy Andy (Steven Prince), a travelling salesman with guns and drugs, he buys the weapons but not the dope, showing that there are some distinctions in this Hell – notably, drugs are also 'no go areas' for some members of the Mafia in *GoodFellas*. Scorsese points out that 'the dealer lays [the guns] out one at a time on the velvet, like arranging the altar during Mass' (in Ebert 2008: 45). Preparing to assassinate Senator Charles Palantine (Leonard Harris), Travis turns his body into a temple but for an evil deed – not 'a temple of the holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6.19). He goes into training and (as Max Cady does in *Cape Fear*) exercises with pull ups, using the door frame for support. He has toned muscles and practised gun skills (although he blinks and flinches as he shoots) for his vocation of vengeance, and the DIY gadgets that he constructs for his many weapons turn him into a walking arsenal. Michael Bliss argues that 'Travis views Hell as a purgatorial prerequisite to salvation' (1995: 51), a rather muddled theology that may well be in his mind. One of the key dates in the narrative is 29 June – the Feast of St Peter and St Paul in honour of their



martyrdom. There is a ‘tension between sacred violence, as adopted and negated in the sacrificial crucifixion of Christ, and the profane violence of man, which is an attempt at divine power’ (High 2015: 388).

In the celebrated ‘You talkin’ to me?’ scene, the mole on Travis’s cheek helps the spectators to identify whether or not they are looking at a reflection: are they looking directly at his face or do they ‘see indistinctly, as in a mirror’ (1 Cor. 13.12). Mirrors, which evidently are a repeated feature in Scorsese’s mise en scène, also have an important role to play in *The Divine Comedy*: ‘Virgil’s second parallel is that of a body and its image in a mirror, which he offers as comparable to the relation between a soul and the body it represents’ (Reynolds 2006: 300):

And wouldst thou think how at each tremulous motion  
Trembles within a mirror your own image;  
That which seems hard would mellow seem to thee. (*Purg.* XXV)

Dante argues that ‘the soul possesses in potential both the human and divine faculties’ (Reynolds 2006: 302) and he rejects determinism: ‘Whatever the conditions into which we are born, our souls are the direct creations of God and we are responsible for our deeds’ (Reynolds 2006: 282).

Indeed, Travis might be regarded as the saviour of the young prostitute Easy, who is ‘born again’ as Iris. Therefore, the most complicated aspect of Travis’s personality is his ‘saviour’ role when he decides that he must enter Hell to rescue Iris, whose first audible words are: ‘Get me out of here’ – a command that he will eventually obey when he kills her pimp Matthew (Harvey Keitel) and she is returned to her family home. The crumpled \$20 (the sum that will impress Henry in *GoodFellas* and cause Paul such trauma in *After Hours*) that the pimp throws at Travis to ‘forget about it’ is not enough, and he will use that tainted blood money (like the thirty pieces of silver in the New Testament narrative) to gain entry to the brothel.

In *Silence* there is a rate for betrayal, including 300 silver pieces for a priest. In *Taxi Driver* there is a monetary scale for illegal acts: \$15 = fifteen minutes for sex with a child; and \$25 dollars = thirty minutes. At one moment Matthew calls Travis ‘a funny guy’ – the very words that cause extreme tension in *GoodFellas* when Henry makes the same claim about Tommy. However, there is no escalation of violence at this point as Matthew gives Travis an encouraging farewell: ‘But looks aren’t everything. Go on, have a good time.’ Dante had an interest in astrology (Beaup 2014: 109) and might have taken note that Iris and Matthew are Librans – the sign of balance – if he had ever had the opportunity to watch *Taxi Driver*.



When Travis first talks to Matthew there are church bells ringing in the background, but when Iris takes Travis into the brothel, the police sirens are audible, so that there is an intermingling of the sacred and the profane. The room is illuminated by candles of different sizes and colours, so that it has the aura of a shrine. Travis wants to help Iris rather than exploit her ('This is nothing for a person to do') and to persuade her to return home and attend school, as Jesus will also encourage Magdalene to follow a new path in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. When they go for breakfast together in the afternoon, her straightened hair and plastic sunglasses make her look like a child rather than a prostitute, although the fire engine passing in the background is a warning sign that this environment is dangerous.

There is both threatening and romantic music as Travis leaves \$500 for Iris in what is effectively a suicide note – an action that would be condemned by Dante, who turns those who have killed themselves into gnarled trees in the Wood of Suicides. In Scorsese's filmography, the act of suicide – which goes against the teachings of the Catholic Church – plays only a small part. His short film called *The Big Shave* (1967) is one dramatic example of self-destruction when the protagonist slits his own throat through excessive grooming with a razor blade – supposedly a comment on Scorsese's state of mind at the time of filming (the song 'I Can't Get Started' accompanies the image), as well as a critical observation on the involvement of the United States in Vietnam (see Cieutat 1986: 51). Groppi shoots himself in the mouth in *Mean Streets*, with the moment of impact replaced by a white screen; the demise of Marcy – presumably by her own hand – happens off screen in *After Hours*; and an employee of Stratton Oakmont slashes his wrists in *The Wolf of Wall Street* – a death that Jordan Belfort recounts with the same glib tone that he adopts for many events in his life. In *The Last Temptation of Christ* the suicide of Judas (as recorded in the New Testament in Mt. 27.3-10) does not take place at all – indeed, in the 'dream sequence' it is Judas who comes to stir Jesus up, although his actions have the same effect as his biblical betrayal of his Master for money: he helps to ensure that the Messiah is crucified.

Some elements of Dante's poem were censored. For example, the verses in which 'Dante has the corrupt popes stuffed head down in holes in the rock' were scraped away from the manuscript in the British Library (Shaw 2014). Scorsese also had to make adjustments to *Taxi Driver*: the shoot-out scene is desaturated in order to get the right rating, toning down the image without removing the horror. Reflecting on the mayhem at the end of *Taxi Driver* Scorsese explained,

'I think those things should be shown as being ugly and awful. At least that's how I see them and how I must, therefore, present them. ... Also, many of Bobby's close-ups aren't at the usual 24 frames per second. They're at 36, which makes them a little slower, more deliberate and off-kilter than the rest' (in Amata 2005: 67). Scorsese explains that he wanted De Niro 'to look almost like a monster' (in Ebert 2008: 46).

After shots are exchanged, Travis is bleeding from his own wounds and sprayed with the blood of his victims. Having run out of bullets, Travis sits on the sofa in Iris's room, having transformed the brothel into a killing ground. Three policemen arrive (an interesting number in itself, given Dante's penchant for the number three) and point a gun at Travis, who aims his finger at his head and makes the gesture of shooting himself three times with his eyes open. The camera tracks back over the carnage, looking down from above, following the trail of blood. It is a scene of sacrifice that might be viewed as 'a purification' (in Keyser 1992: 83).

Here death could be treated on film as 'a thrilling spectacle tailor-made for alleviating the general boredom of life' (Ratzinger 1988: 70). However, speaking about the spectators' reactions to the final shoot-out, Scorsese himself clarified, 'The idea was to create a violent catharsis, so that they'd find themselves saying, "Yes, kill"; and then afterwards realize, "My God, no"' (in Raymond 2015: 27), so he was shocked that people were actually quite enthused by the act of murder on screen. In relation to the case of John Hinckley, who reportedly tried to assassinate President Ronald Reagan because of his obsession with Jodie Foster in *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese responded: 'Well, I'm Catholic. It's easy to make me feel guilty' (in Goodwin 2005: 64).

Three men are dead in the brothel scene, but the subsequent newspaper reports hail Travis as a hero, as Iris's family (represented in a photograph by Scorsese's own parents) express their gratitude at the safe return of their daughter to Pittsburgh. However, the purported saviour remains a danger to society, as indicated by Travis's expression in the rear-view mirror in the final scene when he drives away from Betsy: 'I wanted to use it to show that the time bomb is ticking away,' confirms Scorsese (in Wilson 2011: 60). An appropriate intertextual reference would be Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, with a quotation from Bernanos's novel: 'Hell, my dear lady, is not loving anymore' (in Balthasar 1988: 56).

The famous sermon about Hell and damnation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is reportedly based on Jesuit preaching that James Joyce heard when

he was a student in Dublin (see Turner 1993: 90). 'The Jesuits ousted demons, too, or nearly so. They weren't needed in a Hell of "other people"' (Turner 1993: 174). In Scorsese's films the 'other people' may be trapped together in a toxic relationship, as with Sam, Nicky and Ginger in *Casino*. Nicky squeezes a man's head in a vice before suffering his own painful demise that would have been in keeping with the Florentine statutes in Dante's day, which 'stipulated that the punishment for murderers was to be buried alive, placed head down in a hole' (Shaw 2014). Nicky's former associates beat him savagely before throwing him, still breathing, into a grave dug out in the Nevada desert. Scorsese explained his thinking behind the scene and why he did not make 'short shrift' of the murders: 'I didn't feel we should have. I think it was terrible, and sad. He kind of took for everybody' (in Ebert 2008: 150).

In the world of Italian gangsters, there is a mixture of outright evil and moral control: 'Street muggings, burglaries, purse-snatchings, and rapes were almost non-existent in mob-controlled areas,' explains Pileggi in *Wiseguy* (1985: 49). 'For most of the guys the killings were just accepted. They were part of every day. ... Murder was the only way everyone stayed in line. It was the ultimate weapon' (in Pileggi 1985: 159).

There is a kind of terrestrial fiefdom that St Augustine identifies: 'What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms? A gang is a group of men under the command of a leader, bound by a compact of association' (*City of God*, IV:4); and some of Scorsese's male protagonists fit Augustine's description of the robber who 'is anxious, of course, to be at peace in his own home, with his wife and children and any other members of his household; without doubt he is delighted to have them obedient to his beck and call' and, if displeased 'he scolds and punishes' (*City of God*, XIX:12).

The actor Paul Sorvino (whose character Paulie in *GoodFellas* was based on a real gangster called Paul Vario) explains the 'weird bifurcation of character' of family men who were also murderers (in Philips 2015). He said, 'I think there are wiseguys who make moral decisions. I don't think all the people are the same in that walk of life, if you can call it a walk of life. It's more like a kind of descent into hell' (in Kelly 1996: 264). Nicholas Pileggi talks about one of the hit men he knew named Danny Jack Parisi, who 'took communion every day' and made a special pilgrimage every year by walking barefoot from Brooklyn to Our Lady of Mount Carmel church. When asked how he could make sense of following his daily Mass attendance by killing people, he replied: 'I go to church every day and I pray to God to give me the strength to rob again' (in Kelly 1996: 268).

Henry and Karen (via their voice-overs) guide the audience through the Underworld in *GoodFellas*. As Dante's Pilgrim interviews characters in Hell to learn their stories, Henry and Karen give their version of their own lives. The mob also breaks the fourth wall and acknowledges the audience in the Bamboo Lounge, where the red glow of the shades echoes the atmosphere of Volpe's bar in *Mean Streets*. The 'Funny how?' scene with Tommy is all about keeping one's nerve when faced with a genuine threat of violence.

When the young man named Spider (Michael Imperioli) stands up to Tommy, he pays for his bravery with a bullet in the foot. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, 'And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna' (Mk 9.45). Initially, it appears that Spider will be entering the Afterlife with a limp, but it is not clear whether his act of defiance is a rejection of the gangster code or just an (understandable) reaction to ill treatment. However, the subsequent killing of Spider by Tommy demonstrates the abnormality of the latter's violent outbursts.

The trick in *GoodFellas* 'was to sort of ignore that danger, make it a rollicking road movie in a way – like a kind of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby picture, with everybody on the road and having a great time' (in Schickel 2013). This is a world where men sit down to eat a meal with a body in the boot of the car outside the house. Famously, in the role of Mrs DeVito, Catherine Scorsese provides this very repast for her onscreen son Tommy and his friends. She discusses her desire for Tommy to find a nice girl, not knowing that her offspring has come to borrow a shovel to dig a grave for his most recent victim. In the Italian family, the 'meals were a "communion" of the family, and food was "sacred" because it was the tangible medium of that communion' (Gambino 2011: 17). Mrs DeVito sits in front of a reproduction of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, not realizing that Billy Batts has already enjoyed his last meal, thanks to her son. It is an improvised scene as Scorsese explains: 'That's what I've often tried to get at – that kind of raw, unforced feeling when the actors lose the sense of artifice and the barriers between fiction and reality break down' (in Donato 2017).

In *GoodFellas*, Henry wants to be 'somebody' and for people to treat him with respect because of his associations. He does not suffer from the lack of ambition that affects those in the first rings of Dante's Hell. But he also faces moral conflicts. As a boy, he tries to help a man who has been shot, and he is criticized for wasting clean aprons on mopping up the blood – turning himself into a Veronica figure from the Catholic Stations of the Cross. Henry does not find killing as easy as Tommy, and while he is prepared to beat up Karen's

aggressive neighbour in broad daylight on his front lawn, he has some qualms about throwing a man to the lions in a Florida zoo. Ebert notes that this is the type of lifestyle that 'fills the soul with guilt and the heart with dread, and before long Henry Hill is walking around as if there's a lead weight in his stomach' (2008: 121) – and swallowing a lead weight is the kind of punishment that would be at home in Dante's *Inferno*.

Far more committed to the cause of violence is Max Cady in *Cape Fear*, based on a book called *The Executioners* (1957) by John MacDonald. The film is replete with religious references and an emphasis on blood and water. There is also a notably Hitchcockian atmosphere, given the incorporation of work by artists once employed by the Catholic Master of Suspense, from the credit sequence created by Saul Bass to the arrangement of Bernard Herrmann's score (taken from *Cape Fear* (J. Lee Thompson 1962), an earlier adaptation of MacDonald's novel) by Elmer Bernstein. In Cady's prison cell there are several recognizable images and publications: Nietzsche holding a sword; General Patton; Stalin; General Lee; Black Bolt; Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* and *Thus spake Zarathustra*, and Dante's *Inferno*. Interestingly, given Scorsese's later adaptation of *Silence*, the picture of San Felipe de Jesus impaled on spears was chosen because Max 'sees himself as a victim' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 169).

'To be punished, even justly, is still suffering,' explains Ricoeur (1967: 43). Having completed a fifteen-year jail term for rape, Cady sets out for revenge on his lawyer Sam Bowden, who had buried a report about the promiscuity of Cady's female victim that might have altered the verdict. Sam's one-time illiterate client has learnt to read and now understands the deception. Carrying out his retribution, Cady seduces Sam's assistant, Lori (Ileana Douglas), declaring that he is 'one hell of an animal' before proving that he is a man of his word by handcuffing her, breaking her arm, biting her face and hitting her with his fist. Lori decides not to press charges because she believes that the cross examination at the trial would 'crucify' her – a choice of verb with religious connotations that relates to public humiliation rather than physical suffering in this case.

Vengeance is certainly the theme of *Cape Fear* in which 'Cady is an illustrated man, or a personification, if you like, of revenge, and an instrument of salvation' (Stern 1995: 184). Among the tattoos that adorn his flesh is 'Vengeance is mine' (Rom. 12.19). The verse from St Paul's epistle reads: 'Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his

head' (Rom. 12.19-20). Although it is clear that the whole quotation would make a rather lengthy tattoo, it seems that Cady has not accepted the biblical verse in context. He has definitely decided not to wait for God to intervene on his behalf. 'My time is at hand' is a reference to Cady's own timing rather than to that of Jesus (Mt. 26.18), although a bumper sticker on his car indicates that he has hopes for a better Afterlife: 'You're A V.I.P. on EARTH, I'm a V.I.P. in HEAVEN.' When he overcomes the three men whom Sam has sent to beat him up, he emerges victorious to declare: 'I am like God and God like me. I am as large as God. He is as small as I.' The quotation comes from Silesius, a seventeenth-century Lutheran who converted to Catholicism and was a priest and physician, but Cady's adoption of the phrase is to underline his superiority over Sam (who is cowering behind a dumpster) rather than to stress any communion with the Divine.

Cady is represented as a typically devilish figure surrounded by smoke (from his cigar) with a forced laugh, accompanied by flashes of red (to signal passion, danger and blood). On one occasion he is dressed in a Hawaiian shirt (a touch of paradise) for his meeting with Sam; but he is also wearing a wire – an act of deception to deceive the deceiver. 'I'm going to teach you the meaning of commitment,' he warns his former lawyer. He quotes from the Bible and gives Sam a riddle to decipher ('Look between Esther and Psalms'), which is a reference to the Book of Job. Presumably, Cady could see himself in the role of Job (the good man who has been unfairly persecuted); whereas Sam might see himself as Job and Cady in the part of Satan, who is 'roaming the earth' (Job 1.7).

Scorsese admitted that he 'Catholicized' the script of *Cape Fear*, turning Cady into 'the malignant spirit of guilt, in a way, of the family – the avenging angel. Punishment for everything you ever felt sexually. It is the basic moral battleground of Christian ethics' (in Keyser 1992: 216). So Cady carries out his evil plan to corrupt Sam's daughter Danielle (Juliette Lewis), earning her trust by pretending to be her new drama teacher. As he speaks to her on the telephone, hanging upside down from his exercise bar, the camera, which is mounted on a panatate, turns 360 degrees (Keyser 1992: 218) so that Cady appears upright but with the distorted features of a monster. (**Figure 2.2**) (Viewers of *Silence* may be reminded of the contorted face of Ferreira when he is shown hanging over the pit when he is tortured.)

Having lured Danielle into his lair (a 'Hansel and Gretel' forest setting on a school stage), Cady addresses her in a gentle voice ('I'm not going to hurt you'), talks to her about sex and encourages her to read Henry Miller – the author whose work got Paul Hackett into trouble in *After Hours*. In his guise



**Figure 2.2** Max Cady: the avenging angel with evil intent in *Cape Fear*.

as Professor Do-Right, he carries out his 'search for truth', telling Danielle that her parents have punished her 'for their sins'. He advises her, 'Just forgive them, for they know not what they do' without any intention himself of turning Jesus's words at the Crucifixion (Lk. 23.34) into action. 'Every man carries a circle of hell around his head like a halo,' is his rather pessimistic view of humankind.

The stability of the Bowden family in *Cape Fear* has already been undermined by the flirtatious reputation of 'Slippery Sam', and now Cady is beguiling Sam's young daughter with his understanding smile: 'You know, I think I might have found a companion. A companion for that long walk to the light.' When he gently places his arm around the bashful young girl's shoulders, puts his thumb into her mouth and kisses her, he is committing an act of sacrilege.

In *The Divine Comedy* the Pilgrim is carried from the seventh to the eighth circle by Geryon, who has 'three forms in one body, human, bestial and reptilian. He is the representation of fraud, having the face of a just man, a body dazzling with bright colours, the paws and forearms of an animal and a serpent's tail with a poisonous sting' (Reynolds 2006: 157). On the one hand, the image evokes the beast in the Book of Revelation. However, in reading the description of Geryon, the tattooed body of Max Cady may also come to mind. In addition to the little Lacoste crocodile trade mark on the cardigan that he wears, Cady proves his reptilian features with his snake-like charm. Scorsese admits that he was 'playing on the idea of evil being attractive and dangerous' and 'Max uses logic and emotion and psychology very much in the way Satan speaks in the Bible' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 166). As Dante records in *The Divine Comedy*, one of the Devil's vices is that 'he's a liar and the father of lies' (*Inf. XXIII*).



Having infiltrated the Bowden house as if he were 'the Holy Ghost', bypassing all the defences that Sam had erected and committing two murders, Cady demonstrates superhuman strength when he travels strapped to the undercarriage of Sam's car, so that he can pursue the family to the appropriately named Cape Fear. The religious references continue in the climax that takes place on a river with a storm on the horizon. As the boat scenes were also filmed with the panatate that enabled the camera to rotate through 360 degrees (see Grist 2013: 149), the sense that the Bowden family and their enemy are circling down through the vortex of a Dantean Hell is visibly conveyed.

### Religious antagonism

Max Cady appears to be an evangelical antagonist in an atmosphere of Catholic guilt. Andrew Greeley points out that Catholicism arrived 'after the establishment of the American republic as a basically Anglo-Saxon Protestant society. Thus, Catholicism was not only an immigrant religion but an immigrant religion coming into a culture which, for a number of historical reasons, was antipathetic to Catholicism' (1967: 19). It is this atmosphere that Scorsese captures in *Gangs of New York*, in an era when the Catholic Archbishop John Hughes 'had the background and personality intended for a leader of warriors rather than a compromiser' (Greeley 1967: 108)

St Augustine bemoans the fact that the world is divided against itself by wars and 'the pursuit of victories that bring death with them or at best are doomed to death' (*City of God*, XV:4). Scorsese remarks on the tribes emerging from their underground lair in *Gangs of New York*: they have a god but he is a 'Celtic god of war' rather than a loving Jesus (DVD commentary). It was a time when 'Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants were often regarded as less than white, ethnic others incapable of assimilation' (Ennis 2015: 175).

The Protestant ministers drive out the Irish homeless from the brewery building 'to make way for a mission to "serve" the same people' (Lohr 2015: 197). *Gangs of New York* has been criticized for emphasizing an antagonism between Christians, with the anti-papal observations of Bill 'The Butcher' Cutting (Daniel Day-Lewis) being an obvious example: at one point he rails against the 'king in a pointy hat what sits on his throne in Rome'. 'Priest' Vallon (Liam Neeson) is a kind of warlord who wears a clerical collar to protect his throat, but he and his son Amsterdam pray for 'success on the earthly battlefield and potential deliverance



of *their enemies* into another, much hotter place' (Lohr 2015: 205). The prayer to St Michael that they say together is actually an anachronism, as it was composed later in the nineteenth century to assist the Church in its confrontation with cosmic forces of evil (see Blake 2005). Before Vatican II, it was the prayer said at the end of Mass, so Scorsese would have known it well.

Amsterdam claims that he 'was about [his] father's business' but his actions bear no resemblance to Jesus in the Temple (Lk. 2.49). The battle offers 'the movement and the creation of a kind of confused, futile, primeval world, everything, just the futility of the fight itself' with its medieval atmosphere (in Gross 2017). The battlefield action at the Five Points would certainly befit Dante's *Inferno*:

They smote each other not alone with hands,  
But with the head and with the breast and feet,  
Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth. (*Inf.* VII)

Scorsese also depicts racism in *The Departed*, in which footage of the school integration riots in Boston is followed by Frank Costello commenting in voice-over about discrimination against Irish Catholics: 'Years ago we had the Church. That was only a way of saying we had each other'; and twenty years after an Irishman could not get a job, 'we had the presidency (may he rest in peace)'. Costello explains: 'I don't want to be a product of my environment. I want my environment to be a product of me.' However, his desire to escape from his heritage is mired in criminal activity.

The audience sees the young Colin Sullivan as an altar server as Costello continues his criticism of the Catholic Church and harangues his protégé: 'Kneel. Stand. Kneel. Stand. You go for that sort of thing, I don't know what to do for you. A man makes his own way. No one gives it to you. You have to take it. Non serviam.' The Latin phrase comes from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which a priest gives a sermon on the Garden of Eden and the fall of Lucifer who 'was hurled with his rebellious angels into hell. What his sin was we cannot say. Theologians consider that it was the sin of pride, the sinful thought conceived in an instant: NON SERVIAM: I WILL NOT SERVE. That instant was ruin' (Joyce 1992: 126). It is a quotation that the young Colin recognizes – and the question of who will be his master, for good or ill, is at the heart of the film. A subsequent scene of Costello at the opera, in which the red illumination highlights his devilish demeanour, is another reminder that Colin has chosen the path of evil.

While Scorsese's audiences will have their own ideas about distinguishing 'the saints and sinners' from among his protagonists, Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915–68) rightly points out: 'People who look like saints to us are very often not so, and those who do not look like saints very often are' (1998: 186). The theme is underlined in *Silence* where Rodrigues fails to recognize an elderly Samurai as Inoue, the Governor of Chikugo, who is reputed to be 'the devil' responsible for the execution of Christians. When the Japanese soldiers appear through the mist like ghosts, Inoue (Issei Ogata) is among them, but the audience would not realize that the smiling elderly man struggling through the mud is the powerful Inquisitor who will bring death to the village.

There is an evident decision to 'humanize' Inoue in his dealings with Rodrigues as they discuss the Jesuits' unwelcome efforts to spread their faith. In his first onscreen conversation with the prisoners, Inoue arrives with his entourage, waving his fan to swat away the insects, and reproaches the Christians for making him travel so far in the dust at his age: 'Just make a little effort to understand our point of view. We don't hate you. You've brought it on yourselves. And you can rid yourselves of it, too.' Addressing Rodrigues, Inoue admits that he is not infallible and has learnt from earlier mistakes: 'Killing the priests and killing the peasants makes it worse. If they can die for their god, they think it only makes them stronger.'

Faced with Rodrigues's early self-righteousness ('If you feel you must punish someone, punish me alone!'), Inoue responds: 'If you were a real man, a truly good priest, you should feel pity for the Kirishitan.' He utters the devastating words: 'The price for your glory is their suffering.' However, he then has to ask a guard to help him to his feet, underlining his aged status. Confused by appearances, Rodrigues later asks for the 'real challenge' of facing the Grand Inquisitor to test his faith, not realizing that the old man sitting there in front of him is Inoue himself. The other Samurai burst out laughing at this turn of events, but Inoue looks serious before making his own introduction: 'I am the Inquisitor.' He sighs, and then he has to be assisted in order to rise from his stool.

In a further 'interrogation' conducted over a cup of tea, Inoue states with conviction: 'Padre, you missionaries do not seem to know Japan'; and Rodrigues responds, 'And you, honourable Inquisitor, do not seem to know Christianity.' At this moment, Inoue appears to physically deflate, as if he were a punctured balloon, providing a memorably comical moment. 'There are those who think of your religion as a curse. I do not. I see it in another way

but still dangerous,' Inoue explains, before struggling to his feet and using his fan to bat away the servant who tries to help him. 'I'd like you to think of the persistent love of an ugly woman. And how a barren woman should never be a wife,' are his parting words. However, there is no doubt that 'the highly intelligent and informed inquisitor Inoue, with his polite manners and saccharine but sinister smile, [does] not mask his intent to break the resolve of the Christians' (Pacatte 2016).

## The fraudulent

The eighth circle of the *Inferno* is the final destination for those people who are guilty of fraud, which can affect loved ones or strangers:

Hypocrisy, flattery, and who deals in magic,  
 Falsification, theft, and simony,  
 Panders, and barrators, and the like filth. (*Inf.* XI)

Dante places the fraudulent below the violent: 'Violence is something we share with wild beasts, but fraud requires human reason and therefore is a graver sin against our nature' (Royal 1999: 72).

Obviously there are some characters in Scorsese's films who manage to combine violence and fraud, most notably the Mafia men who will 'send the boys round' if payment is not received. Michael (Richard Romanus) is an example in *Mean Streets*, when he takes revenge (via a gun fired by Scorsese himself) on Johnny who has failed to pay his debts, saying: 'Now is the time.' The phrase evokes 'Now is the time for judgement on this world' (Jn 12.31); or the words of St. Paul: 'Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6.2) (see Deacy 2012: 81).

In the eighth circle of the *Inferno* are the panderers and seducers who are punished by a demon. Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull* is prosecuted because he introduces underage girls to men in his club, although he openly expresses remorse for his way of life in a later scene. Matthew in *Taxi Driver* would certainly earn condemnation for his exploitation of a twelve-year-old, although even he has his boundaries ('No rough stuff but anything else') and there is one scene when he dances with Iris to a romantic record that shows his affection for her. However, their embrace is interrupted by the sound of gunfire as Travis practises his skills, foreshadowing the fate that awaits Matthew. Harvey Keitel, who plays

the role, explains the dichotomy: ‘There is a great humanity in a pimp. I don’t mean humanity in its benevolent sense. I mean humanity in its suffering sense. They come out of a place of great need, usually of poverty, of broken homes, of never having opportunity’ (in Kelly 1996: 93). Later, the audience see that Matthew has to pay a man in a suit, so that he, too, has a master.

Scorsese considered himself to be ‘a political virgin’ in 1965 when he went to Mass and heard a priest give a sermon on Vietnam as a ‘holy war’ (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 100), although he rejected organized religion as a result at that time. However, there are some memorable allusions to politics in his films. In *It’s Not Just You, Murray!* the titular protagonist’s reference to politics is illustrated by a man with a knife in his back; and Scorsese made a contribution to the student film *Street Scenes*, shooting a group of angry students (including Harvey Keitel) having a heated discussion in a bedroom (see Cieutat 1986: 65). There are socialist ideas in *Boxcar Bertha*; the Senate hearings in *The Aviator* and dodgy dealings at Tammany Hall in *Gangs of New York*. The golden dome of the Capitol building shines brightly in *The Departed*, overlooking the dirty deeds in the city below.

Dante gives flatterers – among whom are politicians – a harsh punishment because of the way that they have misused language, immersing them ‘in a ditch full of human excrement (not animal dung: the point is made explicitly)’ as Shaw (2014) points out. Senator Palantine in *Taxi Driver* would presumably find his home there. He spreads his arms wide – adopting a Christ-like pose that matches the sculpture behind him on the USS Maine monument at the Southwest corner of Central Park opposite Columbus Circle – but he is presented as ‘a pompous, hypocritical phony who feigns interest in Travis’s inane opinions when riding in his cab’ (Blake 2005). When he goes to Palantine’s rally, Travis applauds the slogans but the sound of his hand claps is distinct from that of the crowd, as if he is aware of the disjunction between empty words and actions.

Malebolge, the eighth circle of the *Inferno* which is the home of the fraudulent, is made of ‘stone and iron to reinforce the notion of a prison house’ (Royal 1999: 79) – perhaps the tower blocks in the Financial District of New York might now play that role. In Scorsese’s treatment for the uncompleted *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* there is a reference to C. S. Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*, (1942) which contains epistolary advice from a Senior Demon to his nephew Wormwood. There are echoes of this devilish education strategy in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, when Scorsese presents Mark Hanna in the role of an experienced Prince of



**Figure 2.3** 'A warm welcome to the Inferno!' in *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

Darkness who introduces his young colleague Jordan Belfort to evil ways in the (appropriately satanically numbered) Top of the Sixes Restaurant (666 Fifth Avenue). (**Figure 2.3**) Hanna would certainly have found like-minded friends among the demons in Dante's *Inferno*:

Ah, how ferocious was he in his aspect!  
 And how he seemed to me in action ruthless,  
 With open wings and light upon his feet! (*Inf.* XXI)

Jim McDermott (2014) argues that both *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* are important in their different ways because they 'take temptation seriously. ... Real temptation is a lot more attractive; it hides its victims and its consequence, and for a long time it's usually a lot more fun.' Balthasar reminds his reader that the devil has 'made a radical decision against God, or absolute love' (1988: 145) and 'unrecognizableness is his real strength' (in Balthasar 1988: 146).

St Ignatius claimed that the devil works 'first by tempting people to desire *riches*, which leads to *honors*, which often leads to an overweening *pride*, the gateway to a gamut of sinful behavior. As any Jesuit will tell you, the shorthand phrase is "riches to honor to pride"' (Martin 2010a). The three temptations offered by Hanna (money, cocaine and hookers) are clearly accepted by Belfort; and he successfully passes his Series Seven exam – suitably named as it appears to qualify him to commit the Seven Deadly Sins. For Dante, there are three wrong paths: 'the desire for pleasure, the desire for fame, and the desire for material possessions' (Reynolds 2006: 85). Boethius, the philosopher who influenced Dante, 'had said that a man burning with greed for other men's possessions was like a wolf' (Reynolds 2006: 85), and the poet calls the monster Plutus

the ‘accursed wolf’ (*Inf.* VII) when he puts him ‘in charge of the souls of the avaricious’ (Reynolds 2006: 140). Given that Jordan Belfort has that appellation, he would find suitable companions in the *Inferno*. Perhaps potential clients should have taken note of the fact that there is a lion in the advertisement for Stratton Oakmont, strolling between the desks, in light of the biblical warning that ‘Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour’ (1 Pet. 5.8).

In *City of God*, St Augustine discusses disability, including humans ‘whose height is only a cubit’ (*City of God*, XVI:8) and argues: ‘For God is the creator of all, and he himself knows where and when any creature should be created or should have been created. ... The observer who cannot view the whole is offended by what seems the deformity of a part, since he does not know how it fits in, or how it is related to the rest’ (*City of God*, XVI:8). Jordan Belfort is evidently unable to see ‘the bigger picture’, and he has no compunction about tossing dwarfs at a target for his own amusement. ‘Dante’s fear is that by telling everything he has seen in this journey, he will anger many’ (Royal 1999: 208); and Scorsese certainly upset some viewers with his vision of Wall Street.

In his discussion of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, Robert Hollander (1998) explains that the poet’s ‘risky technique was to trust us, his readers, with the responsibility for seizing upon the details in the narratives told by these sympathetic sinners in order to condemn them on the evidence that issues from their own mouths’. It is an assessment that also has relevance for Scorsese and his audience – in particular with regard to *The Wolf of Wall Street*, which met with some hostility from those observers who felt that the director had glamorized the outrageous behaviour on display. His editor, Thelma Schoonmaker, argues that Scorsese ‘really wanted to immerse the audience and make you really feel that greed and excess. Not to stand back and judge it, but make you feel it and make you decide, “is it right?”’ (in Tartaglione 2014). Readers must work out their own reactions to the sinners in *The Divine Comedy*: ‘That readers have always been divided in their responses to such episodes is a testimony to the undogmatic quality – the tact, the indirectness, the obliqueness – of Dante’s narrative strategy’ (Shaw 2014). A similar comment could be made about Scorsese’s undogmatic approach, given the range of reactions that his films arouse. He is successful because he entertains rather than sermonizes. In many cases, he also leaves space for the viewer to contemplate the significance of the ending of his films and the fate of his protagonists.

However, there are occasions when the characters themselves understand that they have gone awry. ‘If, through God’s power, the spirit will have before

its eyes the history of all the offenses committed by it in shame and godlessness, then its conscience will be stung by its own barbs: it will be its own accuser and witness' (in Balthasar 1988: 51–2). In the Litany of the Saints there is the petition: *A subitanea morte, libera nos Domine* ('from a death that is sudden and unprepared for, deliver us, O Lord'). Ratzinger points out: 'To be taken away suddenly, without being able to make oneself ready, without having had time to prepare – this is the supreme danger from which man wants to be saved' (1988: 71).

In Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, there is a famous image of 'a sinner realizing for the first time that he really is, finally and irrevocably, going to Hell' (Turner 1993: 156) and this image finds its counterpart in the frightened reaction of Donnie (Jonah Hill) in *The Wolf of Wall Street* when Jordan Belfort's yacht is caught in a storm and death by drowning is a serious possibility: 'I did a lot of bad shit. I'm going to hell, Jordan!' Hans Urs von Balthasar asks: 'Might the fire meant by Christ be a "spiritual" one, consisting of the tortures of conscience in the sinful soul that knows itself to have fallen away from God's order forever?' (1988: 51). In *The Divine Comedy*, the story of Manfred, the son of Frederick II whom the Pilgrim meets in Canto III of *Purgatorio*, 'makes the fundamental theological point that turning to God even at the moment of death is enough for salvation' (Shaw 2014).

Of the reasons that are put forward to reject the idea of Hell, three relate to 'human estimations of the way God ought to behave: (1) Eternal punishment contradicts the goodness, love, and compassion of God and makes him a tyrant; (2) Eternal punishment contradicts the justice of God because it is in no way proportionate to the sin in question; and (3) Eternal punishment that is purely punitive and not remedial has no apparent value' (Burk et al. 2016: 17). However, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus warns, 'And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna' (Mt. 10.28).

In St Augustine's *City of God*, the history of the world is divided into two figurative cities:

I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil. (*City of God*, XV:1)





**Figure 2.4** A poignant question in *Cape Fear*.

St Augustine explains that no one can identify who belongs to the ‘City of God’ and whether bliss or damnation awaits. In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Judas asks Jesus if he is afraid of dying, and the latter replies, ‘Why should I be? Death isn’t a door that closes. It opens. It opens and you go through it.’ The question for Scorsese’s characters is: What is on the other side? In *Cape Fear* the family drive past a roadside wooden cross bearing the message: ‘Where will you spend eternity?’ (**Figure 2.4**) Ratzinger argues that ‘Heaven reposes upon freedom, and so leaves the damned the right to will their own damnation’ (Ratzinger 1988: 216). Some of Scorsese’s protagonists appear to have made that choice.



## Betrayal

Hence in the smallest circle, where the point is  
Of the Universe, upon which Dis is seated,  
Whoë'er betrays for ever is consumed. (*Inf.* XI)

Within the cone-like structure of Dante's *Inferno*, the ninth circle is the smallest and the furthest away from Heaven. Here there are four kinds of traitors: those who have betrayed kin, homeland, guests and benefactors. Bonds that lead to treachery in the Bible – such as Cain and Abel or Esau and Jacob in the Book of Genesis – certainly form a dimension of Scorsese's films. From Murray (Ira Rubin) and Joe (Sam DeFazio) in his student production *It's Not Just You, Murray!* onwards there is a focus on broken ties, whether or not the characters are blood related. In *Raging Bull* Joey is willing to sell out Jake 'at the drop of a hat' (Wernblad 2011: 38) by encouraging him to take a dive in the boxing ring. There is the troubled friendship manifested by Sam and Nicky in *Casino*, with their mutual passion for Ginger at its heart; the adoption of Henry by Paulie in *GoodFellas* that leads to an ultimate act of treason when 'the son' delivers up 'the father'; the devilish machinations of Frank Costello towards Colin (Matt Damon) and Billy (Leonardo DiCaprio) that result in multiple deceptions in *The Departed*; and the most famous traitor of all Judas Iscariot (Harvey Keitel) in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and his seventeenth-century manifestation in the form of Kichijiro in *Silence*.

In *A Letter to Elia* (2010) Scorsese does not mention that Elia Kazan's appearance in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee could be seen as a 'response to save his career while others went down to penury during the blacklist' (Kolker 2015: 81). However, he does focus on Bob Dylan's adoption of an electric guitar in *No Direction Home* (2005) and includes the memorable incident when a fan shouted 'Judas!' at a concert in Manchester in 1966. Dylan himself had dealt with the identity of the New Testament Judas in his song 'With

God On Our Side' in which he considers the betrayal of Jesus and whether God was actually on the side of the traitor as he kissed his Master (see Stanford 2015: 10). Finding himself on the receiving end of the betrayal slur, Dylan responded: 'If you think you've been called a bad name, try and work your way out from under that. Yeah and for what? For playing an electric guitar. As if that is in some way equitable to betraying our Lord and delivering him up to be crucified' (in Stanford 2015: 259).

The act of betrayal has particular significance in Scorsese's films. In *It's Not Just You, Murray!* the titular 'hero' is clearly fooled by his friend Joe, who has evidently slept with his wife and fathered his children. 'Murray is a man who has nothing and thinks he has everything' (Kelly 1980: 154), so that the line 'Vanity of vanities' in Ecclesiastes (1.2) might come to mind.

After the memorable 'What do you mean, I'm funny?' incident in *GoodFellas*, Tommy is laughing as he says to Henry, 'I wonder about you sometimes, Henry, you may fold under questioning.' However, the overall message is deadly serious: 'Never rat on your friends and always keep your mouth shut,' as Jimmy Conway (Robert De Niro) explains. When Henry survives his first day in court, Jimmy congratulates him and gives him money as a Graduation present because he 'told them nothing and they got nothing'. He is welcomed as a hero by a gathering of Paulie's 'disciples'.

However, the reproductions of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* on the walls of Henry's and Tommy's houses add a certain poignancy and a hint of what is to follow. 'If you're a part of a crew, nobody ever tells you that they're going to kill you. It doesn't happen that way. There aren't any great arguments or finger-biting curses like in Mafia movies. Your murderers come with smiles,' explains (the real) Henry Hill (in Pileggi 1985: 333). In *Silence*, the Interpreter (Tadanobu Asano) also plays this double role with Rodrigues, appearing to be helpful but wishing him ill.

After Tommy is killed in *GoodFellas*, there is suspicion in the air – a fact that is underlined by the large spectacles that Jimmy is wearing during his meeting with Henry in a restaurant, as if he needs to see particularly clearly in his search for 'a rat'. When Henry is asked to go to Florida to do a hit, he suspects that he will not come back alive, so he decides to sell out his friends. It is clear that Henry's own survival depends 'upon his capacity for betrayal' (Pileggi 1985: 359), and he points out Jimmy and Paulie in court with his 'Judas finger'. However, in Dante's *Inferno* there are the souls who mourn all that they have lost. Henry is about to join them because he loved the gangster life, as he confesses to the audience

when he breaks the fourth wall. Now it is all over and he will get to live the rest of his life 'like a schnook.' At the end of the film, Henry is breathing but not 'living.'

It is interesting to observe the chilly climate of Dante's ninth circle in the *Inferno*. The worst sin is punished in ice because it 'reflects the coldheartedness of the traitor' (Shaw 2014). Robert Barron (2011) suggests that ice 'is a much better symbol of hell than the traditional fire, for it signals the stuck, immobile quality of sin, which effectively freezes one within the confines of the ego.' Henry will have already noted that the body of his associate, Frankie Carbone (Frank Sivero), was found in a refrigerated meat truck and 'frozen stiff like one of the damned in the last circle of the *Inferno*' (Casillo 2006: 316). However, Henry has a new home that has been assigned as part of the Witness Protection Programme: 'It is cold. It is rainy. It is boring. It is hell' (Kelly 1996: 259).

Scorsese suggests that he found Henry interesting because he does not apologize for his actions. 'At the end, he regrets that he's no longer a wiseguy, but there's no hypocrisy about being sorry for his life, it's just "Gee, no more fun." Now you can take that any way you want. I think the audience should get angry at him and I would hope they do – and maybe with the system which allows this' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 160). The last image is of Tommy firing a gun at the camera as in *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter 1903). It is an image from beyond the grave that indicates that the Afterlife is not a place of peace. The music is 'My Way' by the Sex Pistols, but the end titles inform the spectator that Henry and Karen have separated after twenty-five years of marriage in 1989. There is no 'happy ending'. Roger Ebert suggests that 'the horror of the film is that, at the end, the man's principal regret is that he doesn't have any more soul to sell' (2008: 123); and that 'the guilt – the real guilt, the guilt a Catholic like Scorsese understands intimately – is not that they did sinful things, but that they want to do them again' (2008: 128).

In *Cape Fear*, Max Cady sets out to ensure that Sam Bowden, the lawyer who failed to defend him, will pay for his crime. While Cady is a violent rapist (and subsequently a serial killer), it is Sam who betrayed his client by omission. Cady takes the view: 'To fail to do what one ought to do is as wicked as to do what one ought not to do' (McCabe 2010: 127). In *Cape Fear* Cady opines: 'We are now in the ninth circle, the circle of traitors. Traitors to country. Traitors to fellow man. Traitors to God. You, sir, are charged with betrayin' the principles of all three.' He explains that Sam is guilty of selling him out: 'With the power vested in me by the kingdom of God, I sentence you to the ninth circle of Hell! There you will learn about loss.' Scorsese describes the climax of the film as 'the *Götterdämmerung*'

(in Schickel 2013). In the final confrontation that takes place by the river, Sam, who is clearly not 'without sin' himself, picks up a large rock with the intention of killing his enemy – a form of execution that he had mentioned earlier: 'Many years ago we'd have taken this guy and stoned him to death.' However, Cady eventually dies by drowning because his leg has been attached with handcuffs (by Sam) to the wreckage of the boat. Consequently, he has the time to speak in tongues and sing about being 'bound for the Promised Land', staring at Sam until he sinks beneath the waves. Sam's actions have also caused a death, and his hands are stained with Cady's blood that he tries to wash away in the river.

There are many common reasons for selling out an acquaintance or a business partner in Scorsese's films: Johnny Sirocco (Henry Thomas) betrays his friend Amsterdam Vallon in *Gangs of New York* because of jealousy over a girl named Jenny Everdeane (Cameron Diaz); and the Swiss banker Saurel capitulates remarkably quickly in *The Wolf of Wall Street* when called in for questioning. However, the most complicated representation of double crossing is found in the story of Billy and Colin, who are caught up in a web of treachery in *The Departed* when their lives intersect with Frank Costello, who has been described as a King Lear character or a 'God the Father gone mad' (in Schickel 2013). When young Colin serves at a funeral as an altar boy, the priest prays for forgiveness for the sins of the deceased, and Colin replies, 'Amen' as if he is 'foreshadowing the sins he will commit as Frank's apprentice, and the sins that Frank himself commits during a brutal mob execution a few seconds later' (Bertellini and Reich 2015: 43). In the scene in the porno cinema, Jack Nicholson sits in front of Matt Damon so as to create the idea of a confessional, as Scorsese points out: 'If you look at it, he's like a priest. The priest doesn't see your face when you're in the confessional' (in Schickel 2013) – at least in the traditional confessionals that Scorsese knew as a boy.

Scorsese claims that the film is 'all about trust and betrayal and people hearing, and people hearing what they shouldn't be, people spying on each other' (in Goldman 2017), and there are Xs on the screen whenever a person is about to die in homage to *Scarface* (Hawks 1932). One element of the treachery is revealed when Billy is told, 'I gave you the wrong address. But you showed up at the right one.' When it transpires that Costello himself was an informant for the FBI, the rules of deception become even more confused. At the end of the film, Colin accepts his own death when he says, 'OK' – it may be an understanding that there is nowhere else to go, or a confirmation that his punishment is just. Scorsese explains that the film relates to his thoughts about 'the nature of

betrayal. The nature of a morality which, after 2001, has become suspect to me. I'm concerned about the nature of how we live, how we're living in this country and what our values are' (in Schickel 2013).

## Judas, Peter and Kichijiro

At the bottom of Dante's Hell is Lucifer, who is a parody of the Trinity with his three mouths, from which dangle Cassius, Brutus and (most famously) Judas:

'That soul up there which has the greatest pain,  
The Master said, 'is Judas Iscariot;  
With head inside, he plies his legs without.' (*Inf.* XXXIV)

In Scorsese's films there are three characters who offer an interesting perspective on the treachery theme, although none are presented as worthy of ending up in the satanic jaws: Judas and Peter (Victor Argo) in *The Last Temptation of Christ*; and the Japanese guide Kichijiro in *Silence*, who succeeds in adopting facets of the two apostles' actions in the New Testament.

Speaking of the biblical Judas, Scorsese says, 'He falls in love with God and in the end he's got to take the fall for all humanity. He'll go down in history as the biggest fall guy of all time' (in Floyd 2005: 170). Judas is the one who represents the antithesis of salvation: 'You'll be the one that they claimed hanged himself. And Dante will put you in hell in a certain place,' says Scorsese (in Schickel 2013). Indeed, Ebert sees Judas as Scorsese's alter ego: 'Certainly not the Messiah, but the mortal man walking beside him, worrying about him, lecturing him, wanting him to be better, threatening him, confiding in him, prepared to betray him if he must. Christ is the film, and Judas is the director' (2008: 104).

Judas has red hair in *The Last Temptation of Christ* – a traditional sign in medieval times 'of a moral degenerate' (Stanford 2015: 13). His first words to Jesus (Willem Dafoe) are: 'Are you ready?' as he is a man on a mission who strives to stir Jesus into action. In itself, this interpretation of the role has been observed in the cinema before, notably in *King of Kings* (Ray 1961) when Judas (Rip Torn) fights alongside Barabbas (Harry Guardino) as a rebel before following the Messiah. Scorsese relates that Fr Principe, his mentor, 'detested Christian sentimentality or comic-book religious aspects' in films, such as a clap of thunder in *The Robe* (Henry Koster 1953) when Judas introduces himself, but he admits, 'To this day I haven't heard thunder as good as that' (in Elie 2016).

However, the way in which Judas speaks to Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* ('You're a disgrace. The Romans can't find anybody to make crosses except for you' or 'You're a coward') overturns the expected hierarchy, presenting the Saviour as a collaborator and Judas as the freedom fighter – although in this first onscreen meeting, the two men are introduced as friends and equals, rather than Master and disciple. In the New Testament, Judas is listed as the twelfth and last of the apostles (Mt 10.4), but in *The Last Temptation of Christ* he is prominent as the first one to appear on screen. Within Jesus's carpentry shop, the lattice work creates a cage via the shadows so that Jesus appears to be trapped visually and emotionally in the presence of his friend.

At this stage Judas is not aware of Jesus's identity, so that his question ('How will you ever pay for your sins?') does not have the blasphemous ring of later references in the film to sin. A herd of sheep go past in the dusty town outside, offering a visual reminder of 'the Lamb who was slain' (Rev. 13.8) to the cinema audience, but when Jesus replies: 'With my life, Judas, I don't have anything else,' Judas remains confused. He cradles Jesus's face with concern and asks, 'With your life? What do you mean?' At one point Judas goes to find Jesus in the desert with the intention of killing him and, holding a knife to his friend's throat, he asks, 'What kind of a man are you?' – a key question at the heart of the film. 'What you want, I want. That's why he brought us together. It's God's plan,' explains Jesus. 'Maybe God didn't send you here to kill me. Maybe he sent you here to follow me.'

Rather than a traitor, Judas is presented in *The Last Temptation of Christ* as part of a grander scheme in which there is a need to hear God's voice – a theme that comes to the fore in *Silence* over the issue of how to distinguish the divine will from that of Satan. In the novel of *Silence*, Endo considers the role of Judas through the voice of Rodrigues: 'If it is not blasphemous to say so, I have the feeling that Judas was no more than the unfortunate puppet for the glory of that drama which was the life and death of Christ' (Endo 1969: 75–6). However, in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Judas has a caveat: 'I'll go with you until I understand. But if you stray this much [he makes a small gesture with his hand] from the path, I'll kill you.' He does not represent the kind of underhand betrayal found in other Scorsese films: Judas's intentions are clearly stated from the start.

As Jesus and his apostles travel through the countryside, Judas and Peter walk along at the front – so Jesus is flanked by the two apostles who will eventually disown him in different ways. Peter and Judas are also on either side of Jesus as

they enter the Temple in Jerusalem, observing events with various reactions. Judas is impressed by the dramatic gesture when Jesus throws over the stalls in the Temple, whereas Peter is afraid of trouble: 'Maybe we should go,' he suggests. Wondering whether they will all survive, Peter expresses concerns about death ('Will there be angels there to meet us?') as Judas watches silently in the background. Jesus does not reply with any words of assurance, but he puts his arm around Peter's shoulders in a comforting gesture.

Jesus tells Judas to keep his original promise and kill him because it is God's will: 'He will do it through you.' In contrast to the New Testament account, it is Jesus who tells Judas to bring the Temple guards to Gethsemane to find him, giving him precise instructions as to how to betray him. In response, Judas asks the significant question: 'If you were me, could you betray your master?' Jesus controversially replies: 'No. That's why God gave me the easier job. To be crucified.' When Judas cries at these words, Jesus comforts him.

Scorsese explained his perspective: 'But the whole point of the movie is that nobody is to blame, not even the Romans. It's all part of the plan. Otherwise, it's insane. I mean, the Jewish people give us God, and we persecute them for 2000 years for it!' (in Corliss 1999: 119). Kazantzakis views Judas as the 'sheep dog' who becomes 'the guardian of Christian orthodoxy' (Stanford 2015: 241) when he tells Jesus (in the dream sequence): 'Your place was on the cross. That's where the God of Israel put you to fight.'

The other famous betrayal on the night before the Crucifixion is carried out by Peter, who turns cowardly when he is identified as a disciple of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*: 'You must have been mistaken. It wasn't me.' When a man in the crowd insists that Peter is one of Jesus's followers, he responds: 'He doesn't know what he's talking about.' After denying Jesus for the third time, Peter runs away – and fleeing the scene is a familiar action for Kichijiro in *Silence*. Kichijiro, who is one in a long line of Scorsese's traitors, has elements of both Judas and Peter in his personality.

The theme of treachery resonates throughout *Silence* and yet Kichijiro is not the strong and assured kind of Judas played by Keitel in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The initial reference to Kichijiro comes in a letter from Rodrigues to Fr Alessandro Valignano (Ciaran Hinds) that begins 'May 25 1640 Pax Christi. God be praised.' His text, which is read aloud in voice-over, does not match the image on the screen. Rodrigues reports that he went to find 'the only Japanese in Macao to be our most valued guide' but the audience discover a dirty drunk, crouched down in the shadows in a tavern as if seeking the darkness. The priests

need a guide (as does the Pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy*) but Kichijiro is no Virgil or Beatrice. He is a fisherman (the biblical profession of Peter) but there is a close-up of his face as he rejects the idea that he is a Christian: 'I am not Kirishitan. Kirishitan die.' This consideration was presumably in the thoughts of Peter in *The Last Temptation of Christ* when he protested his ignorance of Jesus.

Rodrigues and Garupe (perhaps understandably) judge on appearances. Kichijiro turns his head at the word 'money' but assures them that he wants to go home because 'Japan is the country of my family' – although the audience learns later that his family is dead. 'I beg you. Don't abandon me here, Father,' he pleads. At this point, Rodrigues is standing upright while Kichijiro grovels on the ground and grasps Rodrigues's clean hand with his dirty fingers. It is the start of a hierarchical relationship that will gradually develop and take on a different dynamic by the end of the film.

The priests suspect from the start that their guide is a danger – a fear that also besets the Pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy* when some of the devilish inhabitants of the Malebolge offer to show him the way:

'O me! what is it, Master, that I see?  
 Pray let us go,' I said, 'without an escort,  
 If thou knowest how, since for myself I ask none.  
 If thou art as observant as thy wont is,  
 Dost thou not see that they do gnash their teeth,  
 And with their brows are threatening woe to us?' (*Inf. XXI*)

When the missionaries reach the shores of Japan, Kichijiro jumps into the sea and disappears below the waves before reemerging through the fog and then appearing to run away. Knowing Garupe's fear of betrayal, Rodrigues consoles him: 'Jesus trusted even worse.' As they crouch in a dark cave, waiting to see what will happen next, the vulnerable priests turn to prayer: Garupe begins to pray the Hail Mary in Latin, while Rodrigues continues the treachery theme by uttering the words of Jesus to Judas at the Last Supper: 'Quod facis, fac citius – 'What you will do, do quickly.' When they hear the sound of footsteps and see the light of a flaming torch above them, the priests fear that they have been captured (as Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane). Yet it is one of the loyal hidden Christians, Ichizo (Yoshi Oida), a man who will give his life for the faith, who has come to meet them and take them to Tomogi village. As they are led away, Kichijiro waves a finger at the priests as if to say, 'See, I did not forsake you.' Nevertheless, he will betray Rodrigues at a later date.



The audience learn that Kichijiro had been baptized a Christian but that he apostatized – an action that was signalled by the placing of his foot on a *fumi-e*, a holy image carved into wood or cast in bronze that was first used in 1628 (see Dougill 2015: 97). Apostasy was considered one of the ‘mortal sins’ in early Christianity because it ‘was seen as idolatry, a rejection of the true God for a deceitful substitute’; and the first Christians ‘treasured the example of the martyrs who had freely died for Christ and for the faith’ (Tilby 2009). In the words of Tertullian: ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’ (in Fujimura 2016). There is a shift of focus to the cold day on which Kichijiro steps on the *fumi-e* as his family stands by and weeps. Having watched his relatives engulfed by flames, Kichijiro falls to his knees and crawls away on the beach like a dog. When he first sees the priests, he begins to have hope: ‘I started to believe that God might take me back because, in my dreams, the fire was no longer so bright.’ ‘He spoke against God but he still believes,’ explain his fellow villagers. These words could be attributed to St Peter.

It is noticeable that Kichijiro does not accept one of the rosary beads that Rodrigues hands out to the Christians because he does not feel worthy to receive this tangible symbol of faith. Rather than a Pharisee, he is more akin to the tax collector who ‘stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven’ (Lk. 18.13). He is a weak man, who admits his weakness, and is more in the vein of Peter, saying ‘Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man’ (Lk. 5.8). (**Figure 3.1**)

Peter Stanford points to the distinction between the two flawed apostles: one is redeemed and the other is not. ‘The language, of course, is different – denial and disavowing on Peter’s part, betrayal on Judas’ (Stanford 2015: 66) and the fact



**Figure 3.1** Kichijiro: traitor or suffering soul in *Silence*?

that Peter 'seeks and is granted forgiveness' (Stanford 2015: 68). Dante sees this fact as an indication that St Peter is more sympathetic to souls seeking admission to *Paradiso* in the Afterlife when he passes on the keys to the gates of Heaven:

From Peter I have them; and he bade me err  
 Rather in opening than in keeping shut,  
 If people but fall down before my feet. (*Purg.* IX)

When Rodrigues offers to hear Kichijiro's confession, the penitent kneels at the priest's feet, bowing his head and sobbing. Adopting the demeanour of a confessor, Rodrigues tries to hide his disdain for the man who says, 'Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,' and he strives to accept his sincerity. Yet the audience will see Kichijiro place his foot on the *fumi-e* on another two occasions before Rodrigues himself commits that very act, stripping away the priest's sense of superiority.

When Rodrigues is travelling alone on Goto after the martyrdom of the Christians from Tomogi, he slips and falls down the hillside, right into the path of Kichijiro. Rodrigues is understandably suspicious of his former guide's solicitousness, especially when he is reminded: 'There is a price of 300 pieces of silver for you.' Rodrigues wonders at the amount: '300? Judas got only thirty.' The number thirty has roots in the Old Testament: the life of a slave is worth thirty shekels of silver in the Book of Exodus (21.32).

However, Kichijiro explains that he also suffers, 'I am like you. I have nowhere else to go. Where is the place for a weak man in a world like this?' Taken with pity, Rodrigues offers him the chance to confess again, but as he makes the sign of the cross in Latin, in voice-over he says, 'What you will do, do quickly,' as if he still suspects that this man is a Judas who will hand him over. As they walk along together, Rodrigues continues to ponder on those words of Jesus to Judas at the Last Supper: 'Was he angry when he said them? Or did they come from love?'

As Rodrigues stumbles, feeling parched because of the salty fish that Kichijiro has given him, he says, 'I thirst.' Kichijiro recognizes that these are the words of Jesus on the cross (it seems that he has not forgotten his religious education) and goes to fetch water. The camera pulls back at speed to leave Rodrigues on his knees on the ground, looking small and weak in the centre of the screen like an exposed target. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that Kichijiro has taken the opportunity to betray the priest to the authorities. When Rodrigues is surrounded by the Samurai, Kichijiro shouts: 'Padre, forgive me.' As the commander throws the silver coins at him, Kichijiro is already looking to make another confession: 'I pray for God's forgiveness. Will He forgive even me?'

When Kichijiro himself is eventually taken to the same prison as Rodrigues, the other Christian inmates do not trust him and sit apart from him in the cell, fearing that he is a traitor. It is clear that the Rodrigues finds him physically repugnant but also that Kichijiro has some theological awareness of the state of grace. Jesus tells his disciples: 'Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile' (Mk 7.15). In his own terminology, Kichijiro admits, 'I know I smell. I smell of sin. I want to confess again so the Lord can wash me clean.' Having already administered the sacrament of confession on two occasions, Rodrigues asks: 'Do you have any understanding what absolution is?' It is here that Kichijiro makes his valid point: 'Years ago I could have died a good Christian. There was no persecution. Why was I born now?' This is a very poignant question in this current age.

When Rodrigues asks if he still believes in God, Kichijiro does not give a categorical statement of faith but kneels down and makes his third onscreen confession: 'I am sorry for being so weak. I am sorry this has happened. I am sorry for what I did to you. Help me, Padre. Take away the sin. I will try again to be strong.' However, the audience hears Rodrigues's inner thoughts, which are not so generous: 'Father, how could Jesus love a wretch like this? There is evil all around in this place. I sense its strength. Even its beauty. But there is none of that in this man. He is not worthy to be called evil.' Balthasar reminds the reader 'that certain late Catholic Scholastics, for their part, had racked their brains about whether, assuming God were to reveal to me privately that one of my fellowmen was destined to hell, I should still love that person with Christian love or would, instead, have to treat him with politeness only' (1988: 196). Thomas Merton came up with a simple response in a letter to Dorothy Day: 'Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.'

Rodrigues does his duty, says the words of absolution in Latin and makes the sign of the cross, but given the inner state of his mind, he appears to lack sincerity. However, forgiveness comes from God rather than the priest. When Peter asks Jesus how many times he must forgive his brother ('As many as seven times?'), Jesus replies: 'I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times' (Mt. 18.22).

The Japanese writer and artist Fujimura makes the point that 'Peter denied Christ three times, Paul led the first persecution of Christians. The entire Bible can be seen, in fact, as a story of betrayal, beginning with Adam and proceeding through the history of the Israelites, culminating in the cross' (Fujimura 2016). Indeed, Balthasar indicates that 'the Church, which has sanctified so many

men, has never said anything about the damnation of any individual. Not even that of Judas, who became in a way the representative example for something of which all sinners are also guilty' (1988: 187). He mentions that 'one goes on to populate hell, according to one's own taste, with all sorts of monsters: Ivan the Terrible, Stalin the Horrible, Hitler the Madman and all his cronies, which certainly results, as well, in an imposing company that one would prefer not to encounter in heaven' (Balthasar 1988: 190). An audience might feel the same about some of Scorsese's protagonists: would Heaven be a relaxing place if it were the home of Travis Bickle, Max Cady or Frank Costello? Representations of Hell have the effect of asking human beings to consider 'the *real possibility* of eternal ruin and to understand revelation as a demand of the utmost seriousness' (Balthasar 1988: 198; italics in original). While Scorsese's films go beyond such a single aim in their entertainment value, they may also give the spectator pause for thought.



Part Two

# Purgatory: The Three Story Mountain



## Misdirected Love

And of that second kingdom will I sing  
 Wherein the human spirit doth purge itself,  
 And to ascend to heaven becometh worthy. (*Purg.* I)

In popular parlance, Purgatory is a place or state of temporary suffering that may be experienced by the living – a definition to which many of Scorsese’s protagonists could certainly relate. As Hans Urs von Balthasar indicates, the Mountain of Purgatory in Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* ‘is properly the place for the two worlds [Heaven and Hell] to meet and intermingle’ (1986: 28) – and it is a prime location for an investigation of Scorsese’s characters who ‘seem to view their earthly lives as mere prep work for the hereafter, and are thus frequently tormented with guilt and fraught with desire for punishment and expiation of their sins’ (Lohr 2015: 203). In the opening minutes of the documentary *American Boy* (1978), in which Steven Prince and Scorsese are chatting in a hot tub, the director is heard to say, ‘We’re all guilty, God knows.’

The theology of Purgatory was developed at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 and defined at the Council of Trent (1543–63) as a place of temporal punishment for those who depart this life in God’s grace but are not entirely free from venial faults, or who have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. Through the fires of Purgatory ‘the souls of the pious are purified by a temporary punishment so that an entrance may be opened for them into the eternal country in which nothing stained can enter’ (in Turner 1993: 127). Martin Luther kept Hell but got rid of Purgatory but it has remained in Catholic theology. In *Who’s That Knocking at My Door*, Scorsese’s camera focuses on an image in St Patrick’s Old Cathedral of the Holy Souls in Purgatory reaching out for Salvation from the flames. (**Figure 4.1**)

Dante’s Pilgrim enters *Purgatorio* on Easter Sunday (10 April 1300) and remains there until midday on Wednesday, for he and Virgil may climb the





**Figure 4.1** The souls in Purgatory in St Patrick's Old Cathedral in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*.

mountain only in the sunlight, a fact that delays their journey. According to Catholic teaching it was assumed that all people would go to Purgatory except the very holy (the saints and martyrs) and the irredeemably evil. Joseph Ratzinger clarifies that 'Purgatory is not, as Tertullian thought, some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where man is forced to undergo punishment in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather it is the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints' (1988: 230). Critics have pointed out that the promotion of Purgatory 'became a way of increasing control over this life, through the twin institutions of prayers for the dead and the sale of indulgences' (Shaw 2014).

Taking the image of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory as its backdrop, Part Two of this book pays particular attention to Scorsese's imperfect protagonists who often express remorse for their faults, rather than the outright killers and fraudsters who were discussed in Part One. Robin Parry underlines the fact that 'in the Bible sins are differentiated in degrees of seriousness: not all sins are as bad as each other, and not all deserve the same punishment' (in Burk et al. 2016: 53). The identification of the Seven Deadly Sins that form the structure of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory is attributed to Pope Gregory the Great (540–604): pride, envy, avarice, wrath, sloth, gluttony and lust. As stated in *The Baltimore Catechism* (1941) which was the standard text used in Catholic education in the United States when Scorsese was at school, 'they

are the chief reasons why men [*sic*] commit sin'. In a medieval play, the Seven Deadly Sins would have been recognized by means of the attire worn by the actors: 'Pride wears a sceptre and a crown; Envy is well dressed with spectacles; Gluttony, well dressed with things to eat; Anger is in armor; Lust, a woman with a mirror; Avarice has a scholar's robes and carries a purse; and Sloth wears droopy breeches and carries a pillow' (Turner 1993: 123). Scorsese has added a wonderful range of characters who betray their sinful attributes through their different personalities while wearing a vast array of costumes, including sharp suits in *Mean Streets* and luxurious ball gowns in *The Age of Innocence*.

Although Dante condemns some of the lustful, gluttonous, avaricious and wrathful characters to the upper circles of his *Inferno*, other characters are given the chance to be purified of their sins in *Purgatorio*. In *The Divine Comedy* the Passport to Purgatory is repentance and the people 'who repent and seek forgiveness, even at the last moment before death, are saved from damnation, though the process of purgation they undergo may last for centuries' (Reynolds 2006: 253).

Scorsese once pondered on the fact of his divorces: 'I've been divorced a few times – therefore, technically, I'm excommunicated' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 96) In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* encourages divorced Catholics to 'not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons' (1993: 1651). However, Dante even has a solution for those people who have actually received official notice of their excommunication, as they are not denied Heaven in his poem but are sentenced to pass thirty times the number of years that they had spent excluded from the sacraments in *Purgatorio*:

True is it, who in contumacy dies  
Of Holy Church, though penitent at last,  
Must wait upon the outside this bank  
Thirty times told the time that he has been  
In his presumption, unless such decree  
Shorter by means of righteous prayers become. (*Purg.* III)

In his autobiographical book *The Seven Storey Mountain* Thomas Merton writes of the impression that Dante's epic poem made upon him: 'It seems to me that I was armored and locked in within my own defectible and blinded self by seven layers of imperviousness, the capital sins which only the fires of Purgatory or of Divine Love (they are about the same) can burn away' (1998: 135). However, rather than trekking a path up seven individual levels when analysing Scorsese's

films from a 'sin' perspective, this section is inspired by the dissection of 'rational love' announced by Virgil in Canto XVII of Dante's *Purgatorio*. According to this philosophy, love may lead to transgression in three ways: by choosing the wrong goal, by lack of intensity, or by excessive zeal. Here the seven storeys (terraces) of Dante's *Purgatorio* are converted into three stories of love: (i) misdirected love; (ii) insufficient love and (iii) excessive love:

The natural was ever without error;  
 But err the other may by evil object,  
 Or by too much, or by too little vigour.

While in the first it well directed is,  
 And in the second moderates itself,  
 It cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure;

But when to ill it turns, and, with more care  
 Or lesser than it ought, runs after good,  
 'Gainst the Creator works his own creation.

Hence thou mayst comprehend that love must be  
 The seed within yourselves of every virtue,  
 And every act that merits punishment.

Although this is love that has gone awry, there are signs of hope despite the difficulties. Mary Pat Kelly argues that 'Scorsese's films are about the search for redemption in a fallen world where evil is real and violence can erupt at any moment' (1980: 124). As Ratzinger explains, 'Man is the recipient of the divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed' (1988: 231). Here are the characters who are striving to survive in very trying circumstances in which 'Light has been given you for good and evil' (*Purg.* XVI).

## Guilt and penance

Scorsese was interested in Catholic saints as a child, and the statuary and stained glass windows in St Patrick's Old Cathedral surrounded him with visual representations of sanctity. He once wanted to make a film about Mother Cabrini, the first American saint (canonized in 1946) who cared for Italian immigrants, and her picture appears on the wall of Jake La Motta's apartment in *Raging Bull*; and he was also attracted to the story of Father Damien (the Belgian priest canonized in 2009) who ministered to the lepers on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. At one point Scorsese was intending to go to Italy to make films

about the lives of the saints for RAI Television (see Ebert 2008: 164). However, although these plans did not come to fruition, he has succeeded in projecting ‘the idea that everyday people can achieve a measure of sainthood or transcendence as they go about their ostensibly commonplace lives, usually after undergoing a mortification of the flesh that prepares the way’ (Sterritt 2015: 104).

The title of *Mean Streets* is inspired by Raymond Chandler: ‘Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. ... He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor – by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it’ (in Sterritt 2015: 97). Scorsese considered *Mean Streets* to be ‘a story of a modern saint, a saint in his own society, but his society happens to be gangsters’ (in Kelly 1996: 71). The film asks: ‘How do you lead a good life, a good, moral, ethical life, when everything around you works the absolutely opposite way?’ (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 92). If Charlie strives to be a man of honour, it is not certain that all his friends are honourable men. Charlie lives in a world of omertà – ‘the criminal code of silence’ (Gambino 2011: 129). It is an Italian American society in which the qualities of ‘manliness’ go back to the medieval times in which Dante was living.

In *Purgatorio* the Pilgrim comes to three steps outside the gates of Purgatory:

Thither did we approach; and the first stair  
Was marble white, so polished and so smooth,  
I mirrored myself therein as I appear.

The second, tinct of deeper hue than perse,  
Was of a calcined and uneven stone,  
Cracked all asunder lengthwise and across.

The third, that uppermost rests massively,  
Porphyry seemed to me, as flaming red  
As blood that from a vein is spirting forth. (*Purg.* IX)

The three steps represent three stages of repentance: self-examination, sorrow and penance (see Musa 1995: 244) as the Pilgrim appeals for admission:

Devoutly at the holy feet I cast me,  
For mercy’s sake besought that he would open,  
But first upon my breast three times I smote. (*Purg.* IX)

The famous opening lines of *Mean Streets*, spoken by Scorsese himself against a black screen, appear to be the thoughts of his alter ego Charlie (Harvey Keitel), who is awakening from a troubled sleep. In *Purgatorio* Dante speaks of the kind

of dream that occurs just before waking in the morning, which 'was thought to be the most clearly prophetic' in medieval times (Royal 1999: 122):

As sleep is broken, when upon a sudden  
 New light strikes in upon the eyelids closed,  
 And broken quivers ere it dieth wholly,  
 So this imagining of mine fell down  
 As soon as the effulgence smote my face,  
 Greater by far than what is in our wont. (*Purg.* XVII)

It appears that Charlie's conscience is in conflict with the events surrounding him as he talks of sin and penance: 'You don't make up for your sins in church. You do it in the streets. You do it at home.' The tri-partite editing as Charlie's head hits the pillow indicates the disjunction. Scorsese is – like Dante – interested in numbers and shares a particular penchant for the number three with the Italian poet. For example, Dante divides his poem into three major sections; and he writes of three approaches to love:

The love that yields itself too much to this  
 Above us is lamented in three circles;  
 But how tripartite it may be described,  
 I say not, that thou seek it for thyself. (*Purg.* XVII)

While Dante's interest in the number three is Trinitarian, Scorsese was impressed by a scene in François Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* (1960) 'when the girl is pressing the door button, carrying the violin case. He cuts three times, coming in closer each time. The shot's in every picture I make, and I don't know why' (in Wernblad 2011: 19). In the opening song on the soundtrack of *Mean Streets*, 'Be My Baby' by the Ronettes, there is a reference to three kisses that follows the triple dimension to the locations mentioned in the opening statement: church, street and home.

Through the *mise en scène* Charlie is identifiable as a Catholic: there is a crucifix on the wall of his bedroom; he wears a cross around his neck and later scenes will reveal other religious iconography around the apartment. A cinema projector (which offers an element of self-reflexivity that is also seen in *Kundun*, *The Aviator* and *Hugo*) shows home movies that capture Italian American family life, with a particular focus on religious events (the San Gennaro festival and the baptism of a child called Christopher) that are interspersed with the life 'on the streets'. A cross made up of light bulbs illuminates the commerce that is taking place in the street festival below; and Charlie is depicted with his neighbourhood

associates outside insalubrious establishments (there is a sign advertising 'Topless' in one window) as well as shaking hands with a Catholic priest dressed in a cassock. In the latter shot, the two men are originally in the shadows on the steps of the church but are encouraged by the person behind the camera to step out into the sunshine. As Charlie puts on his dark glasses to shield his eyes from the bright light, he looks more roguish, giving the handshake between the priest and his presumed parishioner a suspicious aura.

In the opening minutes of *Mean Streets*, the pop lyrics of 'Be My Baby' are replaced by the band music of the San Gennaro festival that takes place in September, giving the action a timescale. Casillo suggests that this kind of ritualized street festival, which celebrates the life of a saint who was reportedly martyred around the year 305, was 'the chief means of mediating the sacred to the individual and community' (2006: 87). The focus shifts from the festivities to a man shooting up in a toilet in Volpe's bar – another example in which religious events conflict with illegal activities, although the owner, Tony, intervenes to throw the man out as drugs are evidently against his morals. Tony has a statue of Jesus in his back room and the red *corno* (horn) in his car as protection against the evil eye (Casillo 2006: 209) as if to cover all bases. Michael is presented as a wiseguy who is lacking in wisdom, having purchased Japanese adaptors in the mistaken belief that they are German lenses, suggesting that he is a fool rather than a criminal mastermind. Nevertheless, he will be responsible for the mayhem at the end of the film. Johnny Boy, who is the target of Michael's wrath, is introduced as a childish criminal, blowing up a US postbox for no apparent reason.

These scenes are followed by the sight of Charlie entering a Catholic church. As the sirens that accompany Johnny's explosive antics segue into the church scene, 'the identity of sound establishes a simultaneity of time' (Bliss 1995: 29) so as to confirm that the two young men are on different paths: Johnny is wreaking havoc as Charlie is saying his prayers. At first the camera dollies behind Charlie, following him in his spiritual quest as if the audience is also a visitor to the church. A higher angle indicates a potential divine interlocutor before Charlie dominates the frame. There are shots of the altar with a crucifix, flanked by statues of the Virgin Mary and St John, with St Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross.

*Mean Streets* puts the Catholic Church and the sacrament of confession at the forefront of the narrative, in which Charlie (sometimes through the voice of Scorsese himself) maintains a contact that is ill at ease with his Creator and an audible, but one-way, dialogue with God. Scorsese explains the significance

of the voice-over as 'the whole business of [Charlie's] own relationship with God, his own way of looking at things. And also his guilt' (in Kelly 1996: 72). Conversations with God occur at various points in Scorsese's filmography: in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, J.R. says his prayers at the time of his confession in St Patrick's Old Cathedral; Jesus pleads with God the Father in *The Last Temptation of Christ*; and Rodrigues tries to communicate with God at various stages in *Silence*. Only Rodrigues gets an explicit response that the audience can also hear.

Charlie goes to the altar rails, where he would kneel to take Communion, and says, 'Lord, I'm not worthy to eat your flesh. I'm not worthy to drink your blood' (with the words spoken in voice-over by Scorsese himself); and then Charlie/Keitel repeats the last words: 'Not worthy to drink your blood.' Scorsese explained that he was thinking of 'an old heretical sect that felt they were not worthy of anything. They would go to confession but would not go to communion because they felt they were not worthy. ... It's a whole guilt thing. No matter where he goes, he's lost' (in Ribera 2017). In the Mass, there is a prayer before Communion (in the 1970 translation): 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.' Charlie misses out any reference to healing at this point.

A long shot of the church shows Charlie as a small figure within the grandeur that is represented by the high Gothic-style pillars and the side altars. Having a choice of where to go to continue his prayers, Charlie walks towards a statue of the Virgin Mary holding her crucified son – a *Pietà* sculpture made famous by Michelangelo's beautiful marble carving in St Peter's in the Vatican. Someone has placed a rose in the carved hand of the Christ figure, and the scene is illuminated by the red and white votive candles.

It is at this point that Charlie offers his thoughts on the sacrament of confession:

OK, OK, I've just come out of confession, right? Right. And the priest gives me the usual penance, right, ten Hail Marys, ten Our Fathers, ten whatever. You know that next week I'm going to come back and he's going to just give me another ten Hail Marys and another ten Our Fathers. And you know how I feel about that shit. Those things, they don't mean anything to me, they're just words.

It is a theme that will be taken up in *Silence* when Kichijiro will ask for forgiveness for his act of apostasy and then go out and repeat the same sin, so that Rodrigues asks him if he really understands what the sacrament means.

Charlie continues with his meditation on the subject: 'Now that may be OK for the others but it just doesn't work for me. I mean, if I do something wrong, I just want to pay for it my way. So I do my own penance for my own sins. What do you say, eh?' Despite his repudiation of the traditional forms of penance, Charlie is not rejecting God. Indeed, he is keeping up a relationship with God with an apparent awareness that he is an 'unworthy sinner'. There is a renunciation of elements of organized religion at the same time as he stands in a church before the *Pietà* that presents an image of the suffering of Jesus.

In his discussion of American films in *A Personal Journey* (1995), Scorsese acknowledges the effect of the *Pietà* imagery in the final death scene in *The Roaring Twenties* (Raoul Walsh 1939); and the *Pietà* appears on several occasions in the church scene in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*. It is one of the many statues that contain a narrative in themselves. When Teresa (Amy Robinson), Charlie's girlfriend, has an epileptic fit and falls to the floor in a tenement building, a neighbour (played by Catherine Scorsese) comes to her aid and holds her in a *Pietà* pose. Discussing the dream sequence when Magdalene bathes Jesus's wounded body in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese describes it as 'a kind of *pietà* in reverse. Instead of being laid in earth, he is being washed, cared for. His wounds are healed as she touches him. It's a scene that moves me because as a child I adored Jesus, and I didn't like to see him beaten and ill-treated' (in Wilson 2011: 155).

Nevertheless, there is a stark contrast between Charlie's musings on life and death and the naked flesh of the dancing girls in the bar that he frequents. The hands of the dancer reach out as if enticing him to join her in carnal pleasures, while the lyrics of the song ('Tell Me (You're Coming Back)' by The Rolling Stones) suggest that Charlie is being drawn away from his religious ponderings into a more sensuous world of alcohol and sex.

The question of penance 'at home' or 'in the streets' continues with Charlie's relationship with Johnny, which is 'a family thing'. Charlie watches Johnny acting the fool, entering Volpe's bar to the tune of 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' with his trousers in his hands. (De Niro will also be seen in his office without his trousers in the role of Sam Rothstein in *Casino*, although on that occasion he has hung them up to maintain the creases rather than as a joke.) Charlie's inner voice says: 'OK, thanks a lot, Lord, thanks a lot for opening my eyes. You talk about penance and you send this through the door. Well, we play by your rules, don't we? Well, don't we?' Rather than saying prayers, Charlie believes that looking after Johnny is a practical way of earning remission for his sins.



In this world in which payment of debts is recommended, Johnny owes Michael a good deal of money. Inspired by Jesus's teaching on anger and the advice to settle with your opponent (Mt. 5.26), Charlie reflects on the situation: 'Amen I say to thee. Thou will not come out from it 'til thou has paid the last penny.' As Charlie explains to Johnny, Michael is unsympathetic ('What is he, your priest?'), and it seems likely that he will 'hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison' (Mt. 5.25). When Johnny is lying to try to save his own neck ('I swear to my mother. I swear to Christ'), he suddenly changes the oath: 'Not on my mother but on Jesus Christ.' As a liar, he realizes the immediate danger to his mother but he will take a chance on later divine retribution.

According to Scorsese, Charlie 'takes in the Johnny Boy character as a penance. But he is really doing it for his own pride' (in Lourdeaux 1990: 242). Misdirected love causes harm by accident or design in a world in which 'pride is the reservoir of sin' as the Book of Ecclesiasticus states (10.13). Scorsese makes the biblical link himself with regard to *Mean Streets*: 'My brother's keeper – it's my brother's keeper! And it goes beyond your brother. Are we responsible for other people? What is our obligation, when somebody does something that is so upsetting? ... Do you really have to do it because they're a brother, or you're related, or you made vows of marriage? What is the right thing to do for the other person, and for yourself?' (in Elie 2016). It is the very question that Balthasar asks in relation to a person's eventual destination in the Afterlife, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Can a Christian allow himself to utter those murderous words? And which man is not my brother?' (1988: 212).

While Charlie is supporting his friend Johnny he is also acting as a loan shark for his Uncle Giovanni and looking for money from the owner of Oscar's restaurant. Catholic imagery surrounds Charlie and his relative as they talk of shootings and debt collecting, underlining the moral conflict. There is a painting of the Crucifixion, alongside photographs of (the Catholic) President John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and Pope John XXIII (who died in June 1963) on the wall, indicating that the film has a pre-Vatican II setting in the early 1960s (see Casillo 2006: 482).

Charlie is torn between Hell and Heaven: Should he follow his uncle or his Catholic conscience? When Giovanni warns Charlie against Johnny (because 'honourable men go with honourable men') and describes Teresa as 'sick in the head', Charlie holds his hand over a flame on the stove in the restaurant kitchen and says 'Fine'. Scorsese explains that Charlie is a character who 'did the worst

thing he could do which was to put everything off, put all the confrontations off, until everything explodes' (in Ribera 2017).

His friends clearly see that he has pretensions to lead a good life and mock him gently. When Charlie visits a Pool hall to collect money that is owed, he receives a comical greeting ('St Charles is here') from his friend Joey (George Memmoli), who asks for a benediction and genuflects before him, making the sign of the cross. Charlie stretches out his hands as a sign of blessing and asks him to rise, before fooling around and blessing his acquaintances, the pool cues and the balls. However, the fact that he keeps holding his hand over flames shows that he is conflicted about the meaning of such symbolic gestures. When a fight later breaks out, Charlie holds up his 'bare hand' but is punched in the face for his attempt at pacifism.

On another occasion, Charlie enters Volpe's bar with the proclamation: 'Hallelujah! I've come to create order'; and the conversation continues with words from the Mass: 'May God be with you.'/'And with your spirit.' He holds his fingers over a glass as the bartender splashes JB and soda over them as if he were the altar server pouring water over the priest's hands before the consecration. However, Charlie is evidently confused about the role he has been assigned in life. There follows a parody of the Passion narrative, in which Tony takes on the part of Pilate ('Art thou the king of the Jews?') and Charlie responds with the words of Christ: 'Doest thou say this of thyself? Or have others told thee of me?' and 'My kingdom's not of this world.' Nevertheless, during his earlier visit to the restaurant, when he overhears a 'sit down' discussion about a murder that took place in Volpe's bar, Charlie is in the washroom, cleaning his hands carefully like Pilate.

Scorsese reveals that some of the original religious references were cut from the final version of *Mean Streets*. 'It's like the Pharisees, the guys who used to give money to the poor and blow trumpets so everybody could turn around and watch them give money to the poor. Christ said they had already received their own reward because they had received their reward on earth. Something like that. We had tons of that in there, that kind of thing' (in Woods 2005: 32). Indeed, in an early draft of the screenplay (then entitled *The Season of the Witch*), there was a fancy dress ball in which Charlie was to appear 'dressed as Christ, blessing everyone' (in Wilson 2011: 35).

Charlie's 'hero' is St Francis of Assisi, to whom is attributed the famous exhortation: 'Preach the gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.' It is notable that St Francis led a 'carefree life of indulgence' before making the

decision 'to wed Lady Poverty' (Stanford 2015: 156) – a change of direction to which Dante pays tribute in Canto XI of *Paradiso*:

For he in youth his father's wrath incurred  
 For certain Dame, to whom, as unto death,  
 The gate of pleasure no one doth unlock;  
 And was before his spiritual court  
 'Et coram patre' unto her united;  
 Then day by day more fervently he loved her.  
 She, reft of her first husband, scorned, obscure,  
 One thousand and one hundred years and more,  
 Waited without a suitor till he came.  
 Naught it availed to hear, that with Amyclas  
 Found her unmoved at sounding of his voice  
 He who struck terror into all the world;  
 Naught it availed being constant and undaunted,  
 So that, when Mary still remained below,  
 She mounted up with Christ upon the cross.  
 But that too darkly I may not proceed,  
 Francis and Poverty for these two lovers  
 Take thou henceforward in my speech diffuse.

The encouraging story of St Francis's metamorphosis offers a suggestion that Charlie might change his approach. However, a scene by the waterfront with his girlfriend Teresa rather undermines any hope of future canonization. Charlie expresses his admiration for St Francis and his desire to help Johnny: 'Who's gonna help him if I don't? What's the matter? Nobody tries anymore. Tries to help, that's all, to help people.' Yet, in an earlier scene in the streets, Charlie and his friends have mocked and berated a homeless man who is looking for money. When Charlie continues to voice his respect for the saint ('Francis of Assisi had it all down. He knew'), his girlfriend Teresa laughs at him, reminding him that 'St Francis didn't run numbers.' Charlie defends himself ('Me neither, I don't run numbers') but he does several dubious things while trying to lead a good life, thereby earning Johnny's mockery: 'Charlie likes everybody, everybody likes Charlie.'

As Charlie drives Teresa and Johnny away from the city, he continues his conversation with God ('I guess you could safely say that things haven't gone so well tonight. But I'm trying Lord, I'm trying') to his friends' amusement; and he sings along to a Neapolitan song called 'Scapricciatiello' in which a mother goes to church to pray (see Muscio 2015: 265). It is at this point that Michael pulls

up in a car beside them and his associate Shorty kisses his gun and pulls the trigger, resulting in the car crashing into a water hydrant with the connotations of a baptism. Charlie is injured in the hand, so that he will have a wound like St Francis's stigmata, while Johnny is shot in the neck – the sort of wounds that the souls display in Dante's *Purgatorio* as they finally turn to God:

After I had my body lacerated  
 By these two mortal stabs, I gave myself  
 Weeping to Him, who willingly doth pardon.  
 Horrible my iniquities had been;  
 But Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms,  
 That it receives whatever turns to it. (*Purg.* III)

Scorsese points out that some critics thought that Charlie had betrayed Johnny rather than attempting to help him escape, or that one or both men died, but that such readings were false: 'They're not dead. The fact is they have to go on. That's the worst part' (in Kelly 1980: 18). But Charlie falls to his knees as if in prayer (**Figure 4.2**), which might support Scorsese's suggestion that the three friends 'all learn something at the end of *Mean Streets*, only they have to get it from, again, the hand of God' (in Keyser 1992: 40). Indeed, Dante's *Purgatorio* offers some consolation to a character like Charlie in his hopes for the Afterlife:

Here of such pride is paid the forfeiture;  
 And yet I should not be here, were it not  
 That, having power to sin, I turned to God. (*Purg.* XI)



**Figure 4.2** Charlie: an everyday saint among gangsters in *Mean Streets*.

Some of the concluding words in English from the San Gennaro festival are, 'Good night, good luck and God bless you.' They have a poignancy for Charlie and his friends.

## The wrong goal

A number of Scorsese's films deal with artists (singers, musicians, comedians or painters) in which 'the wrong goal' causes unhappiness, leaving the protagonists in their private Purgatories as they wait for recognition – their own gateway to heaven – in the outside world.

The prologue of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) – with its surreal homage to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* – presents Monterey as the Promised Land to which Alice Hyatt (Ellen Burstyn) wishes to return throughout her adult life. Following her preliminary presentation as a rather petulant child who desires to be a singer, Alice is reintroduced in a form of exile in Socorro, New Mexico, as a housewife with an unresponsive husband (Billy Green Bush) and an obstreperous son named Tommy (Alfred Lutter).

After the ten plagues strike the Egyptians in the Book of Exodus, the Israelites set out on their journey – a theme that is addressed by Dante in Canto II of *Purgatorio*:

'In exitu Israel de Aegypto!  
They chanted all together in one voice,  
With whatso in that psalm is after written.

When Alice's husband is killed in a road accident, Scorsese also saw the effect of divine intervention: 'Here God comes in and takes him away. Now what do you do?' (in Schickel 2013). The fact that the Israelites took forty years to make an eleven-day trip (Deut. 1.2) might be evoked in Alice's own attempt to return to her family farm. It is a road movie in which Monterey is the red-hued destination that Alice hopes to regain but, as several critics have noted, she seems to take the long route via Tucson (see Kelly 1980: 180) and appears to be going backwards. It is a lack of progress that is familiar to Dante's souls in *Purgatorio*:

Along the solitary plain we went  
As one who unto the lost road returns,  
And till he finds it seems to go in vain. (*Purg.* I)

and

We still were on the border of the sea,  
 Like people who are thinking of their road,  
 Who go in heart and with the body stay ... (*Purg.* II)

When the word Monterey appeared serendipitously in the final scene as an advertisement – ‘It was like God put it here’, said Scorsese (in Brunette 1999: 43) – the choice was made to leave it, with the effect that ‘semiologists could spend weeks determining if it was ironic, symbolic or totemic’ (Keyser 1992: 60).

Alice is a sympathetic character who meets unsympathetic people on her travels, including the aggressive Ben (Harvey Keitel) with whom she unwittingly commits adultery. Just as Dante’s Pilgrim encounters some (once) unpleasant personalities as he makes his way up the mountain, so too Alice comes across people ‘who seem obsessed, greedy, or vengeful’ (Bliss 1995: 42). However, there are also some happier episodes along the way. In the diner where she works as a waitress (with her singing career on hold again), Alice finds friendship with Flo (Diane Ladd), a kind woman with an occasionally vulgar demeanour, who wears a cross made of safety pins. On one occasion when she comforts Alice, Flo explains the significance of the Christian symbol: ‘Honey, that’s what holds me together.’ When Lee Lourdeaux asked Scorsese about the blue walls in the scene, a colour scheme that he had chosen himself, he replied: ‘Mary, I never realized’ (in Lourdeaux 1990: 249–50). Scorsese admitted that the role of Alice – for which Ellen Burstyn won an Academy Award for Best Actress – was a departure ‘from the idea of femininity to which he had been socialized in his Catholic, Sicilian-American upbringing’ (Baker 2015: 120). In *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, the women – who are still far from sainthood – are ‘their sister’s keeper’ as they support each other in their times of trouble.

While Alice’s dreams of being a professional singer are restricted to playing the piano in small bars, the characters in *New York, New York* (1977) are respected musicians who face their own sense of stagnation. Francine (Liza Minnelli) and her husband Jimmy (Robert De Niro) are enclosed by the classical framing, which Scorsese embraced as he celebrated the Hollywood films of an earlier era: ‘That’s where the problem came – because of the grating of the two worlds together, the intimate, personal film with the big splashy spectacle’ (in Kelly 1980: 26). Francine sings ‘But the World Goes Round’ but when she and her husband Jimmy try to break free (through the improvisation of the actors), their efforts get out of hand and pride gets in the way.

*New York, New York* offers a landscape of artificial trees and fake snow within which very raw human emotions are exposed. In fact, during filming, the improvised anger became so traumatic that some of the crew found it frightening to watch the scene in which the couple argue about Francine's pregnancy (see Keyser 1992: 91). Jean-Luc Godard saw the film as 'about the impossibility of two creative people in a relationship – the jealousies, the envy, the temperament' (in Kelly 1996: 111–12). Here are two people who love each other but are in competition rather than harmony because of their respective talents. In fact, Michel Cieutat suggests that Jimmy sacrifices his family on the altar of his saxophone (1986: 135).

Dante points out that 'the pride and competitiveness amongst artists [is] just as grievous as the pride in the social or political sphere' (Royal 1999: 130). It is a theme that is addressed in a number of Scorsese's films, where there is an onscreen conflict between a loving relationship and artistic ambition. In *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, the titular protagonist must make the decision whether to stay with her lover David (Kris Kristofferson) or to head (eventually) to Monterey and a singing career; and, on a grander scale, there are tensions between Howard Hughes's and Katharine Hepburn's respective fame in *The Aviator*. In the latter case, Scorsese thinks of Icarus who 'flies too close to the sun and the wings melt, and he comes down. There's a Hughes metaphor there. His pride and his ego destroyed him, too' (in Schickel 2013) – a myth that inspired Dante when he wrote of the moment 'when the wretched Icarus his flanks / Felt stripped of feathers by the melting wax' (*Inf.* XVII). Lionel Dobie also suffers for his ambition to go further in *Life Lessons*. His 'arms and forehead are smeared over with paint, which looks like dried blood' (Pomerance 2015: 325), as if he is living out his own Passion narrative in which the antipathy of his muse Paulette (Rosanna Arquette) serves to inspire him to greater glory.

In *The King of Comedy* (1983), celebrity is in danger of usurping religion, offering a clear case of misdirected love from a Christian perspective. Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis) has the aura of a Saviour figure for his fans, as 'coast to coast' the television spreads the words of Jerry (rather than the Word). The members of the public outside the television studio recognize each other, as if they are regular members of a church congregation, but there are screams and flashing cameras (rather than prayerful devotion) as the people see their Messiah. Women fall at Jerry's feet (to the tune of 'Come Rain or Come Shine' with the lyrics that declare unprecedented and unsurpassed love); and Masha (Sandra Bernhard) is a female follower, trying to touch the hem of Jerry's garment (Mt.



9.21). When Masha climbs into the car, Rupert appoints himself as an apostle who is protecting the Saviour from unwanted attention (Mt. 19.13). While Catholics treat the relics of saints with reverence, Rupert has his autograph book: ‘The more scribbled the name, the bigger the fame,’ as he will explain to Rita (Diahnne Abbott), the woman he wants to impress. After the scuffle outside the television studio, Rupert even owns a handkerchief with Jerry’s initials, although the blood that covers it is his own, somewhat undermining the sacredness of the souvenir.

Scorsese’s film ‘was ahead of itself in exposing what motivates our whole culture. Everyone wants to be near the immortals. Today the immortals are the stars. It’s very chilling,’ claimed Sandra Bernhard (in Kelly 1996: 158). Rupert’s fantasies – in which the dream is for the limelight – might initially be mistaken for reality by the audience as happened with the ‘hallucination’ in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In the first restaurant scene with Jerry that takes place in Rupert’s imagination, the surprising humility of the talk show host may indicate to the spectator that something is amiss. In ‘reality’ Jerry criticizes other people: ‘The crew, the incompetents, those behind the scenes you think are your friends and you’re not too sure if you’re gonna be there tomorrow because of their incompetence.’

Rupert’s life offers a visualization of Purgatory as a waiting room, in which the repeated rejections are his form of penance. He lingers outside a stage door, sits in a reception area or hangs on a public telephone. The Gates of Paradise, outside which he stands, are represented by the reception desk at Jerry’s office, and the stillness of the camera emphasizes his lack of progress. When Rupert is told that he may not get a response to his comedy tape for several days, he remains seated in his chair. Rupert’s intransience encourages the appropriately named Miss Long (Shelley Hack) to speed up the process in the hope of moving him on, but she believes that he is not yet ready for Heaven.

*The King of Comedy* depicts a world of lonely people. In fact, Wernblad suggests that the audience never sees Rupert’s mother because she is deceased. In his act he says, ‘If she were only here today, I’d say, “Hey Mom, what are you doing here? You’ve been dead for nine years”’ (see Wernblad 2011: 94). Rita – who gate crashes Jerry’s home with Rupert on the misunderstanding that she has been invited – remarks that the star’s grand residence is like ‘a funeral parlour’ in which he will be dining on his meal for one.

Having kidnapped Jerry as leverage to appear on the Langford show, Rupert finally has the opportunity to give his comic monologue on television as part of the ransom demand, leading to a performance that has been judged by film



critics both positively and negatively (see Keyser 1992: 135). However, Rupert achieves his aim because people notice him, allowing him to live up to his philosophy: 'Better to be king for a night than schmuck for a lifetime.' Dante's Pilgrim meets the inhabitants of the *Inferno* who look for consolation in the idea that people on earth are still talking about them:

Therefore, if thou escape from these dark places,  
 And come to rebehold the beauteous stars,  
 When it shall pleasure thee to say, 'I was,'  
 See that thou speak of us unto the people. (*Inf.* XVI)

Even those souls who have gained entry to *Purgatorio* have the same impulse:

And I implore, by what thou most desirest,  
 If e'er thou treadest the soil of Tuscany,  
 Well with my kindred reinstate my fame. (*Purg.* XIII)

*The King of Comedy* is also a place where wrongs are righted in Rupert's fantasy. He envisions a life in which his high school principal, who saw him as failure, comes to perform his wedding to Rita on television. Here it is the principal who admits his mistake in misjudging Rupert's talent with an impressive mea culpa: 'But we were wrong. And you, Rupert, you were right. And that's why tonight, before the entire nation, we'd like to apologise to you personally and to beg your forgiveness for all the things we did to you. And we'd like to thank you personally – all of us – for the meaning you've given our lives.'

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, the inhabitants manifest some of the sins of which Rupert is guilty: 'Wanting them to be inferior to ourselves (pride). Wanting them not to have the good fortune, talents or possessions they have (envy). Wanting them to be punished for some perceived wrong they have done us (anger)' (Shaw 2014). The final scene, in which Rupert is greeted with applause as he appears on television after his release from prison, could be his entry to Paradise or just another of his own fantasies while he waits.

The Bible also contains a famous caution about misdirected love towards material goods: 'For the love of money is the root of all evils' (1 Tim. 6.10) – a theme that has some resonance for *The Color of Money* (1986), a film about Pool players using underhand methods to increase their financial rewards while also longing for the downfall of their opponents. Eddie Felson (Paul Newman) is the older man who corrupts a naïve protégé called Vincent (Tom Cruise) 'like a serpent in the garden of innocence' (in Schickel 2013), but it is also 'the story of the kid who wants to knock the master off the throne' (Ebert 2008: 91). Eddie

may claim that he 'gets high on the Man Upstairs' but he suffers because his glory days are over, as do some of the souls in *Purgatorio*. Dante goes on to relate:

There are, who, by abasement of their neighbour,  
 Hope to excel, and therefore only long  
 That from his greatness he may be cast down;  
 There are, who power, grace, honour, and renown  
 Fear they may lose because another rises,  
 Thence are so sad that the reverse they love;  
 And there are those whom injury seems to chafe,  
 So that it makes them greedy for revenge,  
 And such must needs shape out another's harm. (*Purg.* XVII)

The story of 'Fast Eddie' also offers elements of a 'mini-morality' play that 'reflects our values: money and success and especially this yuppie thing' and 'Don't put false gods in my place' (in Keyser 1992: 162). It was also the movie for which Paul Newman finally won an Academy Award for Best Actor – the 'golden statue' that eluded Scorsese (in the Best Director category) until he made *The Departed*. When he was a schoolboy, Scorsese heard Fr Principe preach that 'statues like the Oscar were false gods representing greed, an obsession with worldly goods, and glorification of the ego' (LoBrutto 2007: 37). However, Scorsese once explained that coming in under budget is 'the stuff sainthood is made of in Hollywood' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 108), which at least was his achievement on *The Color of Money*.

## Pride before a fall

Fr Principe also commented on the effect of Italian Catholicism on Scorsese as a young man: 'To him, as to most Italians, religion is incarnational, earthy. The worst sins are not the sins of the flesh but rather *superba*, or pride. The sins of the flesh are signs of human weakness. But pride, putting man in God's place, that was very serious because it's a direct rejection of God' (in Kelly 1996: 32). It is notable that Dante places great stress on pride in *Purgatorio*. The Pilgrim and Virgil encounter 'the souls of the proud, bowed down by boulders, weeping and beating their breasts' (Reynolds 2006: 272) in Canto X:

'Master,' began I, 'that which I behold  
 Moving towards us seems to me not persons,  
 And what I know not, so in sight I waver.'

And he to me: 'The grievous quality  
 Of this their torment bows them so to earth,  
 That my own eyes at first contended with it;  
 But look there fixedly, and disentangle  
 By sight what cometh underneath those stones;  
 Already canst thou see how each is stricken.'  
 O ye proud Christians! wretched, weary ones!  
 Who, in the vision of the mind infirm  
 Confidence have in your backsliding steps,  
 Do ye not comprehend that we are worms,  
 Born to bring forth the angelic butterfly  
 That flieth unto judgment without screen?

Scorsese has also admitted that he finds 'stories about pride taking a fall so interesting' (in Schickel 2013), and it is a theme that runs through his films, whether the focus is on New York Catholics in the 1960s or Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century.

In *Silence*, Rodrigues is concerned about the effect that Ferreira's reported apostasy could have on 'reputation': 'If it is true, Father, what would it mean ... for the Jesuits? For the whole of Catholic Europe?' It is an early indication of his personal pride that is uncovered during his journey to Japan, through his letters to Valignano and his (initially one-way) conversations with God. In films such as *GoodFellas* and *Casino*, the voice-over is purposefully aimed at the audience, whereas in *Silence* the audience is 'listening in' rather than directly addressed. Sometimes the spectator is privy to an interior dialogue, perhaps a confession or a prayer, in which the vulnerability of the character is revealed – an approach that Scorsese used in *Mean Streets*.

There is often a sense of superiority in Rodrigues's assessment of the importance of his effect on the Japanese people: 'Christianity brought love. The dignity for the first time of being treated like God's creatures, not animals.' In the beginning he is full of zealous fervour and wants to go to Nagasaki to find Ferreira, while Garupe argues that it is 'too dangerous'. Yet, it is Garupe who will die as a martyr, leaving Rodrigues behind to wait for divine judgement.

When he arrives in the Goto islands to minister to the Christians, Rodrigues records: 'The fear I'd felt on the journey faded away because the joy which greeted me was almost as great as my own.' He is delighted that the people welcome him with warm smiles, bowing down before him as he steps onto the shore. 'And they came to me,' says Rodrigues, with an emphasis on the 'me', although it

should be God who is the focus of attention when the Christians arrive from the surrounding villages to receive the sacraments. As the audience hears Rodrigues say, 'They live like beasts and die like beasts,' he is giving out the consecrated hosts at Communion with his clean hands. 'But Christ did not die for the good and beautiful. That is easy enough,' he claims, never having had to face death at this point. 'The hard thing is to die for the miserable and corrupt.' He is standing above the villagers as they kneel, so that his physical position reflects his inner feeling of importance, despite his addendum: 'But here I knew I was one of them and I shared the hunger of their spirit.'

It is the Interpreter, who assists Rodrigues during his eventual captivity, who shows an awareness of his prisoner's weakness. He toys with the priest and teaches him the Japanese word 'korobu', which means 'fall down, surrender, give up the faith'. The Interpreter explains that Ferreira apostatized and is now a celebrity. 'People in Nagasaki point him out and marvel. He is held in great esteem now. Which, I believe, is why he came here in the first place.' As he leaves Rodrigues in his cell, he says in Japanese: 'Arrogant man. Like all of them. Which means he'll eventually fall.' He is right in his judgement. In the novel, Rodrigues comes to ask himself: 'And yet, am I looking for the true, hidden martyrdom or just for a glorious death? Is it that I want to be honored, to be prayed to, to be called a saint?' (Endo 1969: 119). At least, as a Jesuit, Rodrigues would have the consolation of *The Spiritual Exercises* in which 'the individual, with eyes on the Crucified, reflects on his guilt, to be made aware finally that it is grace, and grace alone, which saves him from the well-deserved everlasting perdition. What remains for us is not knowledge, but rather Christian hope' (Balthasar 1988: 251).

When Scorsese was once speaking of the dangers of believing that 'acting out whatever good I would be doing with a vocation could be done through films' he mentioned the trap of falling into the sin of pride and explained that 'someday I'd like to make a film about a priest who has to deal with the sin of pride – because they're human, too' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 93). In making *Silence* – in which the pride of Rodrigues is visible before his apostasy – Scorsese has finally achieved that particular aim.

## Insufficient Love

In *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Thomas Merton suggests that the pattern of all sin is ‘the deliberate and formal will to reject disinterested love for us for the purely arbitrary reason that we simply do not want it’ (1998: 26). Thomas Aquinas – who makes an appearance in *The Divine Comedy* – explains sloth as ‘an oppressive sorrow, which, to wit, so weighs upon man’s mind, that he wants to do nothing; thus acid things are also cold’ (see Beaup 2012: 98). There are several characters in Scorsese’s filmography who suffer from the kind of insufficient love that Dante depicts as sloth on the central terrace of his Mountain of Purgatory.

### Imperfect love

‘The fear of not loving enough is the purest and worst of fears. ... Only *perfect* love casts out fear’ (Ricoeur 1967: 45) is a commentary that has some relevance for *Who’s That Knocking at My Door*, whose extended genesis enhances (rather than undermines) the narrative of the film. The different ratios, the mysteriously ageing/rejuvenating Keitel and the interspersed sex scene after a discussion about ‘broads’ serve to underline the confusion of J.R., the central protagonist. He is on a physical and emotional voyage that takes several stages but does not advance very far and may, in fact, be going backwards.

In comparison to other boat trips in Scorsese’s films (in *Cape Fear*, *Shutter Island*, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *Silence*), the Staten Island ferry offers no sense of threat, even if J.R. does not understand how the (otherwise unnamed) Girl (Zina Bethune) whom he meets there ‘just came for the ride.’ (‘I just don’t look at this as being a cruise, you know,’ he explains.) J.R. appears to be constantly on the move: there is a car drive through the streets of New York; a car lift with its grinding mechanism; a taxi journey with the Girl; an excursion to the countryside and the climbing of a hill that has an echo with Dante’s mountain in *Purgatorio*.

Yet, J.R. ends up back with his friend Joey (Lennard Kuras), indicating that he has made insignificant progress. The repeated theme of padlocks, bolts, closing windows and slamming doors increases the sense of entrapment. Indeed, J.R. is often located in a half-way location, caught (and frequently framed) between his friends Joey and Sally Gaga (Michael Scala). When questioned about his job, J.R. tells the Girl that he is 'in between positions'; and leaving Joey's car after a heated argument one night, he literally finds himself in the middle of the road.

In the Pleasure Club, J.R.'s thoughts are taken up by the Girl – the ideal blonde, despite the snuffles that give her a note of humanity. A close-up of her face, breaking into a welcoming smile, contrasts with the aggressive environment that he shares with his own friends. At first the audience is treated to a silent movie of a slightly awkward first encounter. When the scene cuts to the meeting itself, the wooden benches on which the couple are seated might belong in a church. However, their first conversation is not about religion but about movies, as Charlie draws attention to pictures of *The Searchers* (John Ford 1956) in her *Paris Match* magazine. The article about the film is not in the original French publication (21 January 1967), but the added images allow a conversation to develop in which J.R. appears more of a Western expert than the intellectual Girl, who apparently does not share his view about the importance of the genre and that it 'would solve everybody's problems if they liked Westerns'.

It appears that the Girl eventually remembers the film – directed by the Catholic filmmaker John Ford – and recalls the embarrassing 'comic' scene when Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) inadvertently purchases a Native American bride. The question of insufficient love is demonstrated in *The Searchers* when Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) initially wants to kill his niece Debbie (Natalie Wood), who has been abducted by the Comanches, because he believes that she has been tainted by association. At the end of the film, he changes his mind and rescues her – a narrative that has been linked to the saving of Iris by Travis in *Taxi Driver* (see, for example, Raymond 2015). The theme of rejection reflects the actions of J.R. himself in his attitude towards the Girl, whom he repudiates because she does not meet his ideal of the virgin bride. He lives according to a code in which 'virginity and spotlessness are as closely bound together as sexuality and contamination' (Ricoeur 1967: 29).

J.R.'s turmoil is connected to his religious beliefs, which underpin his actions. The Girl lets J.R. borrow the publication: 'I swear to God I'll give it back,' he vows, bringing God into the conversation as he raises his right hand to make his oath. Later in the conversation there is a sudden eye of God shot, and the Girl

looks up at J.R. as he says, 'I wouldn't lie to you.' The fact that they are sitting next to a bin bearing the sign 'FOR TRASH ONLY' is an ominous portent of their future together.

*Who's That Knocking at My Door* was a project developed during the second half of the 1960s – a period of upheaval in Western society (with anti-war protests and marches for equality) and in the Catholic Church (with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council). As J.R. and the Girl wander among the chimneys on the roof of a New York tenement, it is clear that there are fires burning beneath their feet – a suitable Purgatorial image. There is a cross and a Catholic church in the background, and a high-angle shot offers another suggestion that they are under a divine gaze as the young couple kiss in the cold sunlight. As they make their way across the roof, there are repeated images of dividing lines that underline the fact that J.R. is a conflicted figure. The theme of barricades (closing car doors and windows) is a repeated feature of this film. Indeed, given the focus on virginity within the narrative, there is an association with the Song of Songs in the Old Testament: 'You are an enclosed garden, my sister my bride / an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed' (4.12).

When J.R. and the Girl enter a bedroom, there are sounds outside of children's voices through the window – a reminder that sex may lead to procreation – and plentiful religious iconography, including a statue of a Madonna and Child that J.R. tells the Girl not to touch (because, if it were damaged, his mother would 'pass out'). It is interesting to watch this scene in the light of *Silence*, given the importance of the *fumi-e* on which the Christians are asked to trample to symbolize their apostasy.

The couple lie on top of the bedspread rather than drawing back the sheets, signalling the transitory nature of their assignation rather than a firm commitment, although J.R. places a pillow behind his girlfriend's head to make her comfortable. There are extreme close-ups as he embraces her, and a focus on the texture of their skin. Then J.R. pulls away to leave her puzzled at the traditional role reversal: 'What's the matter? Why'd you stop?' she asks. His response is unhelpful, 'Just felt like it. No reason.' Casillo analyses the bedroom scene and sees J.R. as 'hemmed in by Catholic sanctities and taboos' (2006: 168).

Andrew Greeley points out that, in 1963, the first National Opinion Research Center Catholic school study recorded that 88 per cent of the Catholics who responded to the survey 'thought that premarital sex was always wrong' (1990: 97). Drawing on Greeley's study published in 1971, Richard Gambino explores attitudes towards sex among unmarried Italians and claims that 'the supposed

Italian double standard for the two sexes did not emerge. On the contrary, Italian-American responses to questions about acceptable behavior for engaged males were almost identical to those about females. Only 5 per cent thought it acceptable for an engaged man to have intercourse; only 42 per cent approved petting; while 94 per cent sanctioned kissing' (2011: 184). Gambino argues that 'American culture served more to distort Italian-American sexuality rather than liberate it' (2011: 186).

J.R. is one of those statistics, caught between 'anxieties and uncertainties, doubts and guilt born from culture conflict' (Gambino 2011: 186) as he kisses the Girl. There is a reflection of the couple in the dressing table mirrors (**Figure 5.1**), with the Girl appearing in stereo, and J.R. situated in the middle. The statue of the Virgin Mary on the right of the frame also watches over him. 'If you love me, you'll understand what I mean,' he says, kissing her hand as if she were a princess: 'Call it anything you want. Old-fashioned or what.' Indeed, his apparent chastity is out of kilter with the standards of the 'swinging 60s'.

It is only later that J.R.'s view of women is clarified by the 'broad' discussion after the couple leave a cinema having watched *Rio Bravo* (Hawks 1959). There is an abrupt switch of focus to the Girl and J.R., as he makes the sign of the cross (a traditional symbol of respect) as they walk past a church. 'A broad isn't exactly a virgin, you know what I mean. You play around with them. You don't marry



**Figure 5.1** 'If you love me, you'll understand.' Uncertain morality in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*.



a broad, you know what I mean.' J.R. does not appear to object to sex before marriage per se. However, he would expect his own bride to be a virgin – and it is here that his failure 'to love enough' comes to the fore.

Before the relationship falls apart, the taxi ride taken by the couple in New York shifts to a car journey in which J.R. and his two friends drive to a small town named Copake – 'the garden spot of the world'. When they go for a walk in the countryside, their aim is to see 'something beautiful' and the auditorium is filled with the sound of birdsong – an unusual moment in Scorsese's filmography. There are several examples of the beauty of the natural world in his films that focus on religion (*The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Kundun* and *Silence*) but his protagonists are more accustomed to the paved streets of the city. The hillside scene also has a Dantean resonance as the Pilgrim makes his way with Virgil through *Purgatorio*:

After his feet had laid aside the haste  
Which mars the dignity of every act,  
My mind, that hitherto had been restrained,  
Let loose its faculties as if delighted,  
And I my sight directed to the hill  
That highest tow'rds the heaven uplifts itself.  
The sun, that in our rear was flaming red,  
Was broken in front of me into the figure  
Which had in me the stoppage of its rays. (*Purg.* III)

In *Who's That Knocking at My Door* there is a zoom out in which the young men are viewed against the expanse of landscape, indicating that J.R. and Joey are outside their comfort zone in the kind of environment that Dante envisages on the Mountain of Purgatory:

Upon the side on which the little valley  
No barrier hath, a serpent was; perchance  
The same which gave to Eve the bitter food.  
'Twixt grass and flowers came on the evil streak,  
Turning at times its head about, and licking  
Its back like to a beast that smoothes itself. (*Purg.* VIII)

There is even a warning to J.R. and his friends to 'Watch out for the snakes down there!' for this Garden Wilderness may contain dangers (and Scorsese himself does not like reptiles as he admitted during the filming of *The Last Temptation*).

When they reach the top of the hill, J.R. is the only one to kneel down, as if in prayerful contemplation of the sunlight, perhaps from the viewpoint that 'the sky *manifests* the sacred' and '*signifies* the most high' (Ricoeur 1967: 11). Michael Bliss argues that the men may be facing the realization of 'what an orientation towards death and enclosure represents' (Bliss 1995: 9) but it is Joey who complains, while J.R. gazes in silence as if experiencing a moment of illumination.

After climbing the mountain, J.R. plummets symbolically in the subsequent scene when he rejects the girl of his dreams because she is not the pure virgin of his fantasy. On the evening when the Girl discusses her past, she lights a votive candle and puts it on the table as a decoration, not realizing the incongruity of the gesture. The statue of the Madonna and Child is also present again as a constant reminder of J.R.'s religion. In the shot there is a loaf of 'Wonder' bread in a wrapper bearing the testimony that it is 'Premium Quality' – a label that J.R. once attributed to the Girl and will soon withdraw when he learns that she is a rape victim. Her long hair is piled on her head and features a spiral curl that is notably reminiscent of the coiffure of Madeleine (Kim Novak) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). J.R. is to undergo his own moment of revelation when his ideal woman begins to tarnish before his eyes, as happened to Scottie (James Stewart) in Hitchcock's film.

Dante reminds the reader 'that disordered love makes the crooked ways seem straight' (Royal 1999: 125). This is a world in which 'defilement is spoken of under the symbol of a stain or blemish, sin under the symbol of missing the mark, of a tortuous road, of trespass, etc. In short, the preferred language of fault appears to be indirect and based on imagery' (Ricoeur 1967: 9). As the Girl relates her story of date rape, her narrative is intercut with images from the crime itself, although it is not certain whether they reflect her own memory or J.R.'s imagination. The audience does not hear her describe her assailant, and there are specific details (such as the fact that the man took off his glasses) that she would remember. The rape itself is not recounted in dialogue, but the camera focuses on J.R.'s face as if the event is being played out in his mind, and the moment that the Girl fights off her brutal attacker is intercut with a vision of her and J.R. in their earlier bedroom tryst. J.R.'s potential virgin bride is now soiled in his mind. The account ends with her scream.

The scene has a confessional edge as J.R. and the Girl sit on opposite sides of the table, but he proves to be an unforgiving confessor whose concern is for himself. Her words are full of self-reproach tinged with hope: 'I felt dirty. I felt

I wasn't as good as anyone else. I felt ashamed. I couldn't even talk. I didn't talk. I love you. And I don't wanna lose you.' Notably, her plea ('With you it will be the first time') would also meet the approval of Catholic theologians such as St Augustine. In *City of God* Augustine acknowledges that a rape victim may feel shame, but notes that 'whatever anyone else does with the body or to the body, provided that it cannot be avoided without committing sin, involves no blame on the sufferer' (*City of God*, I:16). Thomas Aquinas writes that virgins who have suffered rape are not merely 'secondary virgins' in the eyes of the Church; they are true virgins: 'Even supposing that one thus violated should conceive, she would not for that reason forfeit her virginity' (*Summa Theologiae*, Suppl., q. 96, a. 5, ad 4).

However, J.R. does not share these theological viewpoints. He shakes his head and his spoken words offer no consolation ('I can't understand') as he states that he does not believe her 'story.' J.R.'s reaction echoes a scene in Franco Zeffirelli's New Testament production *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) when Mary reveals that she has virginally conceived a child. Joseph, her betrothed, responds: 'That's too much for any man to believe,' and Mary counters, 'But you're not "any man."' The Girl also meets with rejection from J.R. at this juncture ('I mean if anyone else hears a story like that, well, how could they believe it?') and her plea ('But you're not "anyone else"') falls on deaf ears. 'It just doesn't make any sense,' is J.R.'s reaction, and the apartment door is heard to slam three times as she leaves, although it shuts only once, to emphasize the finality of their parting.

J.R. is then seen with his laddish friends – in the middle – and 'Mary had a little lamb' on the soundtrack seems an appropriate message for his juvenile reaction to life. Yet the images of the violation scene continue in his imagination: there is wild laughter intercut with a shot of the car in which the attack took place, followed by the rape itself. J.R. sinks down by a radiator in the hallway on the chequered linoleum, as if he is a left-over piece in a board game. He reaches out a hand as if to touch the Girl's golden hair in the sunlight with a memory of their kiss.

When J.R. eventually relents, he goes to the Girl's apartment, apparently for the first time as he searches for the number as he walks down the long corridor. She is alone in bed, with a chain on the front door – the kind of chaste behaviour that he would expect of his girlfriend – and she is even glad to see him at 6:30 in the morning. However, his attempt at repentance for his actions is quickly undermined when he continues: 'I forgive you, and I'm gonna marry you anyway.' J.R. does not receive the grateful response he expects: 'I won't marry you on that basis,' she replies, as she (presumably rightly) concludes: 'You'll always

find a way to bring it up' and that a marriage built on such a foundation is 'not good enough'.

'Who do you think you are, the Virgin Mary or something?' asks J.R., and then he compounds his error by adding, 'You whore.' Gambino explains that the status of a woman 'as symbolic of all that is human and supportive of life also finds its expression in the great status accorded to the primary female figure in Italian Catholicism, the Virgin Mary' (2011: 165); but, as has been well documented, Scorsese has suffered from 'the well-known tendency of some men, especially those raised in the church, to see women as either Madonnas or as whores' (Ebert 2008: xiv).

The Girl does not react but stands with her back to him and her arms folded. Now realizing his mistake, J.R. makes an attempt at reconciliation: 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. Honest to God, I didn't mean it. I'm just so confused by this whole thing.' Anthony Cavalluzzi sees J.R.'s reaction to the rape of the Girl as part of an assumption 'that the Madonna-whore characterization is the only possible path for a woman to take' but that 'the realization the Girl is not "pure" also corresponds to J.R.'s inability to separate himself from the restrictive margins of his stunted male world' (2015: 282).

As the Girl lives on the ninth floor of the building, J.R. stumbles down a symbolic nine levels – figuratively into the ninth circle of traitors – but his descent is the result of confusion rather than wicked intent. The Girl's final instruction to J.R. is 'Go home' (as opposed to the conciliatory 'Let's go home' – the words Ethan says to Debbie in *The Searchers*). Although J.R. is next seen in a church, he is wearing different clothes, so there is a time lapse that suggests that the church is not actually the 'home' to which the Girl was referring. However, when J.R. seeks refuge in St Patrick's Old Cathedral (with its autobiographical links to Scorsese as a parishioner and altar boy), he is surrounded by the iconography of Catholic saints who have given their lives for a Cause – whereas J.R. has failed to love enough.

The church is a most impressive building with beautiful stained glass windows and an array of holy statues. Paul Sorvino, who starred in *GoodFellas*, spoke of the influence of Catholicism: 'We were all brought up in churches that have marvellous windows and statues, and big ideas were presented weekly. The question of good and evil is a serious question for Catholics, and it is related to the question of beauty, because the history of the Church is a history of art' (in Kelly 1996: 272).

J.R. goes into a confessional and there is the sound of the screen being pulled back by the priest. As J.R. imagines kissing the Girl, a church bell rings (perhaps

adding to the fantasy of the marriage that will now not take place). He makes an act of contrition, resolving 'to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin' – although the narrative has frequently shown him on the edges of an altercation and then enthusiastically taking part in it with his friends.

In the confessional, there are flashbacks to his relationship with the Girl, her rape and an episode (presumably in his fantasy) in which he cavorts with naked women. The scenes represent his examination of conscience, as they are the times when he has indulged in lust, hypocrisy and a lack of compassion. The song 'Who's That Knocking at My Door' by The Genies tells of 'a man beset by women who constantly bang on his door,' while the following song is 'The Plea' by The Chantels with the lyrics: 'Dear Lord, please hear my plea, / And do something, something for me' (in Cavaluzzi 2015: 283). Casillo maintains that when J.R. 'is shown several times alternately in the confessional receiving his penance and at the altar in the act of performing it, it is implied that the pattern will be repeated again and again, but with no alleviation of J.R.'s anguish' (2006: 175). It is a scene that evokes the actions of Kichijiro in *Silence*, who confesses five times on screen and repeats the same sin in between the sacrament.

The statues in St Patrick's Old Cathedral include St Lucia who has been a popular female martyr for Italians as she combined 'serietà attributes with her Christian virtues' (Gambino 2011: 181). Indeed, she is one of the sacred figures who come to the Pilgrim's aid in *The Divine Comedy*:

A gentle Lady is in Heaven, who grieves  
 At this impediment, to which I send thee,  
 So that stern judgment there above is broken.  
 In her entreaty she besought Lucia,  
 And said, 'Thy faithful one now stands in need  
 Of thee, and unto thee I recommend him.' (*Inf.* II)

There are repeated shots of a *Pietà* and statues of Christ, St Theresa of Lisieux, the Sacred Heart, St Rocco (a popular Sicilian saint, with the scar on his leg that was a sign of the plague) and the Virgin Mary handing the rosary to St Dominic and St Catherine. Scorsese discusses the original effect of those statues on him as a boy: 'And the use of color and the suffering of the saints .... It was quite a theatrical experience but, I mean, religious, but also at the same time something that has never left my consciousness' (in Ebert 2008: 191). The religious icons are interspersed with images from the rape scene, with a focus on wounds, including the image of Christ laid out in the tomb. When J.R. kisses the crucifix

in the confessional, there is blood on his lips, uniting him with his Saviour – in comparison to the scene in *The Last Temptation of Christ* when the devil kisses the wounds of Christ on the cross and there is no transfer of blood.

Then J.R is back on the street with Joey with a ‘See you tomorrow’ farewell, remaining trapped in the darkness. He is not an evil protagonist with murderous aims, but his disjointed, immature morality leads to unkind judgements and confused actions. Casillo points out that ‘a Mediterranean man’s honour requires him to preserve the chastity of his wives and daughters’ (2006: 76), but Scorsese describes such attitudes as ‘medieval’ and out of step with society in the 1960s. He was told: ‘Here we are in the age of the sexual revolution, and you’re making a movie about repression! Total sexual repression. Who’s going to see it? Nobody’ (in DeCurtis 2017). Fortunately, for admirers of Scorsese, those critics were wrong in that respect.

## Wasted talent

Deficient love also leads to more conventional ideas of sloth with regard to the use of one’s talents. Bliss claims that *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* ‘communicates a semblance of moral progress while what it actually catalogues is a story of spiritual inertia’ (Bliss 1995: 45). At one point the heroine is literally at a crossroads and says, ‘Quo vadis?’ echoing the famous story of St Peter. Scorsese admits that he ‘was fascinated by Ancient Rome because of the church’ (Schickel 2013) and that he liked the film *Quo Vadis* (1951) by Mervyn LeRoy. Alice appears to give up on her singing career, not making the most of her (admittedly unspectacular) gifts, but Scorsese was unhappy with the compromise scene in the diner in which Alice reconciles with her lover David. Ellen Burstyn explains: ‘The end they wanted was a *movie* ending, not a *real* ending – which was why Marty had everybody in the restaurant applaud, because that was *his* way of acknowledging that this was the *movie* ending’ (in Kelly 1996: 84–5).

In Scorsese’s adaptation of Edith Wharton’s novel *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis) has a comfortable nineteenth-century lifestyle but an insufficient sense of purpose. ‘The theme of conformity’ is seen ‘during a street scene in which an all-male band of pedestrians marches against the wind wearing identical derbies’ (Blake 2005). Newland Archer does eventually commit to his marriage with May Welland (Winona Ryder) but, as Roger Ebert points out, there is poignancy in the final scene that ‘reveals that the man was not the only one with feeling – that others sacrificed for him, that

his deepest tragedy was not what he lost, but what he never realized he had' (2008: 133). At the other end of the social scale, Johnny Boy's poor work ethic in twentieth-century New York leads to the dramatic finale in *Mean Streets* in which he is shot because he cannot pay his debts, although he does remain alive.

There are also signs of recovery when 'Fast Eddie' picks up his pool cue again in *The Color of Money*; Lionel Dobie returns to his canvas in *Life Lessons*; and Howard Hughes leaves the darkness of his screening room and takes the controls of The Hercules in *The Aviator*. But sloth is a difficult aspect to address on film, given that visualizing indolence is not necessarily an entertaining prospect. As the Pilgrim has already been informed in *Inferno*:

'Now it behoves thee thus to put off sloth;  
My Master said; 'for sitting upon down,  
Or under quilt, one cometh not to fame,  
Withouten which whoso his life consumes  
Such vestige leaveth of himself on earth,  
As smoke in air or in the water foam.' (*Inf.* XXIV)

The piteous sight of Jake La Motta's expanding girth in *Raging Bull* is a visible symbol of his inner weakness, while the stage routines in the night club might earn sympathy, as they 'involve a kind of self-humiliation that is painful to watch' (Bliss 1995: 70). 'The man without a soul has nowhere to go but outward,' claims Peter Ackroyd (in Hayes 2005: 6). Scorsese explains that the film aims 'to achieve an understanding of a self-destructive lifestyle – of a person who was destructive to the people around him and to himself – who finally eased up on himself and on those other people, and somehow made peace with life' (in Kelly 1996: 122). At one point, Scorsese was going to play the role of a priest, integrating himself into the moral argument (see Cieutat 1986: 163).

The pain is magnified as the audience is inside the ropes with the boxers during the bouts, so that the sense is conveyed that 'inside the ring becomes equivalent to inside Jake's psyche' (Grindon 2005: 37), and in one fight (against Sugar Ray Robinson) there is 'an impression of heat throughout: A heavy haze fills most of the frames, figures come in and out of focus' (Berliner 2005: 42). Scorsese, who admits to having no familiarity with the sport of boxing, treats Jake with some sympathy: 'The pail of water the sponge is dipped into is bloody. The sponge goes up to Jake's back. It's squeezed. Then the blood drips out. ... The trainer was putting vaseline onto Jake's face, but it looked like some sort of blessing almost. It looked as if this guy was going to be sacrificed, so I thought that was very interesting' (in Kelly 1996: 134).

Scorsese shot the fight scenes at high speed so that the audience would be able to see the punches. 'The rushes were hours of a guy standing there like this, bleeding' (in Kelly 1996: 136). When the announcer (the voice of the actual announcer from the last real fight is used) says, 'No man can endure this pummelling,' the comments about Mel Gibson's representation of Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) might come to mind. However, Jake becomes an animal sacrifice – not a Christ-like figure himself but the kind of man for whom Jesus laid down his life. It is in prison that Jake appears to come to terms with this fact.

Rather than 'attempting to justify La Motta's behavior, the film lets the ugly facts of his life, both in and out of the ring, speak for themselves' (Ehrenstein 1992: 67). David Ehrenstein suggests that this is problematic for some audiences: 'Without some form of catharsis – preferably one of the "life-affirming" variety – viewers were forced to take away unanswered questions and unresolved feelings' (1992: 68). Changes are made to La Motta's biography in order to 'bring out the Christian themes of fraternal love and hatred, since Scorsese regards La Motta as less a historical character than a moral exemplum' (Casillo 2006: 227).

Scorsese revealed, 'Later on, people told me that the suffering in that film had more to do with a Catholic sense of suffering, the daily struggle of just living' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101). Bertellini and Reich claim that La Motta has made 'a pact with the devil (the mob boss Tommy Cosmo)' and 'is incapable of distinguishing licensed, socially acceptable, and sacralised violence inside the ring from domestically situated profane violence outside the ring' (2015: 47). However, Jake does appear to be aware of his mistakes when he says, 'I've done a lot of bad things, Joey, maybe it's coming back to me.' His words may remind an audience of Donnie's reaction in *The Wolf of Wall Street* when he thinks he is about to drown. However, while Donnie survives and carries on in the same vein, Jake will eventually try to mend his ways.

In conversation with Richard Schickel, Scorsese compares the narrative of *Raging Bull* to the story of King David in the Bible – a man who sinned against God in his act of adultery with Bathsheba and his treatment of her husband Uriah, and yet he is still 'one of the anointed of God' (Schickel 2013). Scorsese wrote a quotation from the Gospel of John at the end of the script, with a discussion between Nicodemus and Jesus about being 'born from on high' to enter the kingdom of God (in Wilson 2011: 101). He reveals: 'It was only a joke, but we did consider having a white light enter the cell or using its beams to trace the shape of the Cross' (in Wilson 2011: 102).

The theme of redemption, which relates to Scorsese's personal emergence from his physical trough in the late 1970s as well as to La Motta's survival, is





**Figure 5.2** 'I'm not that guy.' Repentance in *Raging Bull*.

underpinned by the New Testament verse that appears on screen at the end of the film: 'All I know is this: once I was blind and now I can see' (Jn 9.24-6). The biblical quotation and the dedication of the film to his former tutor, Haig Manoogian, indicate 'that Scorsese himself had achieved redemption through this character' (Raymond 2015: 30).

With reference to *The Divine Comedy*, Royal explains:

We are so prone to spiritual drift that it is often only through the sharp sense of loss of meaning and direction that God can get our attention. At first we may only think we need simple measures to pull ourselves together such as therapy or vigorous action. These may help, but Dante suggests that, for this predicament, the real remedy goes much further. (Royal 1999: 39)

Commenting on the role of Jake La Motta, Scorsese asks, 'What is it that confers a sort of grace on him at that moment? That's the mystery. Something happened to him, and it happened to me, too, and that's why I'm here now. Something that allowed him to say "I'm not that guy"' (in Henry 1999: 91). (**Figure 5.2**) When Jake utters the monologue from *On the Waterfront* (Kazan 1954) he is trying to forgive himself: 'I wanted to show there was hope for the resolution of the soul, to show it simply with an unsympathetic character' (in Keyser 1992: 120). In making *Raging Bull*, Scorsese shared with Jake the 'Catholic background, the guilt feelings, the hope for redemption. Maybe it's a little pretentious to talk about redemption. More than anything, it's about learning to accept yourself' (in Henry 1999: 89).

## Excessive Love

And if, when turned, towards it she incline,  
 Love is that inclination; it is nature,  
 Which is by pleasure bound in you anew  
 Then even as the fire doth upward move  
 By its own form, which to ascend is born,  
 Where longest in its matter it endures,  
 So comes the captive soul into desire,  
 Which is a motion spiritual, and ne'er rests  
 Until she doth enjoy the thing beloved. (*Purg.* XVIII)

## Lust and avarice

In the treatment for Scorsese's uncompleted project entitled *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* J.R. goes to confession and works up the courage to admit to 'self-impurities,' and the boys are asked to write private petitions which should 'contain their resolutions for making their life more Christ-like' (in Kelly 1980: 44–5). When Scorsese was at school, the *Baltimore Catechism* was the summary of doctrine that Catholic pupils would have been taught, including entry 275: 'When do thoughts about impure things become sinful?' and the answer: 'Thoughts about impure things become sinful when a person thinks of an unchaste act and deliberately takes pleasure in so thinking, or when unchaste desire or passion is aroused and consent is given to it.' James Martin (2010a) asks, 'How many children who memorized the Baltimore Catechism concluded that spiritual life was not an invitation to a relationship from a loving God but a series of complicated rules from a tyrant God?'

Scorsese received an education that taught the doctrine of Original Sin which, in the theology of St Augustine, was linked 'inextricably with sex'

(Turner 1993: 79). Andrew Greeley argues that the sexual attitudes of St Augustine 'have done enormous harm. Moreover, his shabby treatment of his concubine when he decided to give up sexual pleasure shows him to be a chauvinist and a cad. It will not do to say, as Augustine's admirers argue, that his behavior must be judged in the context of his times. At no time and in no culture is it justified for a follower of Jesus to treat another human being that way' (Greeley 1990: 93).

In Scorsese's student production *What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?* (1963), the main protagonist Algernon/Harry (Zeph Michelis) sits at his typewriter to write his 'Confessions' – an exercise that St Augustine famously undertook and in which he included the celebrated prayer to the Lord: 'Give me chastity and self-control, but not just yet' (*Confessions* Book 8, IV:17). These sentiments might well have been appreciated by J.R. in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, although (as with Charlie in *Mean Streets*) there is no certain indication that he will mend his ways and become a saint in later life.

According to Andrew Greeley: 'In theory Catholicism says that sex is good, but in practice the Church has yet to shake the Platonist notion that sex is dirty' (Greeley 2000: 57). It is a theme that Scorsese has addressed in his films, admitting that there is a lot of Catholicism in 'the sexual aspects' of *After Hours* (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 100) in which Paul is 'privy to a secret he is far too naïve to comprehend' (Keyser 1992:152). He has eaten the apple of the Tree of Knowledge and now he is going to suffer. In *Mean Streets* Charlie speaks of a dream in which he ejaculates blood over his lover Teresa, linking sex with death. As the couple lie together on white sheets – their arms outstretched in a semi-cruciform position – he explains that he will sleep with her but says he cannot love her. Ebert suggests 'that for Charlie the crimes of gangsters (extortion, beating, killing) were insignificant compared to crimes involving sex. He felt more guilt about his lust for the girl Teresa than for taking a man's restaurant, his family's livelihood, away from him' (2008: 13). Scorsese points out the guilt that Charlie feels because of his love for Teresa as well as Johnny: 'And so that, along with his own feelings about leading a spiritual life, he calls down upon himself a kind of suffering' (in Schickel 2013).

In *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* J.R. listens to a sermon on hell and damnation – offering an intertextual link to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although it was only in retrospect that Scorsese read the book and realized, 'My God, it's the same thing' (in Lourdeaux 1990: 232). Scorsese's invented sermon is about 'Marriage and Sex' and includes the story of a young unmarried

couple (whom the priest claimed to have known all their lives) who were killed while having sex in a car. J.R. is then upset when his friend Mikey tells him that another priest recounted exactly the same event at a different retreat – revealing that it is ‘just a story’ rather than a personal recollection (as the priest indicated), and leaving him with a sense that he has been cheated.

The anecdote itself then eventually features in *Mean Streets* when Charlie and his friends discuss the retreat sermon as they play pool. Tony says that he had heard the story before from a different priest and, responding to Charlie’s dismay at this fact, adds that he has to understand that the Church is ‘a business. It’s work. It’s an organisation’. Charlie explains that he was angry because he had been told a lie by ‘guys’ who were ‘not supposed to be guys’. Scorsese was expressing ideas that would come more to the forefront in the paedophile scandals when respect for priests (once taken for granted in Catholic communities) would be undermined. The point is made crudely in *The Departed* by Frank Costello when the clerical collar is a target for ridicule in a narrative set in Boston – one of the cities in the United States in which the abuse cases came to light, as highlighted by the Investigative Staff of the *Boston Globe* (2002) and the film *Spotlight* (McCarthy, 2015). The honour once accorded to priests by the faithful – as witnessed by the arrival in Japan of Rodrigues and Garupe in *Silence* – has been dealt a blow in recent years.

Roger Ebert suggests that the story of the young couple in *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* also helps to explain why J.R. is reluctant to have sex with the Girl in *Who’s That Knocking at My Door* (2008: 6). Alongside the narrative concerning J.R.’s unconsummated relationship with the Girl, the film also treats expressions of sexual desire among his friends, and attitudes towards women in general. When J.R. and the Girl discuss the merits of *Rio Bravo*, the Girl says that she liked Feathers (Angie Dickinson), whom J.R. denounces as ‘a broad’. Their conversation is suddenly interrupted by a sex scene, in which a naked J.R. is cavorting with attractive nude women in a loft apartment. During the encounter, J.R. lies stretched out on a bed in the centre of the room, so that he appears to have become a (willing) sacrifice at the hands of the women, with his smiling face indicating that he has no inhibitions. After sex, dressed in a waistcoat and tie, J.R. throws playing cards onto the woman on the bed as if to signal that he is ‘a player’.

On one level, the scene appears to be incongruous until it is explained that it was added as a moral compromise at the instigation of ‘soft porn’ distributor Joseph Brenner so that Scorsese could get wider exposure for his film. The episode was shot in Amsterdam and Scorsese had to smuggle the 16mm film

'through customs in the pockets of his raincoat' (Keyser 1992: 24) when he returned to the United States – so it would have been another reason to go to confession if Scorsese had still been a practising Catholic at the time.

As this scene was a late addition, Keitel clearly looks older than in the earlier episodes with his friends that were shot some time previously – but this fact fits well with the idea that it is a fantasy in J.R.'s head. In his reminiscences about meeting the Girl on the ferry, J.R. was never a smooth operator. It seems unlikely that the awkward fellow has been transformed into the confident man engaged in sex games (with French actress Anne Collette who had worked with Jean-Luc Godard, no less), except in his own imagination. It also raises the issue of how to distinguish between fantasy and fact in Scorsese's films – a theme that is addressed in *The King of Comedy* and, most obviously, *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

At another party in 'the real world', Gaga brings along Susie and Rosie, two 'broads' in the eyes of J.R. and his friends. The girls are in a bedroom and engaged in amorous activity (with a man each) while the others wait outside – in a manner that Scorsese will replicate in Magdalene's brothel in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Treating the girls like prostitutes and believing that they are next in line for their services ('I Call First' was one of the original titles of the film), the young men become tired of waiting and launch an attack, causing the girls to leave in tears. *Who's That Knocking at My Door* is a form of Purgatory in which the protagonist reviews his imperfect life – with most of the imperfections connected to sex.

While the film was 'a movie about sexual repression in an age of sexual revolution' (Stewart 2014), Scorsese's next full-length feature was more in line with a spirit of sexual freedom. It is recorded that Dante's friend Guido Cavalcanti 'rebuked him in a sonnet for wasting his talents' (Reynolds 2006: 17), just as filmmaker John Cassavetes criticized Scorsese for making *Boxcar Bertha* according to producer Roger Corman's 'exploitation' rules that required regular nudity and violence in the narrative. It was a low-budget production that was filmed on a limited strip of railway track and, as Scorsese admitted, the audience may have had 'the impression that the railroad lines formed a closed loop! The characters are always in the same place, the way they are in a dream. It's very strange, this circularity' (in Wilson 2011: 33). It is evidently a visible indication that the protagonists are currently 'going nowhere' despite their attempts at forward motion.

Bertha (Barbara Hershey) is a good natured young woman who falls into a life of crime through misadventure and is deceived into joining a brothel

(at which Scorsese himself is a client who is willing to pay \$15 for company). Although she did not go to church much as a child, Bertha is happy to pretend to be a missionary (in comparison to the real missionaries in *Silence*) who has dedicated her life 'to the black heathens' in order to help her friends escape from prison. On another occasion, Bertha covers herself with stolen jewellery in an exhibition of playfulness that differs from the outright avarice that Ginger manifests in *Casino* when her eyes fall upon the expensive gifts with which Sam attempts to buy her affections.

Bertha is eager to protest her innocence as if aware that an account of her life may be recorded. She is keen to counter her bad reputation as a common whore, to claim that a shooting in which she was implicated was an accident, and that 'the other stuff's a lie'. The actions of Bertha and her compatriots are confused as they manifest examples of interracial harmony and outer acts of criminality. Bertha's lover Bill (David Carradine) sees himself as a Union man who gives his loot to the strike fund. Sartoris (played by John Carradine – the father of David Carradine in real life) is the patriarchal figure who owns the railroad and speaks of God: 'In the words of the Lord: I shall vomit forth that which is lukewarm'. The film contains several biblical references in the dialogue that Scorsese inserted himself (see Wilson 2011: 35). Sartoris suggests that Bill should not lay up 'treasures on earth', at which Bill shows himself familiar with the Bible by responding, 'Where thieves break through and steal.' However, Bill prefers to promulgate a kind of 'liberation theology' and 'a preferential option for the poor' in a world in which the rich 'are depicted as greedy, smug, and – through the activities of their minions – murderous' in comparison to the poor who 'are seen as predominantly warm, accessible, and thereby attractive' (Bliss 1995: 17). When Sartoris points out that the New Testament passage continues: 'But lay yourselves up treasures in heaven' (Mt. 6.19-20), Bill indicates the dichotomy: his Bible is his gun and, as he is very much interested in laying up 'treasures on earth', Heaven can wait.

In *Taxi Driver* there is a 'Heaven on earth moment' with the introduction of Betsy, who is 'a goddess who could make an ugly world beautiful' (Kelly 1996: 88). Scorsese himself is visible on screen as an admiring bystander in the scene when Betsy glides by in slow motion in the daylight, and she will have her own romantic theme music to enhance the moment. She is initially 'an angel' for Travis until she rejects him in response to his ill-conceived decision to take her to the cinema to see a double bill of 'exciting adult hits'. At this point, Travis turns against Betsy with the response: 'You're in hell and you're going to die in hell. Like the rest of

them.' When he watches a soap opera that deals with emotional rejection, Travis kicks over his television set.

After the Girl in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* and Betsy in *Taxi Driver*, the next beautiful blonde to find herself the object of lust is Vickie in *Raging Bull* – who offers another 'Beatrice moment' when Jake first spots her beside a swimming pool. In the words of the actress who plays her, Vickie is 'a character seen entirely through Jake's eyes' (in Kelly 1996: 131). Cathy Moriarty describes the scene in the bedroom when Jake brings Vickie home: 'Marty had all these little touches, like the crucifix over the bed. Even in the scene where I look at the picture, on the dresser there were rosary beads, a little medal, a crucifix, and a holy water container. It was very important for Marty to include those things. He knew exactly what he wanted on the set' (in Kelly 1996: 131–2).

When Jake shows Vickie the photograph of himself and Joey in boxing pose, there are rosary beads draped over the frame as if to sanctify their fraternal relationship, but it is an early indication of trouble ahead. (**Figure 6.1**) There is a photograph of Joey's wedding that is spliced into the scene when Jake returns home with his new bride – a subliminal message that Joey is an interloper in his brother's marriage (see Wernblad 2011: 37). A triangle of jealousy is created, which extends to Jake's suspicion that his friend Salvy (Frank Vincent) is also having an affair with his wife. La Motta is caught up in the Madonna – whore complex: 'It amounts to a man having such low self-esteem that he (a) cannot respect a woman who would sleep with him, and (b) is convinced that, given the choice, she would rather be sleeping with someone else' (Ebert 2008: 65).



**Figure 6.1** Catholic men with troubled lives in *Raging Bull*.



## Scorsese's tragic lovers

Among Scorsese's characters there are many tormented personalities (whether their desire is for people or material goods), but the most distinguished pair are Newland Archer and Countess Ellen (Michelle Pfeiffer), who suffer for their adulterous but unconsummated passion in *The Age of Innocence*. (**Figure 6.2**) They have the elevated status of Dante's famous lovers Paolo and Francesca who are placed in the *Inferno* as their attraction ends in adultery, although it is notable that they are in the upper regions of Hell: 'Some people, hearing the frequent warnings by Christian clergy about the evils of fornication and adultery, have come to assume that, in the Christian scheme of things, this is the most serious of sins. Dante and the whole medieval tradition thought otherwise' (Royal 1999: 56).

Francesca falls in love with her brother-in-law Paolo, and she recounts the day that they succumbed to their feelings:

One day we reading were for our delight  
 Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthral.  
 Alone we were and without any fear.  
 Full many a time our eyes together drew  
 That reading, and drove the colour from our faces;  
 But one point only was it that o'ercame us.  
 When as we read of the much-longed-for smile  
 Being by such a noble lover kissed,  
 This one, who ne'er from me shall be divided,  
 Kissed me upon the mouth all palpitating.  
 Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it.  
 That day no farther did we read therein. (*Inf. V*)



**Figure 6.2** Scorsese's Paolo and Francesca: Newland and Ellen in *The Age of Innocence*.



When Francesca's husband discovers the lovers, he kills them both, but their love binds them together in death within the *Inferno*:

Love, that on gentle heart doth swiftly seize,  
 Seized this man for the person beautiful  
 That was ta'en from me, and still the mode offends me.

Love, that exempts no one beloved from loving,  
 Seized me with pleasure of this man so strongly,  
 That, as thou seest, it doth not yet desert me. (*Inf.* V)

In the original Italian, each stanza begins with the word 'Amor', and the couple believe that it is 'love that brought them to a single death' (Reynolds 2006: 133). As C. S. Lewis suggests in *The Four Loves*, when lovers explain that 'Love made us do it', their 'confession can be almost a boast. There can be a shade of defiance in it. They "feel like martyrs"' (1960: 136). Speaking of the relationship between Newland Archer and Countess Ellen in *The Age of Innocence*, Scorsese stated, 'Sometimes when you fall in love you can't see what other people see. You become as passionate and obsessive as Newland, who can't see what is going on around him. That's the theme of *Taxi Driver* and of *Mean Streets*' (in Christie 2005: 215). Robert Casillo points out: 'In many ways, the difference between Scorsese's Italian American films and *The Age of Innocence* is that between a lower-class village-based Mediterranean society, where emotions lie close to the surface, and a Northern European Protestant high society, where control of affect is *de rigueur*, and where one dreads to become a public spectacle' (2015: 161).

When Ellen enters the frame during a performance of Gounod's *Faust* – with its themes of wasted lives, lost love and devilish pacts – Scorsese sought for a technique to highlight the moment by presenting her to the audience through the opera glasses: 'so finally we decided to dissolve between each set of three frames. I settled on that effect because I saw how you began to notice people, with the glitter of their jewellery, and then this incredible woman appears in a blue dress, and the blue is very different from what everyone else is wearing' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 186–7). Notably, the hair colour of the female protagonists has changed in the transfer from Wharton's novel to the screen: May Welland has dark hair and Ellen is now blonde. Interestingly, Reynolds writes of Dante's 'screen-love' – a woman to whom he addressed poetry in order to disguise the true target of his affections (Reynolds 2006: 22). The term obviously has cinematic connotations and works particularly well in the case of *The Age of Innocence* when Newland's marriage to May is an attempt to 'screen' the real object of his desire. In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland gives May lilies,

the symbol of purity associated with the Virgin Mary; and he sends Ellen yellow roses, which have a Marian link to Mary as Queen of Heaven.

In Canto XXVII of *Paradiso* 'the heavens assume a red hue' and 'in what seems something of a spiritual reach at this level of perfection, Dante suggests that the heavens are turning red here out of embarrassment for what the times have wrought upon the worship of God' (Royal 1999: 229). Scorsese mentions how the wall seems to blush red in *The Age of Innocence*:

We did the wall turning red on the set, but the image we dissolve to was normal color and the red went away too quickly; it was like a jump in color. The only way to do it was to smooth out the red optically over the dissolve, and as the full image comes in and the other image is fading out, gradually lose the red also. ... I was interested in the use of color like brush-strokes throughout the film, the sensuality of painting, how the characters expressed themselves by sending each other flowers. The flowers could be sensual, but they couldn't allow themselves to be overtly sensual, so it just didn't seem right to fade to black. (In Smith 1999b: 202-203)

Ellen says that she has been away 'so long I'm sure I'm dead and buried and this dear old place is Heaven' but there are repeated images of flames – from candles, lighted cigars and blazing fires – that offer a conflicting message that this is a living Purgatory (if not Hell). Indeed, Newland asks, 'Why should we bury a woman alive if her husband prefers to live with whores?' while he himself feels that he was 'being buried alive under his future'. Newland and Ellen are captured in an 'iris in' – as if caught in a spy glass – as they attend a performance of *The Shaughraun*, in which the play's female protagonist, who is wearing a cross, rejects her lover 'out of a sense of higher duty' (Casillo 2015: 170). The narrative 'is centrally concerned with offering, then closing off, avenues of escape' (Nicholls 2004: 30). There is, for example, a scene with May and Newland in which 'two masses of blackout converge from both sides of the frame, engulfing them in darkness' (Casillo 2015: 158).

On one occasion Newland accuses May of being cruel, when she suggests that Ellen would be better returning to her estranged husband: 'Even demons don't think people are happier in Hell.' When May worries that he will catch his death by leaning out the window on a cold night, Newland realizes (via the narrator's voice-over): 'I am dead. I've been dead for months and months.' He even thinks wistfully that May might die and set him free. Scorsese's films are often about 'the passion of a man forced to choose between what he wants, and what he knows is right' (Ebert 2008: 138). It is notable that May is wearing her wedding dress as Newland contemplates betraying her. The coals tumble from the fire onto the hearth as if to offer a warning of fiery torment in the Afterlife.

The film offers an example of the 'scapegoat mechanism' explored by René Girard, as love transforms Ellen into a Girardian motif: 'This person is accused falsely of having violated those prohibitions which, before the crisis, the community had deemed sacred .... He or she thus becomes society's scapegoat, whose miraculous elimination through unanimous violence renews social order' (Casillo 2015: 135). Scorsese explains some of the symbolism of the dinner table when the Roman punch was 'like having a triple high mass for a funeral rather than a regular low mass' (in Christie 2005: 213). At the farewell meal for Ellen, Newland is described as 'a prisoner in the centre of an armed camp' – an image that has both military and Old Testament connotations. At the key moment when Newland finally realizes that he is trapped (as his wife reveals that she is pregnant and he cannot leave her), Scorsese films May getting up from a chair 'in three cuts, three separate close-ups, because I thought he'd never forget that moment for the rest of his life' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 192).

Ricoeur asks the question: 'Do not the marriage rites, among others, aim to remove the universal impurity of sexuality by marking out an enclosure within which sexuality ceases to be a defilement, but threatens to become so again if the rules concerning times, places, and sexual behaviour are not observed?' (1967: 29). Newland begins to bend those very rules but does not ultimately break them. When Ellen expresses her thanks for his advice (not to pursue a divorce) she is briefly backlit and bathed in a heavenly glow. It becomes clear at the end that Newland has given up the woman whom he loved out of duty to his family, as Scorsese explains: 'Now whether he's passive earlier in the film or not, that's something else. But his decision – I admire it' (in Schickel 2013). Nicholls argues that 'the male melancholic appears at the end of his narrative as if in a state of grace, strangely beautiful in his self-sacrifice' (2004: xii).

Newland and Ellen do not consummate their love: 'That was the real reason I wanted to make the film – the idea of that passion which involved such restraint,' explained Scorsese (in Christie 2005: 216). Ellen asks Newland, 'Don't you see, I can't love you unless I give you up?' When the couple part in Boston, Scorsese ensured that they each appear to dissolve from the screen: 'There, it's that he never wants to take his eyes off her and she fades away. He puts his head down and he fades away, like his soul goes with her' (in Smith 1999b: 203). In the words of the narrator: 'Whenever he thought of Ellen Olenska, it had been abstractly, serenely, like an imaginary loved one in a book or picture. She had become the complete vision of all that he had missed.' It is an emotion with which Dante could identify.

Newland becomes 'a dutiful and loving father, and a faithful husband' and he mourned the death of his wife, who 'died thinking the world a good place, full of loving and harmonious households like her own'. When he is a widower, Newland travels to France and discovers that Ellen is living in Paris. More surprisingly to him, he learns that May had known the truth all along and realized that he had suffered. Newland's son reveals: 'Once, when she asked you to, you gave up the thing that you wanted most.' The narrator recounts that Newland is soothed by the knowledge that 'after all, someone had guessed and pitied. And that it should have been his wife moved him inexpressibly'.

However, he does not feel able to meet Ellen again, although the invitation is given, and he sits alone in the Parisian square outside her apartment and gazes up at her window. Scorsese uses cuts rather than pans in this scene because the latter movement of the camera would tie the two people together: 'They can't be together the way they were before. They'll always be together in their hearts. But one cannot ignore the complete separateness of the jump. It's got to be a brutal cut straight to the window' (in Smith 1999b: 214). Newland ponders on the moment when Ellen was standing on the pier and gazing out to sea, and when he had promised himself that he would go to her if she turned around before the sailboat passed the lighthouse. In reality, she never did. Now, in his fantasy, she turns to look at him in the glowing sunlight – it is a heavenly image.

The poet ends *Purgatorio* because of lack of space – a practical barrier with which Scorsese might sympathize, given the pressures on a director to bring in a film on time and under budget:

If, Reader, I possessed a longer space  
 For writing it, I yet would sing in part  
 Of the sweet draught that ne'er would satiate me;  
 But inasmuch as full are all the leaves  
 Made ready for this second canticle,  
 The curb of art no farther lets me go. (*Purg.* XXXIII)

However, Dante's decision to stop writing takes him on to *Paradiso*, in which optimism reigns. Thomas Merton proclaims that, in spite of sin, 'the human race can still recover, each time, and can still produce men and women who overcome evil with good, hatred with love, greed with charity, lust and cruelty with sanctity' (Merton 1998: 142). These themes have also been addressed by Scorsese in cinema, as the final section of this monograph will illustrate.



## Part Three

# Paradise (Lost or Found?)



## Encountering Jesus

The glory of Him who moveth everything  
 Doth penetrate the universe, and shine  
 In one part more and in another less. (*Par.* I)

Dante's *The Divine Comedy* has been described as an allegory of the journey towards God – and it is from that perspective of a pilgrim towards the Divine (rather than the Pilgrim's specific voyage through the heavenly spheres in the poem's *Paradiso*) that the last section of this book is written. The next three chapters focus, in particular, on the narratives in which Scorsese has explicitly engaged with theological issues and religious rites (most notably in relation to Christianity and Buddhism) and used cinema to support his view that 'God can't be only in the hands of the churches. There are so many obstacles in between us and the spirit' (in Kelly 1996: 179).

As Dante writes in the first person when he takes his readers into the Afterlife in *The Divine Comedy*, academics have long pondered over the question of life/art conflation between the poet and his Pilgrim. Film scholars have also made similar comments about Scorsese. David Sterritt, for example, maintains that 'Scorsese has worshiped at two altars throughout his adult life: the altar of Christianity and the altar of cinema' (2015: 109) and that *The Last Temptation of Christ* is as much about the director as it is about Jesus. In fact, organized religion and cinema have intersected in the director's life from the early days of his devout Catholicism, when he confessed to watching films that were condemned by the Legion of Decency: 'If you went to see a film on the C list it was a mortal sin: if you died after walking out of the theatre you went straight to hell. That was it. You go and see a Max Ophüls film and you're finished' (in Dougan 1997: 21–3). As a child, Scorsese's mother had taken him to see *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1946) that was once on the list of films condemned by the Legion of Decency. Having made *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese found himself on the other side of the argument when there was a call for a boycott (see



Keyser 1992: 186). Now Scorsese was the creative force behind a controversial film, rather than a guilt-stricken audience member.

Scorsese has recounted his awareness of Catholic images during his childhood: his grandmother 'had the portrait of the Sacred Heart. Also the niche with the statue of the Virgin Mary grinding the snake under her foot. Also, the beautiful, gigantic crucifix over the bed, with Jesus in brass and the palms from Palm Sunday draped over the crossbar' (in Keyser 1992: 7). *Who's That Knocking at My Door* was partly filmed in Scorsese's parents' apartment and he explains that 'the statuary in that bedroom is my mother's. That's real stuff that I grew up with in my house, especially the Madonna and Child. ... All the religious artifacts were as they were in the film; there was nothing extra-special put in. Especially the crucifixes over the beds – I think I had a little plastic one over mine' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 90). Religious references are detectable throughout Scorsese's filmography, from the first shot in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*. (**Figure 7.1**) The statue of the Madonna and Child shares the space with Catherine Scorsese, who is making a pork-filled calzone that is traditionally served on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a fact that she reveals in her Italian Cookbook (Scorsese 1996: 130). The holy image and accompanying votive candle are combined with the reflection in the mirror of the woman baking food for her family, so that there is 'a doubling of the maternal figures, one secular, one sacred' (Casillo 2006: 148). In the film *Italianamerican* Mrs Scorsese even has her own anecdote about



**Figure 7.1** Earthly and heavenly mothers in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*: the first shot that sets the tone.

a fig tree with its obvious biblical allusion (Mk 11.12-14), when she recounts how her own mother cursed the family fig trees after her father had a deadly fall while tending them. When her mother died soon afterwards, the fig trees did not blossom again: 'It was as if she took them with her.'

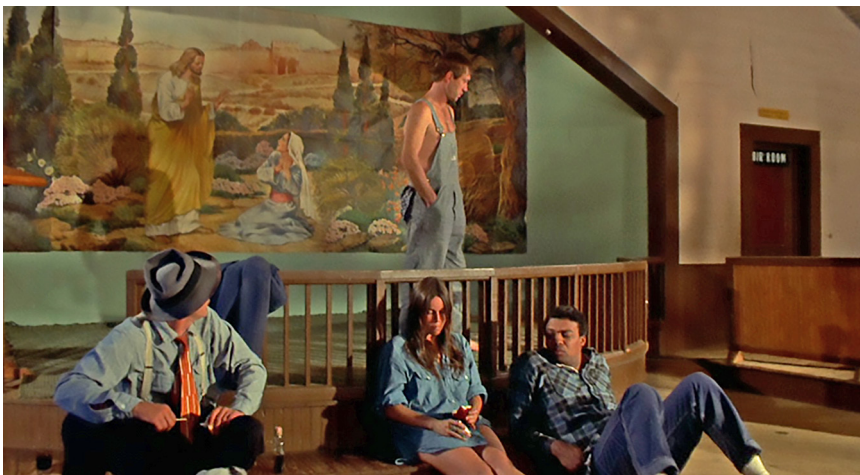
In *GoodFellas* there is a picture of the Madonna and Child on the wall looking down over the dodgy dealings, reminding the audience of the Catholic background of the crooks. When Henry meets Karen's Jewish parents he explains that he has to hide the gold cross that he wears around his neck – although it is not as large as the one that Karen describes in Pileggi's book *Wiseguy*: 'I mean it was hanging round his neck. It was from his neck to his rib cage' (in Pileggi 1985: 86). When Karen's mother questions Henry on his religion ('My daughter says you're half Jewish'), Henry is ready with a diplomatic reply: 'Just the good half.' Henry wears a yarmulke at his Jewish wedding ceremony, but the chief focus is on the reception with Henry's friends, where the family members of Paulie are called Peter or Paul, and they are all married to women called Marie, with daughters who are also called Marie. However, the Catholic bond is not sufficient. The fact that Henry and Jimmy have Irish blood means that they cannot be 'made', as it is necessary to be 100 per cent Italian so that relatives can be traced back to the Old Country. Several of the guests at the wedding have been killed by the end of the film.

Once explaining that he had 'always wanted to make a film about Jesus', Scorsese said: 'I don't know anymore what came first, the movies or religion' (in Wilson 2011: 146). In *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* the retreatants are called to say the Stations of the Cross at an outdoor shrine that offers a view of a small valley – the kind of countryside vista that Scorsese will film in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* when J.R. and his friends climb a hill. According to the treatment, the boys kneel on the uneven ground and sing the 'Stabat Mater' after each station, and their prayers are accompanied by slow-motion flashbacks of a twentieth-century Jesus, who is wearing a crown of barbed wire and carrying a log through the streets of New York. Rather than being accompanied by Roman soldiers, Jesus is led to his death by a police car with a flashing light. The watching crowd abuse him and throw bottles at him; and his own mother, weeping and dressed in black, watches him pass by. When he reaches the docks, he is crucified with the Empire State Building in the background. Interestingly, Scorsese's idea for a contemporary retelling of the New Testament found an outlet later in *Godspell* (David Greene 1973), *Jesus of Montreal* (Denys Arcand 1989) and *Son of Man* (Mark Dornford-May 2006). It is clear that the youthful Scorsese had a viable creative notion for how to update the biblical narrative, despite the fact that he

thought the moment had passed for an onscreen retelling of the story when he saw Pasolini's *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (1964).

The first crucifixion scene that Scorsese actually filmed was in the original script for *Boxcar Bertha* that Scorsese was given, rather than being the director's own idea for a religious-themed conclusion. Indeed, the Corman exploitation vehicle has its fair share of biblical allusions even before the violent ending. Bill uses religious vocabulary ('It is appointed each man to die ... till judgement'); and he plays a 'saviour' role for his Union colleagues until he is captured, beaten and nailed to the side of a train wagon in a mock-up of the biblical crucifixion scene, with a playing card (the Ace of Hearts) replacing the INRI sign. Bertha takes up her position at the 'foot of his cross' in the Magdalene role.

When Bill and Bertha earlier take refuge in a church called 'Nazarene', there is a mural on the wall that represents Mary Magdalene meeting the resurrected Jesus – an image that Scorsese apparently 'accidentally' discovered while shooting in Arkansas (Lourdeaux 1990: 239). (**Figure 7.2**) The painting serves as a poignant backdrop, for it underlines the importance of Magdalene in the New Testament as a follower of Jesus, the first witness to the Resurrection and 'the apostle to the apostles'. It is a reminder of her true status in the Gospels rather than the conflation of several biblical characters attributed to Pope Gregory the Great, and one that Scorsese (along with many directors of New Testament films) continued to disseminate. Magdalene is the woman 'from whom seven demons had gone out' (Lk. 8.2), but she is not the woman caught in adultery or



**Figure 7.2** Confused identities in *Boxcar Bertha*.

the penitent whore – the role that Barbara Hershey plays in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In particular, the mural illustrates the scene in St John's Gospel when Magdalene initially fails to recognize Jesus and mistakes him for the gardener (Jn 20.11-18). The identity of Jesus will be a pertinent question throughout Scorsese's career, leading up to *Silence*; and the words of Jesus to Magdalene in the Gospel passage ('Noli me tangere') are an indication of the status of the human and divine Saviour that Dante also addresses in *The Divine Comedy*:

There sang they neither Bacchus, nor Apollo,  
But in the divine nature Persons three,  
And in one person the divine and human. (*Par. XIII*)

In traditional New Testament epics, Magdalene weeps at Calvary but experiences the joy of the resurrection when she goes to the empty tomb. In *Boxcar Bertha*, the relationship between the condemned man named Bill and his female follower remains unresolved: Bertha is left behind when the train pulls away and her pleas ('Don't take him! Stop it!') are powerless. However, if Scorsese shot the crucifixion scene in order to 'get it out of [his] system' (in Kelly 1980: 20), he was clearly unsuccessful, as the desire to make a film about Jesus himself became part of the obsession 'to get to know Jesus better' (in Schickel 2013).

Talking about reactions to *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese said, 'Well, he's everybody's God, and people approach God differently' (in Greene 2005: 236), although he claims that he did not set out to be controversial: 'We're not looking to do a *Hail Mary* like Jean-Luc Godard or any of that stuff. We're looking to make a film that will make people think, that will make people begin to see that maybe the best philosophy is the way Gandhi took it and to give people something to hope for' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101). He especially liked the idea of Jesus who had 'the guts to hang around with the outcasts' (Lourdeaux 1990: 240); and, following on from his ideas in the *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* treatment, he has argued that 'Jesus, if he were here, would be on Eighth Avenue with the prostitutes and crack dealers' (in Lally 2005: 167). Reflecting on his difficulties with the Catholic Church ('For instance, it was a sin to eat meat on Friday, and then, suddenly, after a thousand years, it was no longer a sin'), Scorsese claimed, 'Where I think the Church has failed over the years is that they have never gotten across to people the actual concept that Jesus taught in day-by-day living' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 96). While he has talked enthusiastically about memorable scenes in Old Testament films, he has also explained, 'To me, it's important to study the Bible because it permeates everything around us, literature, painting, music, and so on, but ultimately the New Testament is the real challenge, because it shows us the steps we need to take

as a species' (in Wilson 2011: 292). In advocating this approach, Scorsese was also forming a link with the author of *The Divine Comedy* who believed that the Church 'is shaped solely by the form of Christ' (Balthasar 1986: 21).

Scorsese relates that he first heard of the controversial novel *The Last Temptation* (1955) by the Cretan writer Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) through a Greek friend named John Mabros from New York University, but it was Barbara Hershey who encouraged him to read the book when they were making *Boxcar Bertha*. Hershey had to wait until 1988 before she was able to fulfil her own ambition to play Magdalene as interpreted by Kazantzakis. Indeed, the film opens with the caveat that it 'is not based upon the Gospels but upon [Kazantzakis's] fictional exploration of the eternal spiritual conflict'.

Patroclus Stavrou, the literary executor for the estate of Kazantzakis, was impressed by Scorsese's 'great sense of consciousness and responsibility about the task to be undertaken. I saw also in him a sense of absolute honesty, a very honest approach to the book, to the spirit of the book, and even, I would say, to the deity of Christ as such, as it is described by Kazantzakis' (in Kelly 1996: 163–4). When the novel was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books, Kazantzakis suffered in the face of the condemnation he received from the Catholic Church for a book that he 'wrote in a state of deep religious exaltation, with fervent love for Christ' (in Kelly 1996: 166). Likewise, faced with censure even before making the film, Scorsese also expressed the sincerity of his aims and the difficulties that he experienced in an 'attempt to use the screen as a pulpit in a way, to get the message out about practicing the basic concepts of Christianity: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101).

*The Last Temptation of Christ* had a modest budget, providing a connection with the Italian Neo-realist film of Pasolini that Scorsese had so admired. The Sermon on the Mount has a very limited crowd (although the Bible evidently records that Jesus addressed gatherings of 5000, not to mention women and children). As the director did not have access to a crane (just a jib arm), there was a height limit of seven feet for high angles; and the same Moroccan village (Oumnast) is used to represent different locations. As a result, there is none of the grandeur of the famous biblical epics such as *King of Kings* (Ray 1961) and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (Stevens 1965), and Barbara Hershey described the shoot as 'like a crusade' (in Keyser 1992: 168). Scorsese wanted a soundtrack that was ancient and contemporary, and Peter Gabriel combined indigenous music and some modern Moroccan tunes, with drums to represent the flesh, and ethereal sounds to evoke spirituality.

One cause for comment in reviews of the film was the use of language – a criticism that Dante himself faced when he wrote *The Divine Comedy* in Italian rather than Latin. In his treatise entitled *On Vernacular Eloquence*, Dante defends the idea of ‘using the common spoken language of men, women, and children – rather than the learned language of Latin – to write the greatest of literary works’ (Royal 1999: 26). Discussing his screenplay for *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Paul Schrader explained, ‘Unless you have them speaking in ancient Aramaic with subtitles, whoever stands behind the camera is going to be doing his “wrong” idea of the dialogue of the time’ (in Corliss 1999: 116) – a view that Mel Gibson apparently took on board by shooting *The Passion of the Christ* in Aramaic and Latin. As Terry Jones points out when discussing *The Life of Brian* (1979), the characters in biblical films traditionally speak in very portentous tones as if they were aware that they were living during an era when something very wonderful was happening, rather than as ordinary folk going about their daily lives (DVD extra). Scorsese himself wanted the dialogue in his film to be plainer and more contemporary, with the apostles speaking in their own North American accents (with the British accent restricted to Satan and the Romans in their ‘bad guy’ roles). The conversational and colloquial manner was intended to achieve a sense of immediacy.

*The Last Temptation of Christ* contemplates humanity, divinity, sin and salvation – as does *The Divine Comedy*. However, while Dante’s poem is praised for its ‘extraordinary spiritual power’ (Barron 2015), fierce reactions to Scorsese’s film as part of the ‘culture wars’ have been long debated and documented (see, for example, Riley 2003; Middleton 2005; and Lindlof 2008) and its heretical elements have been identified (see Baugh 1997; and Greydanus 2001). Indeed, references to Hell and the devil are prevalent in the words of the film’s opponents. The chairman of Gulf and Western, the parent company of Paramount that was originally going to produce the film, received a letter which condemned the project as ‘straight from the pit of hell. We may as well destroy our country with the nuclear bomb as show this film’ (in Jenkins 2005: 163); and Mother Angelica of the Catholic television station EWTN described it as ‘the most blasphemous, the most disrespectful, the most Satanic movie ever filmed’ (in Lally 2005: 166). According to these negative assessments, Scorsese himself would have been placed in Dante’s *Inferno* with the heretics:

Violence can be done the Deity,  
 In heart denying and blaspheming Him,  
 And by disdainng Nature and her bounty. (*Inf.* XI)



Yet, in interviews, Scorsese has striven to explain his sincere reasons for making *The Last Temptation of Christ* and his representation of Jesus: 'He's God. He's not deluded. I think Kazantzakis thought that, I think the movie says that, and I know I believe that' (in Corliss 1999: 115).

In particular, Scorsese 'was interested in developing to the ultimate a crucial, astonishing concept: the word that is made flesh' (in Monda 2007: 159) – an expression of wonderment in the Incarnation that Dante also makes in *The Divine Comedy*:

More the desire should be enkindled in us  
That essence to behold, wherein is seen  
How God and our own nature were united.  
There will be seen what we receive by faith,  
Not demonstrated, but self-evident  
In guise of the first truth that man believes. (*Par.* II)

The question of the humanity and divinity of Jesus is a theme that Dante embraces in *Paradiso*, in which the mythical Gryphon 'represents the theological concept of Christ, the mystery of the divine and human nature in one' (Reynolds 2006: 311). The Pilgrim meets the Roman emperor Justinian, who had once rejected Christ's humanity in favour of his divinity but came to change his mind:

Caesar I was, and am Justinian,  
Who, by the will of primal Love I feel,  
Took from the laws the useless and redundant;  
And ere unto the work I was attent,  
One nature to exist in Christ, not more,  
Believed, and with such faith was I contented.  
But blessed Agapetus, he who was  
The supreme pastor, to the faith sincere  
Pointed me out the way by words of his.  
Him I believed, and what was his assertion  
I now see clearly, even as thou seest  
Each contradiction to be false and true. (*Par.* VI)

Justinian's uncertainty over the true identity of Jesus touches on theological questions that are at the heart of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Was Jesus's human knowledge 'very extensive or somewhat limited? Did it include the fact that he was the Jewish Messiah or that he was divine?' (Gaine 2015: 3). In Scorsese's film,

Judas confesses, 'I thought maybe you were the One,' but Jesus is initially unable to confirm or deny his status.

In an early scene, Mary (Verna Bloom) sees her son tormented by dreams and wrestling with his confusion over God's love for him, and she grasps his convulsing body and strokes his hair, asking the question: 'Are you sure it's God? Are you sure it's not the devil?' (a theme that will come to the fore in the discussion of Rodrigues's actions in *Silence* when he believes that he hears from God before his act of apostasy). Notably, the one occasion that Mary offers public encouragement is when she comes to the defence of her son when the crowd abuse him for helping the Romans. Interestingly (given that Scorsese did not read Endo's novel *Silence* until after making *The Last Temptation of Christ*), it is on this occasion that Magdalene spits in the face of Jesus so that he becomes a living *fumi-e* when he carries out a cross for the crucifixion of a Jewish man. Fujimura (2016) describes *The Last Temptation of Christ* itself as 'a fumi-e-like litmus test to force people to choose sides'.

In approaching the issue of Jesus's identity on screen, a key factor is the choice of actor for the role – a topic that Scorsese addresses himself in the first meeting between J.R. and the Girl in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* when New Testament films come into the conversation. The young couple discuss the fact that one of the actors who appears in *The Searchers* had also once played Jesus. 'Was he Swedish?' asks the Girl, evidently thinking of Max von Sydow in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. However, J.R. is talking about Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings* – a film that Scorsese himself has analysed, praising the Sermon on the Mount as a modern-day press conference (in Baugh 1997: 21) but criticizing the crucifixion scene: 'Jeffrey Hunter ... doesn't look as if he's suffering at all and you don't feel it' (in Telford 1997: 134).

The representation of Christ is also at the heart of Endo's novel, *Silence*, in which Rodrigues explains that he was intrigued by the face of Jesus 'because the Scriptures make no mention of it. Precisely because it is not mentioned, all its details are left to my imagination' (Endo 1969: 44). When he contemplates Jesus, Rodrigues thinks of a face 'resplendent with the authority of a king' and 'filled with vigor and strength' (Endo 1969: 22). In the film adaptation there is an overhead shot of Rodrigues, lying on his bed with his eyes open as he muses on the image of Christ: 'He looks as he must have when he commanded Peter, "Feed my lambs. Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep."' Notably, he is remembering the post-Resurrection meeting on the shores of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus tells Peter to look after his flock three times – these are the three requests to



the apostle to compensate for the three acts of betrayal on the night before the crucifixion (Jn 21.15-17). At this point, Rodrigues has no notion that he will one day publicly disown Christ himself.

When filming *Silence*, Scorsese selected a painting by El Greco, 'St Veronica holding the veil' (1580), to illustrate the vision of Jesus that fascinates Rodrigues ('I feel such great love for it,' he says) before he is fully tested. There is an insert shot of the veil at the centre of the painting, bearing the image of Jesus wearing the crown of thorns, with the drops of blood upon his forehead – an interesting choice, as Veronica's veil could be regarded as one of the first sacred 'media' images. There is a great sense of stillness as the eyes of Jesus gaze out into the audience.

Aidan Quinn would have played the part of Jesus if *The Last Temptation of Christ* had gone ahead in 1983 with Paramount, who pulled out in the wake of public protests. When the project was revived with Universal in 1988, Scorsese cast Willem Dafoe. On the one hand, Dafoe is white and bears a resemblance to the traditional Western image of Jesus (as previously represented on screen by Max von Sydow or Jeffrey Hunter), but Scorsese was impressed by the physical and spiritual qualities that the actor manifested in *Platoon* (Stone 1986). Dafoe saw the film as a spiritual exercise, making a connection between his art and spiritual need (DVD commentary), just as Andrew Garfield took the correlation between art and spirituality even further by going through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises when he was preparing for his role as a Jesuit priest in *Silence*.

The narrative pays attention to the suffering of Jesus in the face of execution – a theme that will also be played out in *Silence* when the Christians are asked to sacrifice their lives for their faith. The notable contrast is that Kazantzakis's/Scorsese's Jesus is plagued with doubt from the beginning, whereas, in *Silence*, Rodrigues initially expresses complete confidence in his readiness to die for the Cause. As he tells his fellow Jesuit, 'We asked for this mission, Francisco. We prayed for this in the Exercises. God heard us then and he hears us now.'

In *Did the Saviour See the Father?* Simon Gainé asks whether Jesus was 'blessed from the very first moment of the incarnation with the vision of the essence of the triune God in his human mind?' (2015: 3), pointing out that Catholic theologians up until the late 1950s believed that Jesus did have this vision, following the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas. Then the perspective changed: In 1961 Karl Rahner argued that such a view seemed 'to be contrary to the real humanity and historical nature of Our Lord' (in Gainé 2015: 4) and this stance overtook the Thomist teaching in the post-conciliar age. Hans Urs von

Balthasar was of the opinion 'that to introduce the beatific vision into Christ's soul would render it no longer a credible human soul' (Gaine 2015: 129). The New Testament passage that Jesus 'grew and became strong, filled with wisdom' (Lk. 2.40) indicates that there was an acquiring of knowledge.

Following Kazantzakis, Scorsese engages with this very issue as he portrays the developing relationship between Jesus and God the Father in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The film begins with an eye of God shot (as if a bird is flying over the trees, with its evocation of the Holy Spirit) and the audience sees Jesus lying on the ground, united to the earth. Scorsese wanted the film to be visceral and passionate – not with a holy gloss – and the brown and ochre colour scheme visually underpins the humanity of Jesus. As Jesus sets out from home, there is a focus on the landscape, with the magnificent mountains in the background and the lake forming part of the wonder of Creation. However, Jesus speaks of God sometimes as a wild bird digging his claws into his head; but at other times as a cool breeze. There is the sound of footsteps behind Jesus although no one is visible – he is contentiously being pursued by God the Father, as if God were the antagonist.

The fact that Jesus might ever have fallen in love has been a rare topic in New Testament films, despite the fact that such an event would be a very human response. In *Jesus* (Roger Young 1999), there is an evident attraction between Jesus and Mary, the sister of Martha, until the young woman accepts that her childhood friend has a particular mission to fulfil. However, in his desire to represent the full humanity of Jesus, Scorsese goes controversially further by paying great attention to sex and the female body as a site of temptation, with a particular aim to show the effect of Jesus surrounded by sin. Andrew Greeley points out that 'sexual desire is not in itself sinful, and one excludes it from the experiences of Jesus only by denying Him a full human nature' (2000: 73). Nevertheless, Scorsese exceeds Kazantzakis's approach in the scene in which Jesus calls at the house of Magdalene and joins the back of a queue of a group of men who are paying to enjoy the prostitute's services. More problematically, the *mise en scène* allows the customers to watch the sexual acts while they wait – an additional dimension to the transaction that broadens the event from fornication to pornography and was not an element in the original novel. The fact that the clients must be aware that they will shortly be 'on view' themselves, which may not traditionally be part of the bargain, does not appear to be a cause for concern.

Scorsese discussed his decision to arrange the scene in this way: 'And I wanted to show the barbarism of the time, the degradation to [Magdalene]. It's better

that the door is open. Better there is no door. The scene isn't done for titillation; it's to show the pain on her face, the compassion Jesus has for her as he fights his sexual desire for her' (in Corliss 1999: 121). As becomes evident, it is the idea of the proximity of sin that interested Scorsese, and the question of how Jesus, as a man, dealt with his sexuality.

During the 'Temptation in the desert' scene, there is simplicity for the representation of the devil with the snake, lion and flame (voiced by Barbara Hershey, Harvey Keitel and Scorsese/Leo Marks, respectively), with the first manifestations evoking the dangers that will be overcome according to Ps. 91.11-13:

For God commands the angels  
to guard you in all your ways.  
With their hands they shall support you,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.  
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper,  
trample the lion and the dragon.

Writing about the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden, Ricoeur suggests that it 'would be a sort of seduction from without; it would develop into compliance with the apparition that lays siege to the "heart"; and, finally, to sin would be to *yield*. The serpent, then would be a part of ourselves which we do not recognize; he would be the seduction of ourselves by ourselves, projected into the seductive object' (Ricoeur 1967: 256). By choosing the voice of Hershey/Magdalene for the snake, Scorsese evidently underlines this seductive theme and links temptation to sex – a temptation to which the schoolboy J.R. in *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* could certainly relate.

Scorsese explained his reaction to the novel: 'The beauty of Kazantzakis' concept is that Jesus has to put up with everything we go through, all the doubts and fears and anger. He made me *feel* like he's sinning – but he's not sinning, he's just human' (in Corliss 1999: 115). Indeed, it is clear that Scorsese is 'searching for the divine in a world beset by temptations' (Morris 2005: 174) with a (quite laudable) desire to develop a relationship with Jesus who is fully human and, therefore, to make Jesus more accessible to the director himself and his audience.

However, the Council of Chalcedon proclaimed 'that Christ in his humanity is "like us in all things except sin"' (Gaine 2015: 144) and, as a result, 'it is theologically unacceptable to portray Christ as a sinner, even in his human weakness' (Morris 2005: 172). In *The Last Temptation of Christ* (drawing on Kazantzakis's novel), Jesus claims, 'Lucifer is inside me.' As Steven Greidanus

(2001) stresses in his article on *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a Jesus ‘who even *thinks* that he commits sins’ and ‘who talks a great deal about needing “forgiveness”’ goes well beyond Paul Schrader’s argument that the screenplay offers ‘a healthy counterbalance’ to the films that focus on the divinity of Jesus. The representation clearly emphasizes the humanity of the Saviour while failing to demonstrate that Jesus is ‘consubstantial with the Father’ as stated in the Nicene Creed.

At times, Jesus has confidence that he is on the right path: ‘I’ll open my mouth and God will do the talking,’ he claims. When Magdalene is about to be stoned by an angry crowd (a scene which conflates her character with ‘the woman who had been caught in adultery’ (Jn 8.3-11)), Jesus defends her (‘I don’t want this’) in the face of the people’s derision. During a discussion about *Raging Bull*, Michael Henry asks: ‘Isn’t that one of the meanings of the parable of the Pharisees? Who are you to cast the first stone? Who are you to condemn her? It’s up to the spectator to decide, in his soul and conscience, like at the end of *Taxi Driver* or *American Boy*: is this man a criminal or a brother?’ (1999: 90). In asking which one of the bystanders has never sinned, Jesus’s words have the desired effect in diffusing the anger and he raises Magdalene to her feet. Zebedee’s sons are impressed and want to follow Jesus, as does Peter – a life choice addressed by the Pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy*: ‘Truly he nothing asked but “Follow me”’ (*Inf.* XIX).

In a subsequent scene, Jesus kneels down and wipes the feet of Magdalene in a reversal of the traditional role in which she is conflated with Mary of Bethany (Jn 12.3). As Jesus washes his disciples’ feet on the night before his crucifixion in the Gospel of John, this action might appear to elevate Magdalene to discipleship status, yet it is also a sign of Christian love for everyone. In the New Testament, Jesus says, ‘If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do’ (Jn 13.14-15). In *Silence*, Garupe follows this commandment when he bathes the bleeding feet of a villager who has travelled from Goto to find the priests.

Jesus is presented as a type of itinerant preacher and he smiles and initially seems more confident in his message: ‘Come closer. We’re all a family,’ he encourages the crowd, with Judas and Magdalene in a front-row position. Unfortunately, the people sometimes misunderstand his teachings in a way that is later evoked in *Silence* when Ferreira tries to convince Rodrigues that the Japanese villagers never really understood the Christian doctrine. Ferreira claims that Francis Xavier had mistranslated the ‘Son of God’ as the ‘Sun’ of God and sown confusion. Indeed, there is historical confirmation that there were

some language issues when the Catholic missionaries reached Japan. A Japanese convert named Yajirō, who worked as an interpreter for Francis Xavier, translated 'Deus' as 'Dainichi' (Buddha Mahavairocana, the supreme deity of the Shingon sect) and the mistake was not rectified until 1551 (see Whelan 1996: 4–5).

When Fr Garupe baptizes a child in *Silence*, the mother of the infant asks, 'We now [are] all with God, in Paraiso?' Garupe is frustrated by the parents' lack of understanding, trying to explain that they are not yet in Heaven: 'But God is there now, and forever. He prepares a place for us all, even now.' The Japanese couple bow their heads humbly, but in some confusion. Rodrigues later comments to Garupe that 'the child is safe in the grace of God now, and that is what is important'. However, when Garupe expresses regret at his impatience, Rodrigues calls him 'a bad Jesuit' with a smile.

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus discovers that his parable of the sower is not understood – a fact that has a biblical foundation, given that his own disciples ask to have the meaning explained in the Gospel (Mk 4.10; Lk. 8.9). Jesus's message is 'Love. Love one another,' but the antagonists in the crowd point out, 'These people are starving. First you feed them, then you talk.' When Jesus gives his own Sermon on the Mount ('You'll all be blessed because Heaven is yours. . . . And the rich will be poor forever!'), his words have the wrong effect by inflaming the people with thoughts of violence against the rich – a theme that is found in *Boxcar Bertha* as well. 'I didn't say "death". I said "love,"' he cries. It seems unlikely that Christianity would have flourished if the leader were so lacking in assurance. In fact, Judas is more impressed by the religious ecstasy at the 'wild revivalist meeting' led by John the Baptist, rather than by Jesus's quieter expressions of love – perhaps a comment on the popularity of contemporary evangelism.

Interestingly, when Jesus asks John the Baptist for confirmation of his purpose, the noise of the music and the crowd are cut out as John and Jesus seek to know the will of God the Father, and only the sound of the flowing water remains. It is as if the voice of God has to be sought through the cacophony of noise that surrounds them – a theme that will evidently be addressed in *Silence* some twenty-eight years later. When Jesus is baptized, all the ambient musical sounds return. Later, Judas is watching from above as Jesus asks John, 'Isn't love enough?' John replies that the tree is rotten and must be cut down with an axe, with talk of an angry God and Sodom and Gomorrah.

When Jesus returns from the desert temptation scene, he tells his apostles that he is going to baptize with fire: 'I'm not inviting you to a celebration. I'm inviting you to a war.' At these words he reaches inside his chest and literally pulls out his heart: 'This is my heart. Take it. God is inside of us. The devil is outside us in

the world all around us.' Schrader claims that he added the heart scene (it is not in Kazantzakis's novel) as a sign of the miraculous; whereas Scorsese sees it as a sign of the supernatural. There is evidently a visual link to the popular Catholic image of the Sacred Heart – one of the paintings on the wall in Jake La Motta's home in *Raging Bull* – but here the image is gruesome. Pope Pius XII took the theme of the beatific vision in the encyclical letter *Haurietis Aquas*, in which he 'taught that this Heart is a symbol of the love that was infused into Christ's soul and directs its acts in the light of his most perfect knowledge, which included a "blessed" knowledge' (Gaine 2015: 8). However, in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the blood from Jesus's heart drips into the water; and when he holds up the axe, the impression is warlike rather than loving. Yet, despite these aggressive signs, Jesus continues to spread a message of love and restoration. The healing miracles that take place throughout the Gospels are brought together in one scene, including the cure of a blind man whom Judas leads through the crowd to point out the proof of Jesus's powers.

At the wedding in Cana in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus draws on the paradisiacal imagery that Dante presented in *Paradiso* of a 'wedding feast' (*Par.* XXX). When Magdalene is initially refused entry to the celebration, Jesus responds, 'Heaven is like a wedding. And everyone's invited.' He laughs and dances, showing enjoyment in life. However, while Judas is among the guests, Mary is notably absent, given that she plays a key role in the Cana miracle according to the Gospel of John. Dante memorably honours the Virgin Mary in *Paradiso*:

Look now into the face that unto Christ  
Hath most resemblance; for its brightness only  
Is able to prepare thee to see Christ. (*Par.* XXXII)

But Mary's words in the New Testament ('Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2.5)) clearly do not fit with her representation in Scorsese's film as she also appears beset by doubts. As a result, the miracle of transforming the water into wine at the wedding appears more like a magic trick rather than the first miracle in the Gospel of John. In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Mary offers an example of a woman who does not understand her son's mission. When Jesus invites the villagers of Nazareth onto his 'ark', the people laugh at him and threaten him, and Judas tries to drag him away. Jesus says, 'I don't have a mother. I don't have any family. I have a father in heaven.' He kisses Mary and she sobs.

At the raising of Lazarus, it is notable that Judas and Peter – the two men who will betray Jesus in different ways – help to move away the stone at the moment

that he offers the most obvious proof of his Saviour status. Scorsese did not want the scene to have the aura of a Hammer Horror film, although he emphasizes the smell of rotting flesh. There is the shadow of Lazarus's hand over the heart of Jesus as he realizes that he has performed the miracle, yet there is also the fear of death as he is nearly pulled into the tomb. Ebert notes that the tomb 'is black inside, contrasted with the blinding sun, and then blacker and blacker until the whole screen is filled with blackness, and held for a few seconds. I take this as an emblem of Jesus's experience of his miracles, during which he is reaching into an unknowable and frightening void' (2008: 102).

However, Jesus reveals to Judas 'a terrible secret' that he has received from God. It will explain why he has come to Jerusalem – and it is not for 'the revolution' that Judas desires. Jesus recounts that Isaiah (inconspicuously played by Scorsese in heavy robes) came to him to point out his own prophecy: 'He has borne our faults. He was wounded for our transgressions. Yet he opened not his mouth. Despised and rejected by all he went forward without resisting, like a lamb led to the slaughter.' It is a biblical passage that is particularly significant for the representation of Jesus in *Silence*.

Judas smiles awkwardly in incomprehension before Jesus explains to him: 'I am the lamb. I'm the one who's going to die.' These words confuse Judas, who does not understand why the Messiah would have to perish for the cause: 'Every day you have a different plan. First it's love, then it's the axe, and now you have to die. What good could that do?' Jesus tries to clarify his position: 'I can't help it. God only talks to me a little at a time. He only tells me as much as I need to know' – a direct comment on the treatment of the beatific vision in the film. In the face of Judas's protests, Jesus continues, 'Now I finally understand. All my life, all my life I've been followed by voices, by footsteps, by shadows. And do you know what the shadow is? The cross. I have to die on the cross and I have to die willingly.' When he goes on to proclaim that he will return after the crucifixion 'to judge the living and the dead', Judas refuses to believe him – a stance that will lead to his position in Dante's *Inferno*.

The apostles walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, with Judas still near the front of the procession despite his confusion over the mission. The other apostles talk about their hopes: one wants more sheep, another wants to worship in the Temple without the Roman presence and Thomas admits that he is a coward: 'Have you ever seen anybody hanging on a cross after two days? ... They don't even have eyes. The crows come and suck out your eyes' – a fact that Mel Gibson represented in *The Passion of the Christ*. In *Silence*, Scorsese will depict the Japanese dying



in agony on crosses, with one of the Christians lingering for four days. Schrader maintains the Temple was awash with the blood of animal sacrifices during the time of Jesus, and this gory image is certainly emphasized in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Jesus overturns the stalls in the Temple, praying, 'Lord, I hope this is what you want. Let me die here. Please let it happen fast while I have the strength.' Rodrigues will utter a similar plea in *Silence*, as uncertainty and weakness replace his former pride.

With Peter and Judas by his side, Jesus states that he is 'here to set fire to the world' and continues to stir the crowd: 'I'm here! And I'm going to baptize everybody. With fire!' At this point, people hold up flaming torches and Judas leads the cheering. Despite the appearance of the guards, Peter is also enthusiastic ('He's leading us. Follow him!'); and Judas asks Jesus for a signal: 'Give it, now!' Yet Jesus (speaking to himself) is still unresolved: 'Please. I'm waiting, too. Give me an axe. Not the cross. Let me die like this.' His hands begin to bleed as if from wounds – stigmata – and he asks Judas for help. When they move away from the crowd, Judas puts his hand on Jesus's forehead as if to test the temperature of a sick man. 'I wish there was another way. I'm sorry but there isn't. I have to die on the cross,' says Jesus, and he goes on to explain that it is the way to bring 'God and man together. They'll never be together unless I die. I'm the sacrifice. Without you there can be no redemption. Forget everything else. Understand that.'

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese does not adopt the long table layout seen at the Last Supper in the famous Da Vinci painting that appears as part of the mise en scène in *GoodFellas*. Instead, Peter and John sit on either side of Jesus; and Judas, who is next to Peter, is present for the breaking of bread, which is the institution of the Eucharist. Most strikingly, there are four women present at the table: Mary, Magdalene and the two sisters of Lazarus: 'The women could not have been sent to the kitchen by Jesus. Not the Jesus we love!' claims Scorsese (in Wilson 2011: 154). Although Mary does not attend the wedding at Cana, she now gives to her son the wine with which he will perform an even more important miracle: 'The Lord's Supper provides a narrative and metaphorical journey into any experience of brokenness. ... Yet at that same time Christ, by instituting the Lord's Supper, promises healing. This profound mystery is played out every time the rite is enacted' (Fujimura 2016).

When Judas gets up to leave, Peter calls out to him: 'We're not finished.' As Jesus restrains Peter and says, 'Let him go,' this moment fulfils the 'What you are going to do, do quickly' command (Jn 13.27) that intrigues Rodrigues in *Silence*



and which might indicate that Jesus is 'complicit' in the deed or resigned (see Stanford 2015: 55). Jesus continues, 'All of you ... I want to tell you something.' However, the audience does not hear the farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, which contains great words of comfort.

There is a shift of focus to the Gethsemane scene in which Jesus goes forward alone and kneels on the rocky ground and prays, 'Father in heaven, Father on earth, the world that you've created, that we can see, is beautiful. But the world that you've created that we can't see is beautiful, too.' He picks up a handful of gravel and says, 'This is my body, too. Together we're going to die.' Clasping his hands in prayer and terror, he cries:

Oh please, Father, I've been with you for so long. I never asked you to choose me. ... You opened the Red Sea for Moses. You saved Noah. You took Elijah to Heaven in a fiery chariot. Now you're asking me to be crucified. Now I ask for the last time: Do I have to die? Is there any other way? You're offering me a cup and I don't want to drink what's in it. Please. Take it away. Please stop. Please, Father, Father. Please.

When Rodrigues is undergoing torment in *Silence*, it is Jesus's suffering in Gethsemane that he remembers. Alongside Mel Gibson in *The Passion of the Christ*, Scorsese offers one of cinema's most searing filmic visualizations of this episode in the Passion narrative, as it shows the reality of the sacrifice for Jesus as a human being who suffers physical pain. (Figure 7.3) However, in *The Last Temptation of Christ* there is no response from above but a shot of the sky through the olive trees. Then there is a breeze on the face of Jesus – a breeze being a frequent filmic representation of the Holy Spirit.



**Figure 7.3** The agony in the Garden in *The Last Temptation of Christ*: humanity and divinity in conflict.

John is lying on the ground asleep but he suddenly appears to be standing next to Jesus in the role of the angel who comes to strengthen him (Lk. 22.43). In the New Testament, Jesus once asked James and John: 'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' (Mt. 20.22), and this appears to be an answer: John drinks from a cup and then hands it to Jesus. 'All right. Just please give me the strength,' says Jesus. He then reproves the three apostles for falling asleep. At that point the guards arrive, led by Judas, who greets Jesus with a kiss on the lips and an embrace. When Peter cuts off the ear of one of the guards, Jesus remonstrates with him ('No, you live by this, you die by it') and the knife falls to the ground. As Jesus miraculously heals the wounded soldier, Judas looks straight at him, as it is a clear sign of the divine power of the man he has now betrayed. Jesus does not resist and says, 'Take me with you. I'm ready.'

As Rodrigues is a prisoner in *Silence*, he contemplates the night that Jesus was arrested. In the novel, Endo writes: 'To calm his anguished trembling that night the priest thought earnestly about a man who had been dragged from the Garden of Gethsemane to the palace of Caiaphas' (Endo 1969: 79). When he is forced to squat in the courtyard he thinks of Jesus's agony: 'Reflecting earnestly on how Christ must have looked at the time of the scourging he endeavoured to distract his mind from the pain in his knees' (Endo 1969: 107). In his cell he ponders again on Gethsemane: 'This was the face that was now before his eyes. Hundreds and hundreds of times it had appeared in his dreams; but why was it that only now did the suffering, perspiring face seem so far away?' (Endo 1969: 137). He asks himself, 'On that night had that man, too, felt the silence of God? Had he, too, shuddered with fear? The priest did not want to think so. Yet this thought suddenly arose within his breast, and he tried not to hear the voice that told him so' (Endo 1969: 137).

In the onscreen conversation with Pilate (David Bowie) in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus explains, 'My kingdom, it's not here. Not on earth. ... All I'm saying is that change will happen with love. Not the killing.' As Jesus makes his way, wearing a crown of thorns and carrying his cross, he is surrounded by mocking faces. When Rodrigues is captured in *Silence*, he travels on a horse in a procession of shame, observed by the curious and the scoffers, in a reversal of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey but in a manner that evokes Jesus's journey to Calvary.

By making *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese finally had the chance to transfer the Good Friday imagery of torture that he had envisaged in *Jerusalem Jerusalem!* to the screen. He consulted documents about the reality of crucifixion

during Roman times, and the nudity and the position of Jesus's body on the cross are in line with his own historical research. Jesus looks around and asks, 'Mother, Magdalene, where are you?' The camera adopts his point of view and alights on four women (his mother, Magdalene, Mary and Martha). Only Magdalene remains standing. Jesus says, 'Mother, I'm sorry for being a bad son' (another reason for outrage in the opinion of the film's critics) while Mary cries, revealing a lack of comprehension on either side as to the purpose of his mission.

As the nails are driven into his hands, Jesus prays, 'Father, stay with me. Don't leave me'. Balthasar (2004) writes that 'it is the reality that the God-forsaken one experienced in an eminent way because no one can even approximately experience the abandonment by God as horribly as the Son, who shares the same essence with the Father for all eternity'. Then Jesus says, 'Father, forgive them.' In *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice explains to the Pilgrim 'that if the nature assumed by God in the Incarnation is considered, no penalty was ever so just as the Cross; but if the Person who suffered is considered, no penalty was ever so unjust' (Reynolds 2006: 351):

Therefore the penalty the cross held out,  
 If measured by the nature thus assumed,  
 None ever yet with so great justice stung,  
 And none was ever of so great injustice,  
 Considering who the Person was that suffered,  
 Within whom such a nature was contracted.  
 From one act therefore issued things diverse;  
 To God and to the Jews one death was pleasing;  
 Earth trembled at it and the Heaven was opened. (*Par. VII*)

The polemical 'temptation scene' then follows: the cross tilts and the light changes, and the world falls silent – although this time it is Satan who breaks the silence in the form of an angelic-looking girl who invites Jesus down from the cross and tells him he is not the Messiah. It is an episode about which Eleni Kazantzakis had some criticisms:

People should understand that there is the Christ on the cross, and all this is imagined. And I thought it was too long. But Nikos did the same thing. I told him while I was typing the manuscript I thought the temptation scene was too long. When you have a nightmare, you see it for one minute, one second, and you think that you have been the whole night with it. But it is not true. It takes seconds. ... So it was not Mr. Scorsese's fault. (In Kelly 1996: 239)

In the temptation sequence, Jesus marries Magdalene. She bathes his wounded body and there is a marital sex scene that Scorsese intended to show ‘mutual tenderness’ (in Wilson 2011: 155) but that was one of the major sources of scandal. Greydanus (2001) argues that the fact that it ‘was part of a “temptation” scene doesn’t mend matters at all; the sheer force of the image is greater than its context’. While Scorsese maintained that ‘the temptation’ is for a normal life with a wife and children, Jesus lives with the sisters Mary and Martha after the death of Magdalene and fathers their children – not in a traditional marriage. When questioned on this matter, Scorsese replied: ‘I don’t know that it’s adultery. It might have been polygamy’ (in Corliss 1999: 122). It could also be viewed as an aspect of the devil’s machinations, as the dream is part of Satan’s plan.

As Ricoeur explains, ‘The structure of the poetic image is also the structure of the dream when the latter extracts from the fragments of our past a prophecy of our future’ (1967: 14). In the hallucination on the cross, there is evidence of Jesus’s divinity in which he sees the future, including the burning of Jerusalem. Within this dream, Jesus meets Paul, who reveals that he persecuted and murdered. ‘I killed anyone who broke the law of Moses. And I loved it.’ But Paul explains his conversion on the road to Damascus and that he now understands that Jesus ‘was the Son of God. ... He was punished for our sins. Our sins. Then he was tortured and crucified. Then three days later he rose up from the dead and went up to Heaven. Death was conquered.’

When Jesus claims that these words are all a lie, Paul retorts, ‘Their only hope is the resurrected Jesus. I don’t care whether you’re Jesus or not. The resurrected Jesus will save the world and that’s what matters. ... I created the truth out of what people needed and what they believed.’ Jay Cocks (DVD commentary) makes the point that Paul has the idea of ‘Print the legend’ – a Fordian reference to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford 1962). Paul continues, ‘If I have to crucify you to save the world, then I’ll crucify you. And if I have to resurrect you, then I’ll do that, too, whether you like it or not. ... You see, you don’t know how much people need God. You don’t know how happy He can make them. Even make them happy to do anything. Make them happy to die, then they’ll die all for the sake of Christ.’ The martyrs in *Silence* will confirm the latter point.

There are flames in the background as Jerusalem has been set on fire. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante refers to this historical event of the destruction of Jerusalem by Emperor Titus in the year 70, accepting ‘the view of the

historian Orosius that by this act Titus avenged the death of Christ' (Reynolds 2006: 351):

Because the living Justice that inspires me  
 Granted it, in the hand of him I speak of,  
 The glory of doing vengeance for its wrath.  
 Now here attend to what I answer thee;  
 Later it ran with Titus to do vengeance  
 Upon the vengeance of the ancient sin. (*Par.* VI)

Accompanied by Nathaniel and John, Peter comes to the deathbed of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and he boldly tells the devil, who is present in the room: 'Out of the way, we were sent here.' Judas has not committed suicide in the hallucination (unlike in the New Testament narrative) and he arrives next. He has grown old and uses a walking stick, but it is clear that he has continued to fight because his hands are scarred and bloody. His first word is 'Traitor!' and he has no sympathy for Jesus: 'Your place was on the cross. That's where God put you. When death got too close you got scared and you ran away. You hid yourself in the life of some man. We did what we were supposed to do. You didn't. You're a coward.' When Peter remonstrates with the apostle for his lack of respect, Judas reveals:

Rabbi, you broke my heart. ... We held the world in our hands. Remember what you told me? You took me in your arms and you begged me, 'Betray me. Betray me. I have to be crucified. I have to be resurrected so I can save the world. I'm the lamb,' you said. 'This is the door. Judas, my brother, don't be afraid. Help me go through the door.' And I loved you so much. I went and betrayed you.

Interestingly, during the shooting of this scene, it was Scorsese who lay on the pallet while Keitel acted out his role (see Kelly 1996: 230) and berated him. Judas continues: 'What business do you have here with women, with children? What's good for men isn't good for God. Why weren't you crucified?' The same question could be asked of the two priests in *Silence*, Rodrigues and Ferreira, who are not martyred but are forced into marriage by the Japanese. Observing Jesus in the 'dream' sequence, Lloyd Baugh describes him as 'an empty, emotionless zombie, going through the motions of living and loving but deriving no real joy from them' (2005: 184) – a representation that resonates with the characterization of Ferreira and Rodrigues as empty shells after their apostasy in *Silence*.

Peter is now the more compassionate of the apostles (as he is in *The Divine Comedy*) and he protests, 'Look at his wounds, Judas, they're bleeding. You're hurting him. That's enough.' It is Judas who is still angry ('He was going to be the

New Covenant. Now there's no more Israel') and puts forward the key argument: 'If you die this way, you die like a man. You turn against God, your Father. There's no sacrifice. There's no salvation.' It is a dilemma that must affect the apostate priests in *Silence*, who turn against God and die as unbelieving men (at least in the eyes of the society in which they live) rather than as soldiers for Christ.

It is at this point that Judas begins to release Jesus from the dream, revealing that the 'angel' is Satan in disguise, so that his actions have the effect of returning Jesus to the cross. In both the dream and the reality, by betrayal or by shaking Jesus awake, Judas ensures that Jesus is crucified and saves humankind. As Jesus responds by crawling off the bed and onto the floor, Satan uses his last gambit: 'There's nothing you can do. You lived this life. You accepted it. ... Just finish it. Die. Die like a man.' In response, Jesus then pleads with God within the hallucination:

Father, will you listen to me? Are you still there? Will you listen to a selfish, unfaithful son? I fought you when you called. I resisted. I thought I knew more. I didn't want to be your son. Can you forgive me? I didn't fight hard enough. Father, give me your hand. I want to bring salvation. Father, take me back. Make a feast. Welcome me home. I want to be your son. I want to pay the price. I want to be crucified and rise again. I want to be the Messiah.

In the dream he has become a Prodigal Son, who is welcomed back by a kind and loving father. As he opens his eyes to find himself (in reality) back on the cross, his final words are joyous: 'It is accomplished. It is accomplished.' (**Figure 7.4**) The film appears to run out as if damaged by light exposure – a genuine accident to the film reel that created an image that Scorsese interpreted as symbolic of the Resurrection.

In the words of St John's Gospel: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life' (Jon. 3.16). Dante explains the Divine plan in *Paradiso*:

For God more bounteous was himself to give  
To make man able to uplift himself,  
Than if he only of himself had pardoned;  
  
And all the other modes were insufficient  
For justice, were it not the Son of God  
Himself had humbled to become incarnate. (*Par. VII*)

Discussing the film's ending, Scorsese expressed a similar idea in more prosaic language: 'Go see *Last Temptation!* He transcends; he goes into heaven. What





**Figure 7.4** 'It is accomplished!' The triumphant ending of *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

more could you want from life than salvation? For all of us! You'll feel great!' (in Hodenfield 2005: 183).

Although *The Last Temptation of Christ* remains one of the most controversial productions in the history of cinema, there have also been some more positive reactions to the film over time – a situation that Dante envisaged in relation to his own work:

For if thine utterance shall offensive be  
 At the first taste, a vital nutriment  
 'Twill leave thereafter, when it is digested.  
 This cry of thine shall do as doth the wind,  
 Which smiteth most the most exalted summits,  
 And that is no slight argument of honour. (*Par. XVII*)

Roger Ebert, who later admitted that the article by Steven Greydanus (2001) had opened his eyes to the blasphemous issues in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (2008: 102), stated, 'I cannot think of another film on a religious subject that has challenged me more fully. The film has offended those whose ideas about God and man it does not reflect. But then, so did Jesus' (2008: 95). Deacy argues that Scorsese may 'be inviting audiences to respond to Christ as an *exemplar*' and that 'the intrinsically *human* dimension of Jesus' struggle necessarily has import for a contemporary audience for whom, as in the case of Jesus, redemption is no sudden and easily attainable activity but the product of an often painful and

protracted confrontation with one's basic human condition' (2001: 89). Students have 'reported that watching the film made them contemplate the precise nature of their beliefs and doubts about the Christ-story on both historical and theological grounds, about the role of the church in retelling that story, and about the mystery of Christ's dual nature' (Knowles and Whitney 2005: 197).

Scorsese also revealed that he had received 'letters from people who said the film brought them back to their faith, and I'm very happy about that' (in Ehrenstein 1992: 114). He once suggested that anyone who went to certain areas of New York and preached the Sermon on the Mount would be 'robbed, or beaten up, or killed. But if you go there and grab people and say, "Look, I want to tell you about Jesus; I want to tell you about something He just said," then it's a confrontation' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 127). There is no doubt that, in adapting Kazantzakis's novel, Scorsese achieved that 'confrontation'. As he explained, 'When I made *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the actual making of the film was like a prayer, the way certain composers in centuries past dedicated their work to God. And the ritual of filmmaking is akin to a religious ritual. ... There is a certain magic, definitely, but you have to go through hell to get there' (in Behar 2005: 188).



## The Compassion Connection

In 1997, Scorsese made one major diversion away from his Christian roots by directing *Kundun*, a film that relates the early years of the Dalai Lama, whose fourteenth incarnation was revealed in 1937. Although Buddhism does not believe in a Supreme Being, it does have a ritual, spiritual and material dimension that it shares with the Abrahamic religions. Damien Keown describes the ‘wheel of life’ (bhavacakra) as similar to ‘an expanded version of the traditional Christian scheme of hell, purgatory, earth, and heaven, with the difference that a person can transmigrate repeatedly from one realm to another’ (2013: 35). While there is no concept of ‘Original Sin’ in Buddhism, there are ‘cycles of incarnation that can lead to an improvement of circumstance’ (Turner 1993: 126). Awareness of death is important, as ‘it is considered that your state of mind at the time of death has a very great effect on determining what form of rebirth you might take’ (Dalai Lama 1999: 217). Hans Urs von Balthasar discusses ‘the *apatheia* of the Buddhist, for whom compassion is the supreme norm of morality, precisely because no being can be totally and definitively lost on the wheel of the Samsara’ (1986: 89); and Henri de Lubac drew attention to similarities between Dante’s idea of *contrapasso* (in the sense that the punishment fits the crime in Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*) and Buddhist *karma* (see Lubac 2012: 3–4).

As a pre-Vatican II Catholic, Scorsese was not raised in an interfaith environment, and he has criticized the Catholic Church’s one-time negative disposition to other religions: ‘Their attitude toward Protestants was one thing, but the worst was the racial intolerance and intolerance against Jews’ (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 96). In *Mean Streets*, he reflects this anti-Semitic atmosphere when Johnny arrives at Volpe’s bar with two girls called Sarah Klein and Heather Weintraub, and Charlie responds to their supposedly Jewish surnames and tells Tony to get the ‘Christ killers’ whatever they want. It was only in 1960 that Pope John XXIII removed the reference ‘to “perfidious Jews” from Catholicism’s Good Friday liturgy’ (Stanford 2015: 244).

The Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) in 1965 sought to improve the Catholic Church's approach to other faiths. Therefore, in a post-Vatican II era, it may be a shock to contemporary readers of *The Divine Comedy* to find that Dante located the prophet Mohammed in Hell 'with recent mischief makers of much less account, perhaps to imply that *all* sowers of discord are responsible for the disunity of mankind' (Reynolds 2006: 204):

How mutilated, see, is Mahomet;  
 In front of me doth Ali weeping go,  
 Cleft in the face from forelock unto chin;  
 And all the others whom thou here beholdest,  
 Disseminators of scandal and of schism  
 While living were, and therefore are cleft thus. (*Inf.* XXVIII)

On the other hand, Dante places the pagans in Limbo on the edges of the *Inferno* in more pleasant surroundings, and Virgil explains their identity to the Pilgrim:

To me the Master good: 'Thou dost not ask  
 What spirits these, which thou beholdest, are?  
 Now will I have thee know, ere thou go farther,  
 That they sinned not; and if they merit had,  
 'Tis not enough, because they had not baptism  
 Which is the portal of the Faith thou holdest;  
 And if they were before Christianity,  
 In the right manner they adored not God;  
 And among such as these am I myself.  
 For such defects, and not for other guilt,  
 Lost are we and are only so far punished,  
 That without hope we live on in desire.' (*Inf.* IV)

Having reached *Paradiso*, the question of the final destination of non-Christians is raised again:

For saidst thou: 'Born a man is on the shore  
 Of Indus, and is none who there can speak  
 Of Christ, nor who can read, nor who can write;  
 And all his inclinations and his actions  
 Are good, so far as human reason sees,  
 Without a sin in life or in discourse:

He dieth unbaptised and without faith;  
 Where is this justice that condemneth him?  
 Where is his fault, if he do not believe?' (*Par. XIX*)

The Pilgrim is advised that only Christians will reach *Paradiso*:

It recommenced: 'Unto this kingdom never  
 Ascended one who had not faith in Christ,  
 Before or since he to the tree was nailed.' (*Par. XIX*)

Yet there is an important caveat: some who bear the title 'Christian' will never be close to Christ at the Last Judgement:

But look thou, many crying are, 'Christ, Christ!'  
 Who at the judgment shall be far less near  
 To him than some shall be who knew not Christ. (*Par. XIX*)

William Johnston, the Jesuit priest who translated Endo's novel *Silence* into English, explains that the Vatican Council insisted 'on freedom to follow one's conscience, following St. Paul who says in the Epistle to the Romans that the Gentiles who do instinctively what the law requires are a law to themselves' (Johnston 2006: 145). There is now a more tolerant attitude:

The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as 'a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 843)

Johnston points out that 'this is far from the triumphalism of the past, which taught that outside the church there is no salvation, and even from the theology I learned in the 1950s' (2006: 145) – the same era in which Scorsese was taught his faith.

Scorsese expressed an interest in the Dalai Lama as someone 'who really practices compassion, kindness, and tolerance, which most of our religions preach but don't practice, and who practices the most revolutionary concept – nonviolence – that's extraordinary. So that's what attracted me to him' (in Taubin 2017). The word 'compassion' is not the most obvious noun to choose when analysing Scorsese's films, yet he has spoken of the impulse in his young life to escape from the grim environment that he saw around him, inspired by Rossellini's *Europa '51* (1952): 'That for me was something that had hope. It has

to do with the teachings of the New Testament. I really bought into it, because of what I saw around me. I thought this is the right idea: feeling for the other person and giving something to the other person. Compassion, maybe that's it' (in Schickel 2013). A prime example of this optimistic assessment is the film *Hugo* (2011) in which 'everything has a purpose' and the titular protagonist (Asa Butterfield) restores the faith of Georges Méliès (Ben Kingsley) – a director who 'was one of the first to realise that films had the power to capture dreams'.

Notably, there is a clock at the centre of the narrative of *Hugo* providing a link with Dante's *Paradiso*. 'To enable the reader to visualize *Paradiso*, Dante uses a practical simile drawn from the latest advancement in mechanical science: the train of wheels of a striking clock, revolving at different speeds, a recent invention that had evidently caught his imagination' (Reynolds 2006: 378):

Then, as a horologe that calleth us  
 What time the Bride of God is rising up  
 With matins to her Spouse that he may love her,  
 Wherein one part the other draws and urges,  
 Ting! ting! resounding with so sweet a note,  
 That swells with love the spirit well disposed,  
 Thus I beheld the glorious wheel move round,  
 And render voice to voice, in modulation  
 And sweetness that can not be comprehended,  
 Excepting there where joy is made eternal. (*Par. X*)

In Dante's *Paradiso*, the blessed 'revolve round one another like "wheels in the structure of a clock"' (Balthasar 1986: 72). Scorsese also found inspiration in the workings of a train station clock, around which human lives rotate with their joys and sorrows. Using advances in 3D technology, Scorsese offered a 'happy ending' as Hugo rescues Georges Méliès and his films from obscurity (an entertaining example of the importance of film preservation that recalls the important work that Scorsese himself is continuing through his Film Foundation). When it was mooted that Scorsese might make a biopic of the young Dalai Lama in the 1990s, there was some concern about which film from his back catalogue could be shown to introduce His Holiness to the director's work. Had it existed at the time, *Hugo* would have been a potential choice to screen for the Dalai Lama. It is a family film in which the titular protagonist acts as an agent in 'a moral utopia where goodness is rewarded and the wicked are punished' (DeBona 2015: 469).

Explaining his decision to make *Kundun*, Scorsese said, 'There's a kind of hunger for peace of mind. On the downside it may signal a lack of faith in our traditional religions in the West. That doesn't mean everyone's going to become Buddhist, but I think you could learn certain things from Buddhism' (in Greene 2005: 235). He has suggested that non-violence may be 'the ultimate revolution. Because what is our nature? Is it our nature to be violent, or is it our nature to love, and be compassionate?' (in Greene 2005: 236). Speaking of his own faith, Scorsese has said:

I don't know if I any longer accept the idea of an inherent sinfulness in human nature. I think in the process of living, we may need redemption just from being who we are. But the idea of original sin, that we are already guilty to begin with, is obviously in the films I make and in who I am. But over the years now I've been thinking maybe that isn't the case. Maybe it's the question of what human nature is. Is it intrinsically good or bad? (In Leach 2017)

Even when considering the reaction of an audience to the behaviour of Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull*, Scorsese suggests: 'To experience compassion for this man takes the viewer to a strange and complicated feeling' (Grindon: 2005: 34). He draws on the same theme when discussing his approach to filming *The Last Temptation of Christ* and the desire 'just to deal with the idea of what Jesus really represented and said and wanted, which was compassion and love' (in Schickel 2013). Scorsese explains, 'I always think it's much harder to deal with the idea of love without retribution, as opposed to Mosaic law. I think that's the thing everybody has to go for: forgiveness' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 95).

While the adaptation of Kazantzakis's *Last Temptation* was an intensely personal project, Scorsese describes *Kundun* as 'almost a retreat' (in Shone 2014: 78), although the production itself was not without controversy. The Chinese were unhappy with the film and warned that they would boycott Disney in protest, just as Christians threatened to blacklist Universal over *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Scorsese was not able to get permission to shoot in India, so Tibet was represented by Morocco (as was Israel in *The Last Temptation of Christ*) with additional filming at an upstate New York Buddhist temple. However, although the Atlas Mountains stand in for the Himalayas, many of the roles were not played by professional actors but by Tibetans, who visibly demonstrate a personal connection to their onscreen identities. Scorsese admitted, 'There was a reverence and a spirituality that pervaded the set, which was interesting. I wanted to be part of that world. Whether I took something away with me, I'm not sure, but I think I have' (in Ebert 2008: 222).

In making *Kundun* Scorsese underlined the fact that he was not a Buddhist, but there is merit in the argument that he was ‘transferring his Pasolinian preoccupation with sacrifice and redemption, as evidenced in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, to a non-Catholic tradition’ (Bertellini and Reich 2015: 38). The screenwriter Melissa Mathison believed that Scorsese would understand the society, the moral code and the spirituality, and how to present the religion, even though there were some elements (such as working with horses) that were outside his natural comfort zone. As Scorsese explains, the film’s ‘inaction is the action. It’s antithetical to what we know as Western drama. But why can’t there be a film where the drama happens internally?’ (in Schickel 2013).

The film is visually magnificent with its red, russet and yellow hues, and many of the scenes are intelligible without dialogue. While lacking in specific geographical authenticity, the exterior scenery serves as an additional marker of the inner spirituality of the protagonists, with the wonder of creation being visible in the epic mountain panorama with which the film opens. Although inspired by De Sica films such as *The Gold of Naples* (1954), *Kundun* is more controlled rather than offering the improvisation of Italian neorealism.

Scorsese reflects on religious films that have enthused him in the past, such as Rossellini’s *The Flowers of St Francis* (1950): ‘I always wanted to make something like it, about a human being who by exemplary action shows us how to live’ (in Ebert 2008: 221). He even draws a comparison with the narrative of *Mean Streets* with ‘the idea of a young man trying to live his religious convictions, a life of the spirit, in the world’ (in Horne 2005: 237–8); and there is also a potential link with *Casino* in that ‘*Kundun* is the story of a lost kingdom and way of life, ending in the ruler’s exile’ (in Horne 2005: 237). In *Kundun* ‘the camera is pulling away from [the Dalai Lama] all the time. He has to renounce everything’ (in Wilson 2011: 212). It is the opposite of the grasping hands reaching out for material goods in *GoodFellas*, *Casino* or *The Wolf of Wall Street*. At the heart of the film is the sand mandala, which represents the universe, and a sense of life’s impermanence. The mandala was filmed by Phil Marco (who also worked on the trick shots during the pool games in *The Color of Money*) using two cameras and time-lapse so that the artistry appears like animation.

Although there were specific practical difficulties in making the film (given that working with child actors who can manifest the appropriate demeanour is a problem that also faces directors of New Testament productions about the young Jesus), the Dalai Lama is often centred in the frame ‘like the subject of a religious icon’ (Ebert 2008: 227). Scorsese’s aim was to tell ‘the story of a man, or a boy, who lives in a society which is totally based on the spirit and,

finally crashing into the twentieth century they find themselves face to face with the most anti-spiritualist society ever formed, the Marxist government of the Chinese communists' (in Kelly 1996: xx). As the central protagonist is treated with a certain reverence, the film becomes 'an act of devotion' that 'wants to enhance, not to question' (Ebert 2008: 216), unlike the exploration of the identity of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

There is the shot of an eye closed in sleep. As the camera rotates, the child's eyes open and the world is seen from his perspective as his mother bends over him. Scorsese mentions the close-up of Jeffrey Hunter's eyes in *King of Kings*, making a link between the New Testament film and *Kundun*. However, here there is a focus on the humanity of the child in his interactions with his family, as the little boy makes his demands, asking to have a place at the head of the table, to the indignation of his siblings who object to his apparent sense of self-importance. The narrative has elements of a traditional family relationship, with a focus on the people rather than the Buddhist teachings.

The birth narrative is recounted rather than filmed, as the boy's voice is heard asking: 'Tell my story' – an approach that has links with *The Divine Comedy*, in which the souls whom the Pilgrim meets have a tale to recount. Although the boy's family groan at the repeated request, his sister relents: 'You were born at dawn. It was so quiet outside.' There were crows that came to nest on their roof 'just as they did for the Dalai Lama,' adds his brother. His own father was sick, the animals were dying and the crops had been failing. On the day he was born, he did not cry. That day his father recovered, and he named his son 'The Protector': Lhamo.

In Dante's *Paradiso* there is the 'love and the beauty of the natural world, within the range of human experience: the mother-bird, fruit harvested, a garden, a rose, lilies, the moon on a clear night among the stars, shafts of sunlight striking through the clouds on a flowery meadow, a baby stretching its arms towards its mother' (Reynolds 2006: 375). In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Judas asks if the voices that Jesus hears are the voice of God: 'Is there some secret?' Jesus replies, 'Pity for men.' He has pity for everything, even ants: 'Everything's a part of God. When I see an ant, when I look at his shiny black eye, you know what I see? I see the face of God.' These words evoke the tone of *Kundun*, in which the young Lhamo separates two fighting insects. Reting (the regent) will later tell the young Dalai Lama: 'You are here to love all living things. Just love them. Care for them. Have compassion for them.'

In the search for the child who is the incarnation, there are some similarities with the Infancy narratives of Jesus when the Magi travel from afar in the Gospel

of Matthew, bringing their gifts. Lhamo appears to recognize the visitor's necklace ('This is mine'), and the man's hands shake as he realizes the potential importance of the boy and the fact that his pilgrimage may be at an end. Over time, Lhamo correctly identifies items that belonged to the thirteenth Dalai Lama (amusingly, including his false teeth). These are the signs that he is the chosen one. There is just one occasion when the Dalai Lama will ask the question: 'Do you ever wonder if Reting found the right boy?' – expressing the kind of uncertainty that torments Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. However, the answer here is a clear 'No'.

There is an emphasis on the Dalai Lama's childish behaviour as he wants to sit on a particular seat, or when he leans out of the window of the palanquin to look at the landscape, offering a contrast between his boyish excitement and the grandeur of the Tibetan processions. When his head is going to be shaved, he runs away and hides under a robe and, as a result of the height and position of the camera, the audience sees the world from his viewpoint through the red fabric. The camera frequently adopts the child's perspective – looking up at the crowd and down at his feet when he is most interested in his shiny shoes. Scorsese revealed one reason why he adopted this approach: 'The only way I could do the film – because I'm not a Buddhist and I'm not an authority on Tibetan history – was to stay with the people. Stay with the kid [who ages from two to twenty-four in the film] and literally see things from his point of view' (in Taubin 2017).

The people bow down before the Dalai Lama and he is aware of his status, offering another contrast with *The Last Temptation of Christ* in which Jesus is constantly uncertain that he is the Messiah. Yet the Dalai Lama also has to pay a price for his special role: he is a privileged prisoner – a small face at a window – who wriggles in his opulent robes and will later cry for his mother: 'I don't like it here.' Behind the scenes there are disputes, just as there are between the apostles in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. His brother tells him to attend to his books ('I get in trouble if you don't study'), offering an element here of 'my brother's keeper' found in the relationship between Charlie and Johnny in *Mean Streets*. After the invasion of Tibet by China, the Dalai Lama's brother reveals that the Chinese are expecting him to commit fratricide, showing that there is treachery afoot.

There is some reference to Buddhist teaching, such as the Three Jewels: I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings; also the law of *karma* and rebirth) and the Sangha (similar to the word 'church'). The Dalai Lama is asked to recite the Four Noble Truths: The truth of suffering, The truth of the origin of suffering, The truth of the cessation of suffering and The truth of the path to the cessation



of suffering. The last words of Scorsese's student film *What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?* are: 'Life is fraught with peril.' Keown points out that the American psychiatrist M. Scott Peck begins his book *The Road Less Travelled* with the statement 'Life is difficult,' making a reference to The truth of suffering, which is the First Noble Truth in Buddhism (see Keown 2013: 50). So, Scorsese appears to have been unconsciously foreshadowing *Kundun* back in 1963.

The Dalai Lama has a fascination with objects of 'seeing,' and when he observes his country through his telescope there are moments of joy and pain. He watches a silent film called *La Poule aux oeufs d'or* (1905) by Gaston Velle, making an evident link with the titular hero of Scorsese's film *Hugo* and the pioneers of the moving image. The special effects in the French film reveal the magic of cinema as well as a moral tale in which the Devil is the antagonist, although the Dalai Lama is later left to hope that 'the gods will win, the devils will lose,' in life as in cinema. When the Dalai Lama looks at pictures of the outside world in *Life* magazine, he sees images of war, bombs and Adolf Hitler; and the Oracle brings grim tidings: 'Heed the warning of your predecessor or the war will end here.'

The image of the Buddha is superimposed on the Dalai Lama's face, as the image of Christ and Rodrigues merge in the reflection in the stream before the priest is captured in *Silence*. The Dalai Lama asks, 'What can I do? I'm only a boy.' Yet, there is pressure on him to take action, as there is on Jesus when he faces his apostles in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and is expected to choose between 'love or the axe.' The Dalai Lama is being asked questions about the preciousness of human life as gunfire is heard in the background – he is surprised to learn that the monks own guns – and people he trusted, such as Reting, now appear to be traitors. Faced with the threat from China and Mao Tse Tung, the Dalai Lama senses that he must act: 'I need to know what to do.' As if to confirm that he is no longer a child, he must face the death of the two mentors in his life, his father and Reting. He attends the funeral rite for his father, in which the body is carried outside and laid on the ground, and the birds circle around waiting for carrion. The audience hears that the communists have control of China and are making their demands (the words are spoken in voice-over) as his father's body is ceremonially dissected.

When a messenger arrives to tell the Dalai Lama that the Chinese have invaded, supposedly to free the Tibetan peasants from feudal tyranny, a canted angle underlines the sense that the world is off kilter. Curiously, the most auspicious date for his enthronement is 17 November 1950. On the day that Scorsese's family were celebrating his eighth birthday in New York, the Dalai

Lama was assuming full temporal power in a grand ceremony in Tibet. The monks beg him to stay and are assured: 'The precious one will not abandon you. He will return. He will not leave Tibet.' But the vow will eventually be broken. A servant asks the Dalai Lama why the Chinese have come: 'What did we do that is bad?' Rodrigues asks a similar question in *Silence* when he meets the hidden Christians in Japan: 'Why do they have to suffer so much? Why did God pick them to bear such a burden?'

### What is truth?

The Chinese claim that they want to bring progress to Tibet. 'We want to help you,' claims Mao Tse Tung, when the Dalai Lama meets him in Peking. 'You know, my mother was a Buddhist. I have great respect for your Lord Buddha. He was anti-caste, anti-corruption, anti-exploitation. For some, politics and religion can mix.' These words give the Dalai Lama hope: 'I think socialism and Buddhism have some things in common,' he thinks at one point, believing in the promises of the Chinese. However, he then has a troubling dream in which his friends and advisers say, 'Goodbye Kundun.' Whereas the 'hallucination' in *The Last Temptation of Christ* is the work of Satan, this dream is clearly a warning.

In a subsequent meeting, Mao Tse Tung undermines his friendly demeanour by turning to the Dalai Lama and saying, 'You need to learn this: religion is poison. Poison. Like a poison, it weakens the race. Like a drug it retards the mind of people and society. The opiate of the people. Tibet has been poisoned by religion. And your people are poisoned and inferior.' The Dalai Lama does not reply but focuses on Mao's shiny black shoes. When he returns to his old home, there is a picture of Mao on the wall, and the people are encouraged to state through their tears, 'I am very happy and prosperous under the Chinese communist party and Chairman Mao.'

The Dalai Lama is informed that the Chinese have bombed a monastery and thrown rocks from airplanes. Nuns and monks have been forced to fornicate in the street, and a child has been made to shoot his parents. The Dalai Lama sobs at this news and is advised: 'Non-violence means cooperation when it is possible. And resistance when it is not.' There is an image of the blue water of the fish pond turning red; and then the sight of the monks lying dead around his feet, as the camera pulls back (in a shot reminiscent of the revelation of the battle of Atlanta in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)) to expose the scale of the tragedy: there



**Figure 8.1** A nightmare vision for the Dalai Lama in *Kundun*.

are hundreds of men in red robes, so that they look like blood-stained bodies. (**Figure 8.1**) As in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, it turns out to be a nightmare vision rather than reality.

The conflict between the Tibetans and the Chinese also evokes the tense relationship in *Silence* between the Jesuit missionaries and the Japanese. Buddhism reached Japan in the sixth century by way of Korea, drawing inspiration from mainland China (Keown 2013: 88). When the Jesuits chose Japan as a destination for their missionary efforts, they reportedly did not at first recognize the difference between Shinto and Buddhism. In *Kundun*, the Tibetan people are facing the invasion of an army that has no faith, and they fear that they will be ‘made to wander helplessly like beggars’. In seventeenth-century Japan it is the Christians who are persecuted, and the priests who have to flee like vagabonds.

Scorsese has considered whether the links between missionary work and colonialism are ‘a wound that Asian Christianity has not yet recovered from’ (in Nepales 2017). As Valignano states to the young Jesuit priests in *Silence*: ‘Thousands are dead because of what we brought them. Thousands more have given up the faith.’ *Silence* ‘raises a lot of problems about foreign cultures coming and imposing their way of thinking on another culture they know nothing about’ (in Dougill 2015: 151), and it is a theme that is evoked in the film with reference to questions of inculturation. There were a number of communication problems in Japan, given that the Jesuits were not always good linguists (Boxer 1993: 88) – a fact that is addressed in *Silence* by the Interpreter, when he refers to Fr Francisco Cabral (who is a historical character) with disdain: ‘All the time he lived here, he taught but he would not learn. He despised our language,

our food, our customs.' In a humorous scene, a Japanese woman arrives and asks for 'Kohisan' (confession), and Garupe, who has little idea of what she is saying despite his best efforts, forgives her sins anyway.

The Japanese also had problems with the 'no divorce' rule 'since they considered it utterly unreasonable to expect a person to remain tied for life to a bad or intolerable spouse of either sex' (Boxer 1993: 175). With some apology towards the priest's sensitivities, Inoue tells the story of a Daimyo (who represents Japan) with four concubines who (it transpires) are intended to symbolize Spain, Portugal, Holland and England. While Inoue suggests that a wise man would send them all away, Rodrigues argues that the Catholic Church teaches monogamy and proposes that Japan should choose 'one lawful wife from the four ... The holy Church'. Inoue counters that Japan should choose one of its own: Buddhism.

In *Silence* the Interpreter tells Rodrigues, 'We have our own religion, Padre. Pity you did not notice it.' In a later 'interrogation' scene, Rodrigues is told: 'The doctrine you bring with you may be true in Spain and Portugal. But we have studied it carefully, thought about it over much time and find it is of no use and no value in Japan. We have concluded that it is a danger.' Rodrigues responds, 'But we believe we have brought you the truth. The truth is universal. It's common to all countries at all times. That's why we call it the truth.'

Rodrigues is told that the 'tree of Christianity' cannot flourish in the soil of Japan. Yet he returns the argument: 'It is not the soil that has killed the buds. There were 300,000 Christians here in Japan before the soil was ... poisoned.' When he eventually faces Ferreira, he claims that the Japanese Christians did 'worship God. God. Our Lord. They praise the name of Deus' and that he saw them die: 'On fire with their faith.'

While the people of Tibet are oppressed by the Chinese communists who reject religion altogether, there is a conflict between the Japanese and the Christians in *Silence* over the question of 'truth'. Following a screening of *Silence*, Scorsese related the reaction of a cleric from the Philippines, who had explained how the Catholic missionaries went to a country, presented their 'truth' and negated the truth of the culture they were trying to convert.

The Japanese saw it as arrogance and they had to take it down. In a sense, that arrogance was a violence to the people, just as the Japanese were cruel to the missionaries. Colonialism is tied inextricably to Christianity. He used the phrase 'that wound still hasn't healed yet'. So how do you spread the word and make the change. Isn't it through behaviour? There is something about our behaviour.

That's where it begins and that's where we get to the truth of it. Compassion and love. Without that, there won't be any species. (Scorsese 2017a)

In *Silence*, the Interpreter tells Rodrigues: 'To help others is the way of the Buddha, and your way, too. The two religions are the same in this.' Indeed, the Dalai Lama himself has spoken of the links between Catholicism and Buddhism that came to the fore in his meeting with Thomas Merton: 'The focus on compassion that [we] observed in our two religions strikes me as a strong unifying thread among all the major faiths. And these days we need to highlight what unifies us' (in Martin 2010b).

Seeing the suffering of his people under an invading army without any compassion, the hardest decision that the Dalai Lama has to take is to leave Tibet. Setting out on the kind of journey that the Pilgrim takes in *The Divine Comedy*, he climbs up a mountain side, crosses a river by boat in the moonlight (like Rodrigues in *Silence*) and travels on a horse across a desert. All the time he holds onto the belief: 'The right will win. The wrong will lose.' He sleeps in a stable with animals on a snowy night – with an evident Christmas allusion. When he reaches the Indian border, a soldier asks, 'With all respect, sir, may I ask: who are you?' The Dalai Lama replies: 'What you see before you is a man. A simple monk.' When the soldier asks again, 'Are you the Lord Buddha?' The Dalai Lama answers, 'I think I am a reflection like the moon on water. When you see me and I try to be a good man, you see yourself.' In his new home he sets up his telescope to look back at his beloved homeland, and the film ends with the statement: 'The Dalai Lama has not yet returned to Tibet. He hopes one day to make the journey.' Scorsese dedicated the film to his mother, who was dying during the production, 'because the unconditional love that she represented to me in my own life somehow connected with the idea of the Dalai Lama having a compassionate love for all sentient beings' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 214).

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## The saint of compassion

Scorsese describes *Bringing Out the Dead* as *Kundun* 'in a modern urban setting' (in Schickel 2013) in which paramedic Frank Pierce is a troubled, kindly figure whose care for his patients has a moral dimension in a dark world. Richard Blake (2005) argues that 'Kazantzakis's Jesus, Frank Pierce and the Dalai Lama stand out as moral giants' because they have the ability 'to transcend the limitations of

their time and place.' As Dante's Pilgrim traverses through the heavenly spheres in *Paradiso*, Scorsese's journey through these films emphasizes the search for compassion.

In *Kundun* there is an explanation of the Noble Truths, ranging from the understanding that one causes much of one's own suffering, to a desire to find a path to peace – a yearning that encompasses the narrative of Frank's life: 'For all beings desire happiness. All wish to find their purer selves.' The Buddha himself 'set out on a spiritual quest, seeking to understand the human suffering he had seen outside his cloistered palace walls' (Dennis 2015: 161). Although Frank does not live in palatial splendour, he is going out into the streets of New York and taking care of some of the weakest members of society in *Bringing Out the Dead*.

As an ambulance emerges out of the blackness and hurtles towards the camera, the tune of Van Morrison's 'T.B. Sheets' provides a slow pulse. There are several shots – such as when New York is lit by the neon signs so that the colours are reflected in the wet roadway – that are reminiscent of *Taxi Driver*. The close-up of Nicolas Cage's eyes, illuminated by the red glow of the ambulance's warning lights, evokes the first glimpse of Robert De Niro behind the wheel of his taxi cab, as does Frank's interior monologue in which he bemoans his tiredness and the fact that 'things had turned bad'. However, while Travis Bickle and Frank patrol the same locations, one adds to the casualty list while the other is trying to ease the pain. The voice of the dispatcher acts as Frank's conscience, telling him what he should do, waking him up when he tries to ignore it. The paramedics climb up dark, narrow winding stairwells in the tenement blocks that are reminiscent of the circular pathways in Dante's imaginative structure of Hell, but the men are trying to bring some light into the darkness. As Frank explains:

Once, for weeks I couldn't feel the earth. Everything I touched became light. Horns played in my shoes; flowers fell from my pockets ... You wonder if you've become immortal, as if you saved your own life as well. What was once criminal and happenstance suddenly makes sense. God has passed through you, why deny it, why deny that for a moment there, God was you.

The film's Catholic environment came 'from the original material itself – and from the fact that I don't know how to film in any other way,' admitted Scorsese (in Wilson 2011: 231). When Frank is called to attend to a cardiac arrest, the crucifix over the bed in the apartment indicates the religious affiliation of the patient, Mr Burke (Cullen Oliver Johnson), as does the name of his daughter, Mary (Patricia Arquette). In a later conversation, it becomes apparent that both

Frank and Mary went to Catholic schools and can share anecdotes about plastic holy statues inside the pizzas that were sold in their local area. The hospital is called Our Lady of Perpetual Mercy (popularly known as 'Misery') and there is a large statue of the Virgin Mary in the corner – a Marian reference of which Dante would have approved in relation to the theme of compassion that is at the heart of *Paradiso*, although Scorsese himself argues that he 'didn't make a big deal about it!' (in Wilson 2011: 234).

One of Frank's patients is a woman named Maria, who expresses shock when she discovers that she is about to have a child, claiming that she is a virgin – although Scorsese appears to make the common theological mistake of suggesting that it is 'an immaculate conception' (in Wilson 2011: 231), apparently confusing the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) with the Virgin Birth (see O'Brien 2011: 20–1). The Immaculate Conception is a Marian dogma that was defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854, stating that the Virgin Mary was 'enriched by God with gifts' appropriate to her role as the mother of the Saviour and 'from the first moment of her conception [was] preserved immune from all stain of original sin' (in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 491). However, in popular culture, the term has frequently been mistakenly used to describe phantom pregnancies, in vitro fertilization or the birth of a child where the father is unknown – as Maria claims is the case here. Religion comes to the forefront again later that night when Frank's colleague Marcus (Ving Rhames) appears to perform a resurrection and bring a young heroin addict named I. B. Bangin' back to life – a 'miracle' that occurs with a lot of help from Narcan and a good deal of theatrical prayer.

Frank cares for the dead, the dying and has a fresh interest in the living (Mary Burke); Mary has sympathy for the troubled vagabond Noel (Marc Anthony), who was once given shelter by her own father; and a group of homeless people show concern for the alcoholic 'frequent flier' Mr Oh ('The king of stink'), calling out 'Good luck, old buddy!' as he is taken away by the paramedics who find his pungent body repulsive. Jesus warns his disciples: 'Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Mt. 7.21); and he tells them: 'Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give' (Mt 10.8). Frank carries out the sacrificial acts for which Charlie had expressed a verbal interest in *Mean Streets*. 'Help others and you help yourself' is Franks' motto, and he talks about his hands moving 'with the speed and skill beyond me' – a gift from God. 'Saving someone's life is like



falling in love, the best drug in the world,' he explains. However, he is an everyday saint with his own troubles, living on coffee and whisky. Although he has come to accept that he is not God ('It's been three days and I haven't brought anybody back to life'), Frank is paying a heavy price because of his failure to forgive himself – the sin of pride that besets many of Scorsese's protagonists in various ways: 'For godly sorrow produces a salutary repentance without regret, but worldly sorrow produces death' (2 Cor. 7.10). After six months, Frank is still haunted by Rose, the eighteen-year-old, asthmatic, homeless girl he was unable to keep alive.

*Bringing Out the Dead* is a film that reaches out towards the threshold of the Afterlife. Scorsese found inspiration in the frescoes of Signorelli, in which people are condemned to Heaven or Hell at the Last Judgement (see Leach 2017). For Frank, the streets are full of ghosts, and these spirits are part of the job: 'All bodies leave their mark. You cannot be near the newly dead without feeling it.' There are several scenes in which the audience is witnessing an ethereal gateway, suggested by the white light that envelops the patients as they hover between life and death. As he attempts to resuscitate Mr Burke, Frank reflects: 'In the last year I had come to believe in such things as spirits leaving the body and not wanting to be put back. Spirits angry at the awkward places death had left them.' He is convinced that, if he turned around, he would see Mr Burke standing at the window, watching as they try to revive him. The camera pans towards the open window in which the breeze – a traditional cinematic method for indicating divine intervention – moves the curtain. At Frank's suggestion, the family plays the music that the patient liked (Frank Sinatra) and Mr Burke's heart begins to beat again, bringing him back from the brink.

As Frank and his partner Larry (John Goodman) drive through the streets, the ambulance is shot at a disorientating canted angle and they pass a neon sign that reports that the NASDAQ FALLS 2.6 per cent. It is a reminder of the uncertainty of storing up material goods and, given the focus on death, the fact that there are no pockets in shrouds. Frank puts on the siren for the family to generate a sense of hope. Mary, who has been estranged from her father for three years, will later admit: 'A week ago I was wishing he was dead. And now I want to hear his voice just once more.'

Some critics have seen Frank as a kind of Charon-figure, who is ferrying the souls across the river Acheron (see, for example, Ebert 2008; and Cleary 2014); and the fact that the film is set over three days mirrors the time that Dante's Pilgrim spends in the *Inferno*. However, at another point during their journey through the Afterlife, Dante and Virgil see a light approaching: 'The description



is cinematic in its suggestion of movement, speed and power. The light proves to be the radiance from the wings of an angel helmsman who is ferrying a group of saved souls across the water towards the shore' (Shaw 2014). With his desire to save lives, Frank and the lights of his ambulance might better fit this reassuring sight. On one occasion, a paramedic named Tom (Tom Sizemore) agrees to take some patients to another hospital while Frank goes to Our Lady of Perpetual Mercy: 'OK, Frank, you take yours to Heaven, I'll take mine to Hell,' he suggests. Frank claims, 'The God of Hell fire is not a role that anyone wants to play,' but the aggressive Tom may have different ideas.

In *The Divine Comedy*, the threatening Minos waits in Hell as the gatekeeper:

There standeth Minos horribly, and snarls;  
Examines the transgressions at the entrance;  
Judges, and sends according as he girds him. (*Inf.* V)

When Frank brings the patients to the emergency room at the hospital, he is greeted by the security guard Griss (Afemo Omilami), who is evidently a much more pleasant figure than Minos as long as he is not riled ('Don't make me take off my sunglasses!'). Beyond the door there is a further 'triage' – just as the souls are allocated to their 'circles' within Dante's imaginative structure. There are people with heart conditions, AIDS patients and addicts who have taken the dangerous drug Red Death with a skull and crossbones on the bottle. One doctor questions a patient and wonders why she should even bother to treat him: 'So you get drunk every day and you fall down. So why should we help you? You're just going to get drunk tomorrow and fall down again,' she asks. It is a question about compassion and forgiveness that will be asked in a different context in *Silence*: when people fall down (such as Kichijiro), how do they rise again and go on? How often should they be helped? Frank comes to realize that he has a vocation as 'a grief mop,' whose mission is to assist without passing judgement and whose job is 'less about saving lives than about bearing witness'. When Cy (Cliff Curtis), a drug dealer, is impaled on a spike and dangles over the balcony of a multistorey building, it is not Frank's role to condemn but to help him, and he holds onto Cy in a *Pietà* pose, cradling his neck to ease his pain. Scorsese himself asks the question: 'Why save a drug dealer – he's such a creep? But he's got to be saved' (in Schickel 2013). By the end of the film, Frank has saved the lives of Cy and Noel, two troubled men who are rejected by society.

The ultimate death of Mr Burke raises ethical questions. Conscious of the man's pain, Frank effectively commits euthanasia when he removes the breathing apparatus and lets him die. However it is made clear that if the doctors had not

already intervened and resuscitated him seventeen times, Mr Burke would have died many hours before: there is a line between treatments that are considered 'extraordinary' (as opposed to 'ordinary') and are not morally obligatory according to the teachings of the Catholic Church (see Catholic Bishops of New York State 2011). Frank 'finds some form of redemption' (Blake 2005) in his love for Mary, ending the film on a hopeful note as he lies peacefully in her arms, bathed in a pure white light. Through Mary, Frank accepts Rose's forgiveness from beyond the grave: 'It's not your fault. No one asked you to suffer. That was your idea.'

Scorsese remembers seeing poor people in New York when he was a child and being warned to stay away from them: 'Parents didn't want you to touch them – they're dirty, they're this, they're that. But at the same time, the Church is always talking about compassion. So I've always had this split guilt: I've always not felt quite right not doing anything about it and that's one of the reasons I wanted to make this movie' (in Jolly 2005: 242–3). While Charlie in *Mean Streets* has pretensions to be St Francis, Frank Pierce is making a tangible effort: 'To attain freedom from such suffering, we must reduce our cravings and reverse the tendency to put the self first while increasing our compassion for others' (Dennis 2015: 162). Prue Shaw suggests that Virgil and Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy* represent 'the two sources of help and comfort offered to all human beings in their dealings with the vicissitudes of earthly existence: human reason and divine grace' (Shaw 2014). Frank offers both his medical knowledge and his compassion.

Mentioning the fact of his happy marriage and having another child later in life, Scorsese once explained that 'values start to change', and he was interested in the idea of 'how to live Christianity in daily life'. Scorsese describes *Bringing Out the Dead* as having a link 'with a philosophical cycle of my own. It had to do with trying to evade the fact that you're going to die, we're all going to die' (in Schickel 2013) – a theme that is at the centre of the film in which the neon and fluorescent lighting shimmies and distorts to suggest that there is only a thin barrier between this world and the Afterlife; and the straight line on a heart monitor brings grief and release. Although he felt that he had 'just missed grasping' the essence of *The Last Temptation of Christ* (in Schickel 2013), Scorsese once explained: 'Despite everything, I keep thinking I can find a way to lead the spiritual life. ... When I made *The Last Temptation of Christ*, when I made *Kundun*. I was looking for that. *Bringing Out the Dead* was the next step. Time is moving by. I'm aware of that' (in Ebert 2008: 250). And *Silence*, which is the focus of the final chapter of this book, takes him even further.

## The Mystery of God's Love

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante sets out his unwavering Christian faith in Canto XXIV of *Paradiso*:

And I respond: In one God I believe,  
 Sole and eterne, who moveth all the heavens  
 With love and with desire, himself unmoved;  
 And of such faith not only have I proofs  
 Physical and metaphysical, but gives them  
 Likewise the truth that from this place rains down  
 Through Moses, through the Prophets and the Psalms,  
 Through the Evangel, and through you, who wrote  
 After the fiery Spirit sanctified you;  
 In Persons three eterne believe, and these  
 One essence I believe, so one and trine  
 They bear conjunction both with 'sunt and 'est.'

The Catholic Church teaches: 'Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 1023). In *Paradiso* 'the blessed are seen expanding their love more and more, through an ever growing concentration on God, until love is also an *understanding* of God, and hence of reality as a whole' (Casey 2009: 282).

*Silence* is a film in which Scorsese concentrates on *an understanding of God*, while also creating a bond with Endo, who 'stands with those sitting in the pews who feel inadequate and uncertain, who doubt whether they can be strong, heroic and faith-filled' (Fujimura 2016). At one point, Scorsese admitted that he was conflicted as to what to do with his own life: 'I wondered then and I still wonder whether I should quit everything and help the poor. But I wasn't, and I'm still not, strong enough' (in Keyser 1992: 10).

During a question and answer session after a screening of *Silence* in Los Angeles, Scorsese explained that *The Last Temptation of Christ* had taken him to a certain stage on his journey but that he realized that there was further to go:

But for myself, as a believer, unbeliever, doubter, have faith, not have faith, go through life, making mistakes, I don't know. Trying to make life better, to feel your way through to live in a better way for yourself and others primarily, *The Last Temptation of Christ* didn't take me that far. ... I knew [*Silence*] was for me, at this point in my life, the beckoning, the call. It said, 'Figure me out,' or at least try to. ... I am not Thomas Merton, I'm not Dorothy Day ... so you admire them and everything else but ... how can you be like them? ... How do you live it in your daily life? (In Pacatte 2016)

Before he went into production on *Silence*, Scorsese saw the film as 'dealing with nature and the evanescence of life, as opposed to it merely being about these two priests who are trying to sustain Christianity in Japan after the religion has been outlawed' (in Schickel 2013). Back in 1974, he had expressed his disgust at the Church for being 'run like a business'; and his desire 'to make a film in which a priest would discover, after trying to save other people, that he is the one who needs to be saved' (in Wilson 2011: 38). However, having read the novel of *Silence* in 1989, it took Scorsese many years to bring his adaptation to fruition because he felt that he did not understand the material and was not ready to get to 'the purity of faith'.

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Writing of *The Divine Comedy*, Reynolds points out that each soul is striving 'to return to God who created it, yet it is liable in its journey to take the wrong path' (Reynolds 2006: 84). In *Silence*, Scorsese tells the story of Christians who are on that very quest and, as a result of their actions, may reach their destination later rather than sooner, if at all. St Ignatius, who founded the Jesuit order, 'traversed a circuitous route, and he recognized that God's activity cannot be limited to people who consider themselves "religious". ... To use one of Ignatius's favourite expressions, his path is "a way of proceeding" along the way to God' (Martin 2010a).

In *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, J.R. and his friends drive to Copake for a three-day sojourn (a markedly symbolic number in terms of *The Divine Comedy*) and see a traffic sign in the centre for 'Route 22: North South' – they could go in either direction. It is a geographical choice that resonates with the life of St Ignatius, who reportedly made a visit to the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem,

believed to be the site of Christ's Ascension, in order to discover whether the feet of Jesus were pointing north or south when he ascended into Heaven. 'The tradition Ignatius was following was that, if the feet pointed southwards, the followers of Jesus were directed southwards to proclaim the gospel among the Jewish people only. If pointed northwards, it would mean that the gospel is intended for the whole world' (Neary 2017). Without St Ignatius's decision to take the gospel to the Far East, there would have been no Jesuits in Japan, and no Scorsese film called *Silence*.

Endo, who had also thought about becoming a priest like Scorsese, set the action of *Silence* in the time following the Shimabara Uprising when the rebels carried a flag bearing the motto 'Praised be the Blessed Sacrament' (Whelan 1996: 9) and 37,000 people were killed. The Prologue of Scorsese's *Silence* pays tribute to the bravery of the priests who were prepared to travel to Japan during this era of terror and refused to renounce their beliefs. As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993: 2473), 'Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he [sic] is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude.'

The missionary priests faced the possibility of laying down their lives for a greater Cause, following the example of Stephen, the first martyr, whom Dante celebrates in *The Divine Comedy*:

Then saw I people hot in fire of wrath,  
 With stones a young man slaying, clamorously  
 Still crying to each other, 'Kill him! kill him!'  
 And him I saw bow down, because of death  
 That weighed already on him, to the earth,  
 But of his eyes made ever gates to heaven,  
 Imploring the high Lord, in so great strife,  
 That he would pardon those his persecutors,  
 With such an aspect as unlocks compassion. (*Purg.* XV)

Indeed, *Silence* opens with a letter from Ferreira in which he writes of the martyrs: 'The story of their courage gives hope to those of us priests who remain here in secret.' Therefore, there is a disjuncture when the action shifts to a cold, white-walled room in which the two young Jesuits, Rodrigues and Garupe, sit opposite Fr Valignano and hear him say, 'Ferreira is lost to us.' The incredulity of the priests is understandable as they hear their mentor's words of heroic

encouragement via his epistle but cannot see the image available to the audience: Ferreira falling to his knees and putting his hand to his mouth in despair. He has become an unreliable narrator. 'We will not abandon our hidden Christians who live in fear. We only grow stronger in His love,' he says, as his head sinks down in submission rather than in prayer.

The mission to discover the truth about what happened to Ferreira also has a personal element for the two young priests: to save their father figure – the man who nurtured them in the faith and 'shaped the world for us'. Even if Ferreira has 'denounced God in public and surrendered the faith', they believe that they need to help him 'to save his soul'. As they descend the white stone steps outside the imposing cathedral in Macao, the eye of God shot, which makes the priests look small and vulnerable, also suggests that they are under a heavenly gaze.

Although Valignano expresses confidence in a divine plan, he warns them: 'The moment you set foot in that country, you step into high danger. You will be the last two priests to go. An army of two.' Boxer argues that the Jesuit 'General' was 'a commander in chief in fact as well as in name' (Boxer 1993: 45) and perhaps there was some 'similarity of training between these soldiers of the Cross and the samurai nurtured in the spartan precepts of the Warriors' Way' (Boxer 1993: 48). However, as they march along, the two young priests are soldiers without weapons.

As Rodrigues and Garupe set off across the ocean, there is an overhead shot of the prow of their ship as it appears through the waves, as if God is watching over them. Rodrigues reflects on the twenty years since the persecution broke out: 'The black soil of Japan is filled with the wailing of so many Christians. The red blood of priests has flowed profusely. The walls of the churches have fallen down.' As he speaks, the ship is obscured by the clouds as if they are now on their own. The camera catches the last rays of the sun as an image of the glory of God – but they will soon find themselves in darkness.

## The hidden Christians

*Silence* is a story of courage in which the traditional heroes are not the Jesuit priests but the poorest members of society whom they meet. Whatever the final fate of the real Ferreira may have been, there is no doubt that there were Japanese people who were prepared to die as martyrs for their faith. When the hidden Christians come to seek Rodrigues and Garupe in the caves by the shore, they are well aware of the danger: 'There are more executions than ever.'

In other Scorsese films, the Mafia may hold the power over life and death, but here it is the Inquisitor Inoue. Antoni Ucerler, a Jesuit priest and historian who was a consultant on the film, explains that the authorities were afraid that the Christians had divided loyalties because of their devotion to God rather than the Shogun: 'Such a faith undermined the entire system of absolute rule' and was, therefore, regarded as an 'evil teaching' (in Pinsky 2014).

As the Christians hold flaming torches as they walk to Tomogi village, the light appears to be a symbol of renewed life (rather than the torches that the guards carry as they come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which is the mark of betrayal). 'We hide the Kirishitan images but God still sees us, yes?' is the hopeful question of a villager named Mokichi (Shin'ya Tsukamoto). As Christopher Deacy explains, 'By placing their faith in Christ, [people] grasp the significance of the present routine because it leads to a future called "eternal life"' (in Deacy 2012: 81). The Japanese villagers have certainly taken that path and maintained their faith despite the dangers. Rodrigues reveals in voice-over: 'I was overwhelmed by the love that I felt from these people even though their faces couldn't show it.'

Yet, the priests are not presented as gallant heroes. The Jesuits appear fearful and ask undiplomatically phrased questions: 'How do you live like this?' is a query that might be interpreted as a comment on the Christians' poverty rather than their resolution. When the priests are given the food that the villagers have clearly sacrificed for their sake, they begin to devour it hungrily and then notice ashamedly that their hosts are saying grace in Latin. 'It is you who feed us,' says Ichizo, the 'Jisama' who baptizes the babies and leads the people in prayer because they have no other sacraments to sustain them. The two priests are often visualized together in the frame, creating a 'them and us' situation in which the hidden Christians often appear more virtuous.

The atmosphere of early Christianity in Rome is evoked. There is a grave-like cavity under the floor of their hut in which the priests can hide if necessary; and they say Mass at night 'just as they did in the catacombs'. An exterior shot of the building in which the Mass takes place reveals the glow of the naked flames visible against the darkness – the lights that could betray them to the Inquisitor.

When Rodrigues travels to the Goto islands, he finds that the people are not afraid to worship in the daytime in this location. During the consecration scene at Mass, the sunlight streams into the hut and illuminates the elevated host and the face of the priest. (**Figure 9.1**) The congregation is so large that Rodrigues divides the hosts into small pieces so that everyone is able to receive



**Figure 9.1** The Joy of the priesthood – bringing the Eucharist to the Hidden Christians in *Silence*.

Communion. ‘On that day, the faithful received fresh hope. And I was renewed,’ he reports, bringing the topic back to himself but sensing the fervour around him. The threat that these people faced will become clear to him when he returns to the islands on a second occasion and finds that the village has been ransacked and the people have fled.

### The martyrs

When a number of the villagers from Tomogi are about to be taken hostage in an attempt to root out Christianity, Mokichi says they are not afraid to die and will never surrender the priests. His own vow turns out to be true – these are not the empty words that Peter speaks in the New Testament: ‘Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be’ (Mk 14.29). As they part for the last time, Mokichi gives Rodrigues a handmade crucifix, explaining its symbolic significance: ‘It was all we had.’ There is a close-up of Mokichi’s hand covered in dirt as Rodrigues accepts the simple gift with the acknowledgement, ‘Your faith gives me strength, Mokichi. I wish I could give as much to you.’ At this stage, the audience does not know the ultimate relevance of the gesture. Mokichi replies, ‘My love for God is strong. Could that be the same as faith?’ In fact, the faith of Mokichi will carry Rodrigues through until the end, as he will treasure this crucifix for the rest of his life, concealing it in his clothes when he is in prison, and dying with it when he is cremated.

Although the hostages trample on the *fumi-e*, with their muddy feet adding to the sense of degradation, they are unable (with the predictable exception of



Kichijiro) to spit upon a crucifix and to say the Virgin Mary 'is a whore'. In the novel of *Silence* Rodrigues notices the devotion to the Virgin Mary. 'Indeed, I myself since coming to Tomogi have been a little worried seeing that the peasants sometimes seem to honor Mary rather than Christ' (Endo 1969: 56). In the film, one of the precious hidden images that the villagers uncover is 'Our Lady of the Snow' – a reproduction of which Scorsese gave to Pope Francis during his papal audience in November 2016.

Endo was inspired by 'Eric Fromm's distinction between a mother religion in which deities are nurturing and forgiving, and a father religion in which God is fearful, judgmental and punitive' (Dougill 2015: 148). In Dante's *Paradiso*, the Pilgrim meets the Virgin Mary on his journey towards salvation in Canto XXXIII:

In thee compassion is, in thee is pity,  
 In thee magnificence; in thee unites  
 Whate'er of goodness is in any creature.  
 Now doth this man, who from the lowest depth  
 Of the universe as far as here has seen  
 One after one the spiritual lives,  
 Supplicate thee through grace for so much power  
 That with his eyes he may uplift himself  
 Higher towards the uttermost salvation.

This maternal image is pursued by Endo in *Silence* and his writings about Japanese Catholicism, in which he stressed the appeal of 'the mother love of God, the love that forgives wrongs and binds wounds and draws, rather than forces, others to itself' (Fujimura 2016).

Scorsese has also explained his interest in 'a more nurturing, female side of the religion' and his attempt to develop 'a nurturing compassion' (in Schickel 2013). His appreciation for the maternal nature of God is shown by the fact that the title of his early film project *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* was inspired by a quotation from the New Testament when Jesus looks across at the city and says, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings' (Mt. 23.37). It is also notable that Charlie goes towards the *Pietà* in the church scene in *Mean Streets* rather than any of the other statues. Endo believed that 'Jesus brought the message of mother love to balance the father love of the Old Testament. A mother's love will not desert even a child who commits a crime' (Fujimura 2016).

In a voice-over that is half whispered, as if he is afraid of being overheard by the Samurai, Rodrigues says, 'These people are the most devoted of God's creatures on earth. ... God sends us trials to test us and everything he does is good. And I prayed to undergo trials like his son. But why must their trial be so terrible? And why, when I look in my own heart, do the answers I give them seem so weak?' As Ratzinger points out, 'The doctrinal assertion that justification is by faith and not by works means that justification happens through sharing in the death of Christ, that is by walking in the way of martyrdom, the daily drama by which we prefer what is right and true to the claims of sheer existence, through the spirit of love which faith makes possible' (1988: 99). However, in *Silence*, it is the drama of explicit, painful martyrdom that is played out.

The following scene is of Mokichi tied to a cross, being given *sake* to drink, as Jesus was given the 'sponge soaked in wine' (Jn 19.29) by the Roman soldiers. 'I prayed they remembered our Lord's suffering and took courage and comfort from it,' says Rodrigues, who is observing events with Garupe from the hillside, like the women in the New Testament who are 'looking on from a distance' (Mk 15.40) as Jesus is crucified.

The execution scene takes place near the caves where the priests first sought shelter when they arrived in Japan. It was the site of their landing when they supposedly brought hope and salvation – but it has now become a place of death. There are three crosses in a Calvary tableau with Mokichi in the middle. (Figure 9.2) It is believed that St Peter felt that he was not worthy to be killed in the same manner as Jesus and asked to be crucified upside down. In *Silence*, it gradually becomes clear that there is another dimension to the punishment, as the crosses are by the ocean, so that the incoming tide adds to the pain of



Figure 9.2 On the way to Paradise: the Tomogi martyrs in *Silence*.

crucifixion. There are shots of the crashing waves, in which the beauty and power of nature become threatening as the sea drowns the victims.

In a 'manual on martyrdom' the advice was given: 'While being tortured visualize the Passion of Jesus. ... Hope and confidence should occupy your mind, since at that moment God shall tender a special help' (Boxer 1993: 354). There were Jesuit publications that explained 'that eternal salvation outweighed the more temporary nature of physical distress: better to suffer a few hours of extreme pain than to endure the horrors of hell for all eternity' (see Dougill 2015: 103). Inoue 'noted in his memoranda that Christians had been taught that they would forfeit their entrance into paradise if they died with feelings of hate towards their persecutors. Consequently they very rarely displayed any resentment, however much they suffered' (Boxer 1993: 341).

When St Stephen was martyred, he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7.56). Hanging on a cross, Ichizo looks up to the sky and cries, 'Paraiso!' and bows his head and dies. The last words of St Stephen are, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' and 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (Acts 7.59-60). At this moment, Mokichi's concern is for his friend: 'Deus-sama. Please receive Jisama's spirit. Jisama's suffering has ended. Receive him Lord.' It is as if Mokichi takes on the role of the priest who would perform the last rites, as they have no one else by their side. As Mokichi cries out 'Lord!' and, 'In Your glory. Please, Jesus!' the priests bow their heads and pray in their helpless state, cowering in their hiding place.

The death of the Tomogi martyrs is a helpful illustration of Ratzinger's claim:

Only God incarnate can draw us out of the waters by his power and hold us firm. Only he can make us stand up straight on the breakers of the sea of mortality. His promise is that we will attain the vision of God, which is life, not through speculative thinking but by the purity of an undivided heart, in the faith and love that take the Lord's hand and are led by it. (1988: 152)

The people 'who persevere in faithfulness to Christ are "blessed" even if they "die in the Lord"' (Rev. 14.12-13) (see Burk et al. 2016: 39-40). Scorsese once said that he was inspired by those moments in films that stay in the mind, and that he wanted to create those effects himself for his audiences: 'It'll change their lives a little bit. I don't know - that kind of thing. Those moments that you don't forget' (in Kelly 1980: 22). The crucifixion scene in the sea is one such moment.

If Peter and the apostles had been captured by the Romans when Jesus was arrested, they would not have been free to spread the Good News of the Resurrection three days later. In the novel of *Silence*, Endo draws attention to

this fact by mentioning the story of a Franciscan in Japan who gave himself up and, as a result, 'the whole underground work of the mission was impaired and the safety of the Christians was jeopardized. . . . Its moral was that a priest does not exist in order to become a martyr; he must preserve his life in order that the flame of faith may not utterly die when the church is persecuted' (Endo 1969: 73). Yet, rather than seeming noble, the priests appear to be the cowards who are 'giving up' and 'running away' as Garupe himself fears.

The audience subsequently hears the text of Rodrigues's letter to Valignano, which is still a public profession of his faith to his superior: 'Fr Valignano, you will say that their death is not meaningless. Surely God heard their prayers as they died. But did He hear their screams?' Yet the Tomogi martyrs did not scream – they went to their deaths with conviction. In his confusion, Rodrigues asks, 'How can I explain His silence to these people who have endured so much? I need all my strength to understand it myself.' He still sees himself in the superior, educated role, yet the villagers – the less sophisticated men – are the ones who accept death with the kind of child-like trust of which Jesus speaks when asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven: 'Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Mt. 18.4).

When Rodrigues himself is captured and sits with other prisoners, they are initially delighted to see him and then gradually surprised to discover that he is afraid. One woman called Monica (named after the mother of St Augustine, as Rodrigues points out) gives him the only food she has (like Elijah and the widow in 1 Kgs 17.7-16). Rodrigues responds gratefully with the words, 'Blessed be God' but he is no great prophet (although Elijah himself famously ran away, too, at one point (1 Kgs 19.3)) and he cannot save her life. Indeed, Rodrigues asks the prisoners, 'Why are you so calm? We are all about to die like that.' The Japanese Christians look confused at his outburst, and it is Monica (Nana Komatsu) who preaches the sermon that presumably should have come from Rodrigues's lips, recalling the words of their former priest who died at Unzen: 'Fr Juan said that if we die, we will go to Paraiso. . . . Isn't it good to die? Paraiso is so much better than here. No one hungry, never sick. No taxes, no hard work.' Rising to the occasion a little too late, Rodrigues responds: 'Padre Juan was right. There is no hard work in Paraiso. There is no work at all. There is [*sic*] no taxes. There is no suffering. We hope we'll be united with God.' He looks heavenwards. 'There will be no pain.'

In the Nagasaki prison, Rodrigues spends his days in peace, making rosaries, praying and hearing confessions. 'Thank you, Lord, for the gentle days here,' he says as he ministers to the prisoners. If it were not for the wooden bars, it would appear to be a Bible study group. He quotes from Ps. 16.8: 'I shall never

be shaken.' Rodrigues's difficulty is that he cannot live up to the image that he has of himself. He initially sees himself in the heroic mode, telling the Tomogi hostages that they should step on the *fumi-e* ('It's all right to trample') because he believes that they are weaker than himself. Yet, he then has to stand by and watch the Japanese Christians suffer while he remains alive.

The scene in which five prisoners are called forward to step on the *fumi-e* is shown from his point of view as he observes events through the bars of his jail. When the prisoners refuse to comply and are returned (with the exception of one man named Juan) to their cell, it seems to be a moment of victory. Rodrigues is relieved at this turn of events, and he sinks down to the ground and says, 'Thank you, Lord, for hearing my prayer.' But the follow-up is unexpected and it quickly seems that his prayer has gone unanswered: a Samurai strides across the yard and beheads Juan with a stroke of his sword. Rodrigues hears the screams from the onlookers and Juan's head rolls into view followed by a trail of blood. Rodrigues's only response is to bang the walls of his cell with his fists, crying aloud and retching. The camera pans from left to right behind the prison bars, adopting Rodrigues's disorientated perspective as he tries to make sense of the violence, followed by the appearance of Kichijiro to commit yet another act of apostasy.

Rodrigues then is forced to watch his friend Garupe accept martyrdom willingly. He is led to the ocean to see his fellow prisoners bound in straw mats so that they will sink more quickly beneath the waves. If Garupe apostatizes, the Japanese will be saved; if Garupe does not renounce his own faith, the Christians will be thrown into the sea. The Interpreter explains to Rodrigues, 'There are still hundreds of Christian peasants on the islands off the coast. We want the padre to deny and be an example to them.' But Garupe refuses: he swims after the boat that is carrying the people to their deaths, trying in vain to save Monica who is the last prisoner to be thrown overboard, and he ultimately drowns with her. Rodrigues is left powerless, kneeling on the sand, his face stained with tears. Inside he is crying, 'Apostatize! For their sake, Lord, do not leave this to us.' He also knows that he is now the last Jesuit priest left in Japan.

### Rodrigues's pilgrimage

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's Pilgrim moves joyously towards God at the centre of *Paradiso*. At the heart of *Silence* is the pilgrimage of Rodrigues, his

relationship with Jesus, and his journey towards death when he, too, believes that he will meet his Maker. As he sets out on his mission, Rodrigues begins with his dreams of following St Francis Xavier with the prayer: 'What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?' When Rodrigues is alone before his arrest, he kneels on the rocks and scoops water from a stream with his hand, seeing his own reflection in the water. The image gradually evolves into the face of Jesus in the El Greco painting – the picture that he loves. At this point, he laughs loudly at the incongruity, splashing his head in the water in his despair. It is at this moment that he is captured, having been betrayed by Kichijiro in the role of Judas.

Rodrigues is brought through the streets on a horse, as Jesus entered Jerusalem. But the people do not greet him with palm branches and shouts of joy. He rides while the Japanese Christians walk, but his elevated position singles him out for abuse rather than for honour. 'I thought that martyrdom would be my salvation. Please, please, God, do not let it be my shame,' he prays.

In the prison, he continues to meditate on the face of Jesus in the El Greco painting: 'Speaking to me, I'm sure of it. Promising I will not abandon you.' However, this time he visualizes the picture against the floor of his cell, so that the face of Jesus is divided into two by the gap between the wooden boards. The cracks are already beginning to show in the perfect image (of the painting and of himself). As he repeats the phrase, 'I will not abandon you,' the question is: does he believe that Jesus will never abandon him? Or is he trying to convince himself that he will never abandon Jesus? It is now that he is becoming fully aware of his own weakness: 'I fear, Jesus, forgive me, I may not be worthy of you.'

During Rodrigues's several Gethsemane moments, he remembers the Christians who have gone before him: the beheading of Juan at the prison, and the drowning in the sea of Monica and Garupe. Alone in his cell, Rodrigues mumbles, 'My God, why have you forsaken me? As your son. Your son's words on the cross.' He is taking on a Christotypical role but becoming incoherent in his despair as he thinks of the martyrs: 'Ludicrous. Ludicrous. Stupid. He's not going to answer.' He cries, unable to hear any response to his prayers. There is an eye of God shot of Rodrigues on the floor of his cell in a foetal position, which evokes the opening of *The Last Temptation of Christ* when Jesus is lying on the earth, unsure of his mission.

It is in this weakened state that Rodrigues is taken through the streets in a palanquin to a Buddhist temple to meet 'the Other' – his former teacher, Ferreira, who has, indeed, apostatized. Ferreira is first shown with distorted

features, a fact that gradually becomes understandable when the shot is rotated to show that he is actually upside down (giving him the deformed look of Max Cady in *Cape Fear* when he hung from his exercise bar and betrayed the trust of Danielle Bowden). It is a scene from the past when Ferreira was tortured in the pit, praying the Our Father as he is lowered down.

The meeting with Ferreira is another test of Rodrigues's resolve: the gaunt figure in front of him, writing his refutations of Christianity, is a foretaste of his own future. There is a shot of Ferreira's horrified face as he steps on the *fumi-e*, then he falls to his knees and embraces the image. It is not clear how much of this event he describes to Rodrigues or whether the audience is given an insight into his memory (as in the rape scene in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* when the Girl recounts her trauma). When Rodrigues is transferred to another prison cell, he finds the words 'Laudate Eum' (Praise Him) carved into the wall and believes it to be a sign of hope left for him by a previous prisoner. So he is distressed when he learns that the words were written by Ferreira, the apostate. He is constantly undermined as he searches for fresh courage in his time of trial.

With his hair flowing down, Rodrigues has begun to resemble a traditional Jesus-figure in a New Testament film, but he has lost his inner conviction. He is talking to Jesus about the night of his Passion: 'In the garden you said, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death". I would bleed for you. I would. I would die for you. His prayers are interrupted by the unexpected appearance of Kichijiro, asking to make his fourth confession for his many acts of apostasy and his betrayal of the priest: 'Padre, forgive me.' As Kichijiro is dragged away, Rodrigues makes the sign of the cross wearily, as if he has given him absolution, but the sense of superiority that he once felt is no more.

It is now that he is faced with his greatest moral dilemma. He does not understand that the distressing noises that he can hear outside are the groans of five Christians who are hanging in the pit and will remain there until he apostatizes. Ferreira confronts him with accusations that have the ring of truth: 'You see Jesus in Gethsemane and believe your trial is the same as his. Those five in the pit are suffering, too, just like Jesus. But they don't have your pride. They would never compare themselves to Jesus. Do you have the right to make them suffer?' The faces of the two Jesuits are framed within the wooden bars of the cell, as if they are separated in a confessional, but Rodrigues sees Ferreira as the satanic tempter rather than his confessor: 'You excuse yourself, you excuse yourself. That is the spirit of darkness.' In the novel of *Silence*, Rodrigues remembers that he has heard of apostates being used by the authorities 'as



though they felt they could justify their own ugly crime by adding one more to their number. Their way of thinking is akin to that of the fallen angels when they allure men into sin' (Endo 1969: 72).

Ferreira continues: 'What would you do for them? Pray? And get what in return? Only more suffering. A suffering only you can end, not God. I prayed, too, Rodrigues. It doesn't help. Go on. Pray. But pray with your eyes open.' Two guards drag Rodrigues outside, and for the first time he sees the pit for himself, with the flames in the background to confirm the hellish theme. Ferreira explains: 'You can spare them. They call out for help just as you called to God. He is silent but you do not have to be.'

Rodrigues cries out to the prisoners to apostatize ('Korobu!') but he is told that they already have – although, notably, this fact is never proved and it is not known whether any of them would have died willingly for their faith like Mokichi. 'They are here for you, Rodrigues,' continues Ferreira, explaining that, if Rodrigues does not apostatize, the Christians cannot be saved. Ferreira says: 'A Priest should act in imitation of Christ. If Christ were here ... If Christ were here, He would have acted. Apostatized for their sake.' (This is the most controversial line.) Rodrigues replies in anguish, 'No, He's here, Christ is here. I just can't hear Him.' Ferreira continues to urge him on: 'Show God you love Him. Save the lives of the people He loves.' He puts the *fumi-e* down on the ground himself. 'There is something more important than the judgement of the Church. You are now going to fulfil the most painful act of love that has ever been performed.' As Rodrigues, breathing heavily in his anguish, looks towards the five victims, the Interpreter adds his own inducement: 'It's only a formality.'

John Paul Meenan takes a very negative view of the scene, regarding these words as devilish counsel: 'I wonder whether Thomas More heard a similar voice while he sat in the Tower, as King Henry's ministers cajoled him into signing the declaration that would make the potentate "Head of the Church in England": "Sign, sign, for what, really is a piece of paper and ink?"' (Meenan 2016). The key distinction here is that Rodrigues is not encouraged to betray his beliefs in order to save his own skin, as was the case with the other Christian martyrs who had gone before him. He is being asked to renounce his faith in order to save five other people who are suffering in front of him. But Meenan also points to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states that moral evil is 'incommensurably more harmful than physical evil' (#311) and to 'the constant and firm teaching of the Church that moral evil must be resisted even to the point of death, and not just one's own death, but the suffering and death of others, even of those we love' (Meenan 2016).



Steven Greydanus sets out the dilemma with reference to St Augustine, who in his treatise *On Lying* wrote of 'the hypothetical case of a man who refuses to apostatize even when threatened with the execution of his father. . . . Such a man, Augustine concluded, is not a parricide; the authorities, not he, are responsible for the father's death' (Greydanus 2017). It is a case supported by McCabe: 'For example, if I allow someone innocent to be killed rather than tell a lie which would save that person, I am not committing an evil and I am in no sense guilty of the person's death or of anything else' (2010: 3). Rodrigues is faced with this exact situation but decides to tell the lie (i.e. apostatize) and save the victims.

But Adam Roberts puts forward another valid argument: 'If you were tortured for your beliefs, it would of course take strength to hold out. But if *others* are tortured for your beliefs, and you still refuse to yield, do we still call that strength? Doesn't it look more like a kind of pitilessness?' (Roberts 2017). Garupe takes this decision when he refuses to apostatize and sees the Japanese Christians drowned in the sea, although he is soon to follow of his own volition.

For Rodrigues, it is obviously not 'only a formality' to put his foot on the *fumi-e*. It is not simply a matter of desecrating a holy symbol. Indeed, in his research on Italian culture, Gambino points out that Italians who had not received the Divine Intervention for which they had prayed would submit statues 'to public ridicule. Some were bound in chains and others were spat upon or stoned in the piazza. . . . During the volcanic eruption [of Vesuvius in 1906] when a stream of white hot lava headed towards Naples, residents of the city placed statues of the city's patron, San Gennaro [who is honoured in the street festival in *Mean Streets*], directly in the path of the threatening flow, shouting to the saint, "Save our city or perish!"' (Gambino 2011: 228). In *Who's That Knocking at My Door* the statue of the Madonna and Child sits among the kitchenware rather than on an altar but without any sense of disrespect. Scorsese refers to a scene in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Allen 1986) when Mickey (played by Woody Allen himself) thinks about converting to Catholicism and 'sees a 3-D Jesus winking at him. . . . That's a low blow in the movie, but we deserve it. We let these images take over. Of course, people don't worship these images, they worship the God that the images represent' (in Kelly 1996: 227–8).

But for the Japanese Christians, the *fumi-e* 'uniquely portrays their own experience of choosing between being a Christian and being a Japanese' (Fujimura 2016). It is not the object itself that is sacred but what the act of stepping upon it represents for the identity of the person concerned and his relationship with God. And for Rodrigues, it means the complete public dismantling of his character and his self-belief. Ferreira's words are close to the

truth when he makes reference to 'the judgement of the Church.' For reputation and pride have been central elements of Rodrigues's personality.

To emphasize the momentousness of the scene, the sound is cut completely – with powerful effect in the cinema. There is a close-up of the *fumi-e*, on which there is an image of Jesus's sorrowful face with his eyes closed in pain. Then the silence is broken and the audience hear a gentle male voice: 'Come ahead now. It's all right. Step on me. I understand your pain.' There is a further close-up of the face of Jesus. 'I was born into this world to share men's pain. I carried this cross for your pain. Your life is with me now. Step.' The silence returns.

Scorsese faced the dilemma: 'How do I do the voice of Jesus?' He reacted against the Hollywood epics that he loved as a child with their glorious music and the beautiful language of the Bible. The divine voice sounds like Ciaran Hinds, the actor who plays Valignano, the Jesuit whom Rodrigues addresses as his 'father' in his letters. It is voice that he can trust to show him the way.

When Endo's novel was translated into English, one of the key issues was the difficulty of rendering the subtleties of the Japanese language, especially with regard to the voice of Christ. In the novel translated by William Johnston, the scene reads:

This is no mere formality. He will now trample on what he has considered the most beautiful thing in his life, on what he has believed most pure, on what is filled with the ideals and the dreams of man. How his foot aches! And then the Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: 'Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross.'  
(Endo 1969: 171)

Junko Endo, the writer's wife, pointed out the misleading use of the imperative (rather than the permissive mood) in the above translation of the word 'trample'. She explains: 'The Christ in bronze talks to the priest as if he were ... a mother who, sharing the anguish and pain for her child, says, "You may step on me now that I have perceived your suffering and weakness." The difference between "Trample!" and "You may step on me" is so clear that there is no need to make a further comment' (Endo 1999: 145). Scorsese has clearly addressed this issue in the film script.

His understanding of the significance of the scene comes across in Andrew Garfield's recollection of the shoot in an interview with Paul Elie: 'It's something we had both waited for, but Marty had waited much longer – he had waited decades to film that scene.' Elie reports: 'The director was ready; the priest

stepped – and then there was a technical difficulty. “I almost lost my mind, and I think Marty did, too,” Garfield recalled. “He wanted it to be done in one take.” There was a second take, and the priest profaned the image of Christ once and for all’ (Elie 2016).

As Rodrigues steps on the *fumi-e*, the face of Christ in the El Greco painting – the face that Rodrigues loves – is seen once more. The surrounding lighting has a red glow. There is a close-up of Rodrigues’s right foot on the image, and then he falls to the floor in slow motion with his hand on the *fumi-e*. The ambient sounds return, bringing to attention the ongoing agony of the Christian victims. Inoue is watching the scene, and he turns away as the Interpreter gives the signal to raise the prisoners out of the pit.

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus controversially claims that he has the easier task in comparison to Judas, and *Silence* certainly presents the idea that it is traumatic to be left behind with the mark of the traitor. Ricoeur writes that ‘martyrdom, accepted with joy and sometimes desired, inclines a man to regard death as the beginning of true life, the life with Christ; by contrast, the sojourn in this “valley of tears” seems to be no more than a time of trial and a figure of evil’ (Ricoeur 1967: 335). Rodrigues is clearly in a valley of tears. In the words of Dante:

Now knoweth he how dearly it doth cost  
Not following Christ, by the experience  
Of this sweet life and of its opposite. (*Par.* XX)

Peter C. Phan, a Jesuit theologian, asks: ‘Are we allowed to do an essentially evil act to obtain a good result? If it is done to save himself, then the answer is no. But the novel [of *Silence*] is so complex because he does it for his followers, for the good end of saving his flock. He will go to hell – but he will go to hell for their sake’” (see Elie 2016).

As a Jesuit, who is familiar with *The Spiritual Exercises*, Rodrigues would have carried out the meditation on Hell at the end of the first week and gained ‘a deep awareness of the pain suffered by the damned, so that if I should forget the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of punishment will help me to avoid falling into sin’ (in Balthasar 1988: 86). He might also consider the warning to potential apostates that people who have ‘been instructed in the way of Truth [and] fall from it will be more bitterly afflicted in Inferno than those who have never come into contact with the Law’ (in Dougill 2015: 103–4). The obvious question is: will Rodrigues really end his pilgrimage in Hell?

## Mercy

As Rodrigues commits his act of apostasy, a cock crows in the background – a sound which is evidently associated with St Peter's betrayal of Jesus. While Rodrigues has seen Kichijiro as the key traitor in his personal narrative, he now finds himself associated with St Peter's moment of shame. Yet, as mentioned earlier, Rodrigues was well aware of the 'Feed my lambs' scene in St John's Gospel, when Jesus asks three times: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' and Peter replies three times: 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus had once said, 'Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father' (Mt. 10.32-33). Yet, Peter was clearly given a second chance.

In *Paradiso*, the Pilgrim meets people who have broken their religious vows: 'True substances are these which thou beholdest, / Here relegate for breaking of some vow' (*Par.* III). Although they are in the outer realms of heaven, they are content with their situation:

And his will is our peace; this is the sea  
To which is moving onward whatsoever  
It doth create, and all that nature makes. (*Par.* III)

In writing his novel, Endo was concerned with the responses of the Christians who lived during the era of persecution: 'What kind of people were they, and how did they feel about the act of betrayal? What would he himself have done?' (see Dougill 2015: 143). Boxer points out that, after 1614, many of the apostasies 'were only "from the teeth out," and induced solely by the pain or the fear of torture' (Boxer 1993: 361). However, there were stern warnings against a display of apostasy that masks an inner faith: 'One might say: My mind is not changed at all but I have declared apostasy only in appearance, for continuing to live. This is an evident fraud. It is usual with a traitor that he says otherwise than as he thinks' (in Dougill 2015: 104).

The film is capable of sparking intense debate among cinema audiences. *Silence* raises a raft of issues for the moral theologian with regard to suffering: 'Good people do not intervene because they are powerless. Wicked people do not intervene because they are evil. Which of these groups does God resemble?' (McCabe 2010: 3). Scorsese himself states: 'Failing, doing something that is morally reprehensible, that is a great sin – well, many people will never come back from that. But the Christian way would be to get up and try again. Maybe

not consciously, but you get yourself into a situation where you can make another choice. And that's the situation Rodrigues is in' (in Elie 2016).

Children mock Rodrigues and call him 'Apostate Paul'. In the novel, it is recorded that he had visions at night when 'the Inquisition, just like the Last Judgement in the *Apocalypse*, was pursuing him vividly and realistically' (Endo 1969: 175). However, Endo himself castigated people who condemned the apostates: 'It shows not the shallow faith of those who end up apostatizing, but it reveals the lack of compassion in the ones making such a judgment' (in Fujimura 2016).

Unlike Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, '*Silence* is not a triumphant pilgrimage with clear outcomes, but a meandering pilgrimage of one wounded by life and confounded by faith, whose experience of faith has been punctuated by betrayals, his own and those of others' (Fujimura 2016). Rodrigues's sad, drawn face indicates that he is now one of 'the walking dead' (in Doak 2015: 11). Yet, Rodrigues never really abandons his faith in God. Gary Wills compares him to Graham Greene's 'whiskey priest' who does not lose his faith in *The Power and the Glory*; and he points out that Rodrigues 'does defect, not from weakness but from love, to spare Christian converts the persecution mounted against them' (in Gessel 2015: 32).

In the final section of the film, a Dutch physician named Dieter Albrecht takes up the story in 1641. Ferreira and Rodrigues are forced to examine imported goods to see if they have a Christian symbolism, and it appears that Rodrigues is the more rigorous of the two carrying out the task. When Ferreira draws attention to this fact ('We were taught to love those who scorned us'), Rodrigues replies coldly, 'I feel nothing for them.' At Ferreira's surprising response ('Only Our Lord can judge your heart'), Rodrigues whispers, 'You said "Our Lord"'. That and 'I doubt it,' are Ferreira's final words. The audience does not see him again.

Rodrigues is given a Japanese name and a wife (a widow with a son) but it is not stated whether he remains celibate (unlike in the earlier film version, *Chinmoku* (1971) directed by Masahiro Shinoda, in which the priest aggressively consummates his marriage). In his last onscreen meeting with Inoue, it is revealed that there are still Christians on the islands of Ikitsuki and Goto, who will not be pursued because the roots of their faith are cut. In his final comment on the situation, Inoue informs Rodrigues consolingly, 'You were not defeated by me. You were defeated by this swamp of Japan. Welcome.'

Rodrigues lives in Edo for the rest of his life and writes regular vows of apostasy as requested, although he exchanges silent glances with his wife as he hands over the documents. The relationship between Rodrigues and Kichijiro is now transformed, as the Jesuit is grateful to be supported by the man he had once pitied and condemned. However, when Kichijiro calls him 'padre', Rodrigues closes the window so that no one can hear and explains, 'Not any more. I'm a fallen priest.' Kichijiro pleads with him to hear his confession, so that he can ask for forgiveness and be at peace: 'I betrayed you. I betrayed my family. I betrayed Our Lord. Please hear my confession.' Although Kichijiro's actions earlier in the film rather undermine the sacrament (this is his fifth attempt to confess a similar sin), it is a sign of the healing power of confession. **(Figure 9.3)** The act of confession contains a 'matrix of emotion, fear, anguish. It is this emotional note that gives rise to objectification in discourse; the confession expresses, pushes to the outside, the emotion which without it would be shut up in itself, as an impression of the soul' (Ricoeur 1967: 7). When Kichijiro was hiding under the stairs in the tavern when Rodrigues first met him, he was a fallen man. The sacrament of reconciliation allowed him to live again. Scorsese has commented on his mentor, Fr Principe's view of Mediterranean Catholicism and the beauty is that 'if you fail, and you fall [Korubu], ... you're not damned for life. The idea is, you get up again, and you try your best. And if you fail again, you fail again, and you try your best' (Scorsese 2017a).

As Kichijiro kneels down, the audience hears Rodrigues's interior prayer: 'Lord I have fought against Your silence.' Then the voice of Jesus is heard: 'I suffered beside you. I was never silent.' Placing his hand on Kichijiro's head as a sign of forgiveness, Rodrigues continues his dialogue with Jesus. In tears, he



**Figure 9.3** The peace of repentance in *Silence*.

says aloud: 'I know. But even if God had been silent my whole life, to this very day, everything I do, everything I've done speaks of Him. It was in the silence that I heard Your voice.' Given that the original title of the novel was *The Aroma of the Sunshine* or *The Scent of the Sunshine*, Endo has admitted that the title *Silence* might cause confusion: 'I did not write a book about the Silence of God; I wrote a book about the Voice of God speaking through suffering and silence' (in Fujimura 2016). Scorsese himself has described *Silence* as 'the story of a man who learns – so painfully – that God's love is more mysterious than he knows, that He leaves much more to the ways of men than we realise, and that He is always present ... even in his silence' (2015: 398).

There are two major examples of silence in the film. At the beginning, when the sounds of nature rise to a crescendo and then are abruptly cut; and at the moment that Rodrigues steps on the *fumi-e* in his act of betrayal, allowing him to finally hear the voice that he believes to be that of Jesus. The second time is the moment of kenosis – an emptying out. The complete silence underlines this act. In a world of sound – sitting in a twenty-first-century cinema where sound is expected – the sudden silence is striking.

In the Good Friday Stations of the Cross in March 2013, Pope Francis said, 'Sometimes it seems that God does not react to evil, as if he is silent. And yet, God has spoken, he has replied, and his answer is the Cross of Christ: a word which is love, mercy, forgiveness' (2013). The novel of *Silence* 'ends with the emptiness or *kenosis* of Jesus who cries out that he came into the world to be trampled on. It ends with the *kenosis* of the priest who, out of compassion and love, empties himself completely' (Johnston 2006: 109). Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that, in *The Divine Comedy*, there is 'the glory of a Heaven aflame with the Eros of God, but the distinctly Christian quality of this – God's descent into death and Hell, his humiliation to the point of complete kenosis, God taking our place and bearing the sin of the whole world – this kind of glory does not come into view' (1986: 101). This is the difference with the suffering Christ in *Silence*.

\* \* \*

In 1667 Kichijiro is discovered to be wearing an amulet containing a religious image, and he is taken away. He maintains that Rodrigues did not give it to him – so there is no final act of betrayal here. Albrecht Dieter reports in voice-over that Rodrigues died and 'never acknowledged a Christian god. Not by word or symbol. He never spoke of Him and never prayed. Not even when he died. The business of his faith was long ended.'





**Figure 9.4** The sign of faith in *Silence*.

There are three guards by the coffin – maintaining a tripartite dimension until the end – but Rodrigues's wife is allowed to approach and to place inside a *mamorigatana* to ward off evil spirits. It is also at this point that she slips Mokichi's crucifix into Rodrigues's hands – although the audience is not clear what she has done at this stage. Although her face is impassive and she does not weep, it will later become obvious that there was a secret bond of trust between husband and wife with regard to his religion and that she knew the significance of this symbol of faith.

In the Buddhist ceremony, the coffin is set alight. In voice-over, Albrecht claims that Rodrigues 'ended as they wanted and as I first saw him: lost to God.' There is a close-up of the flames and then the camera passes through the fire and into the interior of the coffin to an extreme close-up of Rodrigues's dead hands in which Mokichi's crucifix glows in the light. (**Figure 9.4**) And Albrecht adds the caveat: 'But as to that, indeed, only God can answer.' Is that the light of the tormenting fires of Hell, the purifying fires of Purgatory or the glory of God in Heaven?

Dante evidently had confidence in the Afterlife: 'I say that of all the stupidities that is the most foolish, the basest, and the most pernicious, which believes that after this life there is no other; for if we turn over all the writings both of the philosophers and the other wise authors, all agree that within us there is a certain part that endures' (in Royal 1999: 69–70). In *The Divine Comedy* his interest lay in where human beings might spend the Afterlife and he had some clear ideas. Where Dante would have placed Rodrigues is an interesting question.



## Conclusion

Scorsese's film *Silence* ends with a dedication: 'For the Japanese Christians and their pastors. Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.' He had written that very Jesuit motto in English ('For the greater glory of God') at the end of his *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* treatment in 1966 – and, fifty years later, it finally appeared in Latin on cinema screens. The dedication of the film to the Japanese Christians also has a poignancy. The ban on Christianity in Japan was lifted in the nineteenth century, and Fr Bernard Petitjean (1829–84) writes of the discovery of the Kakure Kirishitan on 17 March 1865. In his diary, the priest recounts that fifteen Japanese people came to his new church in Nagasaki. 'Three women then knelt beside him and said, "The heart of all of us here is the same as yours"' (Whelan 1996: 13). About 50,000 eventually emerged. During the years in hiding the people had passed on knowledge about 'the Trinity, the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Ten Commandments. Without books or priests to instruct them or renew their faith, they had transmitted several prayers orally and many knew the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, the Confiteor, the Salve Regina, and the Act of Contrition' (Whelan 1996: 14–15).

When Tagita Kōya (1896–1994) was carrying out research into 'The Religious Mentality of Japanese Schoolchildren' he was surprised to find answers relating to the Afterlife that made reference to Heaven, Hell and Purgatory, and he discovered that the respondents, who lived on Iōjima, a small island near Nagasaki, were descendants of the first converts to Christianity dating back to the sixteenth century (see Whelan 1996: 15). For almost three hundred years they had managed to preserve their Christian faith in secret.

Trying to explain *Silence*, Scorsese said: 'The vehicle that one takes towards faith, which can be very helpful – the institution of the church, the sacraments – this all can be very helpful, but ultimately it has to be yourself, and you have to find it. You have to find that faith, or you have to find a relationship with Jesus with yourself really, because ultimately that's the one you face' (in Martin 2016). As Dante himself said, with a nod to St Paul:

Faith is the substance of the things we hope for,  
And evidence of those that are not seen;  
And this appears to me its quiddity. (*Par.* XXIV)

Reflecting on *The Divine Comedy*, Robert Royal writes that ‘Dante’s overall theme is the love that pervades the universe and we moral beings either find harmony in that order of love or, by opposing God’s Love, damage the creation, ourselves, and others around us’ (1999: 32); and Prue Shaw (2014) notes that Dante’s narrative strategy ‘confronts us with the ambiguities, the reticences and the self-deceptions of real human behavior in a real human world’. Centuries later, and using technology that was beyond Dante’s reach, Scorsese has taken up that subject matter. In an article in defence of his cinematic craft, Scorsese wrote:

I saw something extraordinary and inspiring in the art of cinema when I was very young. The images that I saw thrilled me but they also illuminated something within me. The cinema gave me a means of understanding and eventually expressing what was precious and fragile in the world around me. This recognition, this *spark* that leads from appreciation to creation: it happens almost without knowing. For some, it leads to poetry, or dance, or music. In my case, it was the cinema. (Scorsese 2017b)

In June 2017 he received an award from SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication, ‘in honour of the fact that he has made films that are genuine reflections on human nature, the mystery of evil, and the most transcendent dimensions of life, such as love and sacrifice’.

During an interview after a screening of *Silence*, Scorsese was asked about his famous quotation regarding ‘movies and religion’, which he first uttered when he made *The Last Temptation of Christ*: ‘I wanted to be a priest. My whole life has been movies and religion. That’s it. Nothing else’ (in Kelly 1996: 6). Joking that he had forgotten the first part of the statement, he accepted, ‘It’s true in a way. In the foundation it’s true’ (Scorsese 2017a). The Jesuits, whose story he brought to the screen, strive to ‘find God in all things’ rather than only within the walls of a church. Scorsese has used the medium of film in order to try to achieve that aim.

At the end of *The Divine Comedy*, the Pilgrim ‘feels that the ultimate vision has been granted him, his desire and will turning in harmony with Divine Love’ (Musa 1995: 580):

Here vigour failed the lofty fantasy:  
 But now was turning my desire and will,  
 Even as a wheel that equally is moved,  
 The Love which moves the sun and the other stars. (*Par.* XXXIII)

In contrast, using vocabulary that evokes a pilgrimage, Scorsese has described the making of *Silence*: 'We're still on the road and it's never going to end. I thought it would for a little while, but once I was there, I realized no. Even in the editing room, it's unfinished. It will always be unfinished' (in Martin 2016). While Dante's Pilgrim reaches *Paradiso*, Martin Scorsese is still searching and the journey continues.

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# Filmography

## Scorsese Filmography (select)

- A Letter to Elia* (dir. with Kent Jones) (USA, 2010, Far Hills Pictures, Sikelia Productions) (doc)
- A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (UK, 1995, BFI) (doc)
- After Hours* (USA, 1985, Double Play Productions)
- Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (USA, 1974, Warner Bros.)
- American Boy: A Profile of Steven Prince* (USA, 1978, New Empire Films, Scorsese Films) (doc)
- Boxcar Bertha* (USA, 1972, American International Productions)
- Bringing Out the Dead* (USA, 1999, Paramount Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, De Fina-Cappa Productions)
- Cape Fear* (USA, 1991, Amblin Entertainment, Cappa Films, Tribeca Productions)
- Casino* (USA, 1995, Universal Pictures)
- Gangs of New York* (USA, 2002, Miramax Film, Touchstone Pictures, Initial Entertainment Group, P.E.A. Films)
- George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (USA, 2011, Grove Street Pictures, Spitfire Pictures, Sikelia Productions) (doc)
- GoodFellas* (USA, 1990, Irwin Winkler Productions, Warner Bros.)
- Hugo* (USA, 2011, Paramount Pictures, GK films, Infinitum Nihil)
- Italianamerican* (USA, 1974, National Communications Foundation) (doc)
- It's Not Just You, Murray!* (USA, 1964, NYU Department of Television, Motion Picture and Radio Presentations) (short)
- Kundun* (USA, 1997, Touchstone Pictures)
- Mean Streets* (USA, 1973, Taplin-Perry-Scorsese Productions)
- My Voyage to Italy* (Italy/USA1999, Paso Doble Films, Media Trade, Cappa Productions) (doc)
- New York, New York* (USA, 1977, Chartoff-Winkler Productions)
- New York Stories: Life Lessons* (USA, 1989, Touchstone Pictures) (episode in omnibus film)
- No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* (UK, USA, Japan, 2005, Spitfire Pictures, Grey Water Park Productions, Thirteen, WNET, Vulcan Productions, BBC, NHK, Box TV, Cappa-De Fina productions, PBS) (doc)
- Raging Bull* (USA, 1980, Chartoff-Winkler Productions)

- Shine a Light* (USA, 2008, Concert Productions International, Shangri-La Entertainment) (doc)
- Shutter Island* (USA, 2010, Paramount Pictures)
- Silence* (USA, 2016, Gaston Pavlovich Films, Sikelia Productions)
- Taxi Driver* (USA, 1976, Bill/Phillips Productions, Taxi Driver Productions)
- The Age of Innocence* (USA, 1993, Cappa-De Fina Productions)
- The Aviator* (USA, 2004, Miramax Film, Initial Entertainment Group, Forward Pass, Appian Way, IMF, Warner Bros.)
- The Big Shave* (USA, 1967, Martin Scorsese) (short)
- The Color of Money* (USA, 1986, Touchstone Picture, Silver Screen Partners II)
- The Departed* (USA, 2006, Warner Bros. Pictures)
- The King of Comedy* (USA, 1983, Embassy International Pictures)
- The Last Temptation of Christ* (USA, 1988, Universal Pictures, Cineplex Odeon Films)
- The Last Waltz* (USA, 1978, Last Waltz Productions) (doc)
- The Wolf of Wall Street* (USA, 2013, Red Granite Pictures, Appian Way, Sikelia Productions)
- What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?* (USA, 1963, NYU Department of Television, Motion Picture and Radio Presentations) (short)
- Who's That Knocking at My Door* (USA, 1967–9, Trimod Films)

### Additional Filmography

- Cape Fear* (dir. J. Lee Thompson, USA, 1962, Melville Productions, Talbot Productions)
- Chinmoku* (dir. Masahiro Shinoda, Japan 1971, Hyogensha-Mako International)
- Diary of a Country Priest* (dir. Robert Bresson, France, 1951, UGC)
- Duel in the Sun* (dir. King Vidor, USA, 1946, Vanguard Films)
- Europa 51* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1952, Ponti-De Laurentiis Cinematografica)
- Godspell* (dir. David Greene, USA, 1973, Columbia Pictures)
- Gone with the Wind* (dir. Victor Fleming, USA, 1939, Selznick International Pictures, MGM)
- Hail Mary* (dir. Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1985, Sara Films, Pégase Films, JLG Films, Gaumont, TSR, Channel 4 Films)
- Hannah and her Sisters* (dir. Woody Allen, USA, 1986, Orion Pictures, Jack Rollins and Charles H. Joffe Productions)
- Jesus* (dir. Roger Young, USA, 1999, Antena 3 Television)
- Jesus of Montreal* (dir. Denys Arcand, Canada, 1989, Max Films Productions, Gérard Mittal Productions, National Film Board of Canada)
- Jesus of Nazareth* (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, Italy, UK, 1977, ITC Entertainment, RAI)
- King of Kings* (dir. Nicholas Ray, USA, 1961, MGM)

- La Poule aux oeufs d'or* (dir. Gaston Velle, France, 1905, Pathé Frères)
- On the Waterfront* (dir. Elia Kazan, USA, 1954, Horizon Pictures)
- Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, USA, 1986, Hemdale Film Corporation)
- Pulp Fiction* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1994, Miramax, A Band Apart, Jersey Films)
- Quo Vadis* (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, USA, 1951, MGM)
- Return of the Dragon* (dir. Celso Ad. Castillo, Philippines, 1974, FGO Film Productions, RSJ Productions)
- Rio Bravo* (dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1959, Warner Bros.)
- Rocky* (dir. John G. Avildsen, USA, 1976, Chartoff-Winkler Productions)
- Scarface* (dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1932, The Caddo Company)
- Shoot the Pianist* (dir. François Truffaut, France, 1960, Les Films de la Pléiade)
- Son of Man* (dir. Mark Dornford-May, South Africa, 2006, Spier Films)
- Spotlight* (dir. Tom McCarthy, USA, 2015, Participant Media, First Look Media, Anonymous Content)
- The Flowers of St Francis* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1950, Cineriz, Rizzoli Film)
- The Gold of Naples* (dir. Vittorio De Sica, Italy, 1954, Carlo Ponti Cinematografica, Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica)
- The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy, 1964, Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France)
- The Great Train Robbery* (dir. Edwin S. Porter, USA, 1903, Edison Manufacturing Company)
- The Greatest Story Ever Told* (dir. George Stevens, USA, 1965, George Stevens Productions)
- The Life of Brian* (dir. Terry Jones, UK, 1979, HandMade Films, Python (Monty) Pictures)
- The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (dir. John Ford, USA, 1962, Paramount Pictures)
- The Passion of the Christ* (dir. Mel Gibson, USA, 2004, Icon Productions)
- The Red Shoes* (dir. Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1948, The Archers)
- The Roaring Twenties* (dir. Raoul Walsh, USA, 1939, Warner Bros.)
- The Robe* (dir. Henry Koster, USA, 1953, Twentieth Century Fox)
- The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, USA, 1956, C.V. Whitney Pictures)
- The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (dir. Tobe Hooper, USA, 1974, Vortex)
- The Tomb of Ligeia* (dir. Roger Corman, 1964, UK, USA, Alta Vista Productions)
- Vertigo* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1958, Paramount Pictures)



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