



4-1-2013

## The Sins of Leo McCarey

Richard A. Blake S.J.  
*Boston College*, [blakeri@bc.edu](mailto:blakeri@bc.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Blake, Richard A. S.J. (2013) "The Sins of Leo McCarey," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1, Article 38.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol17/iss1/38>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).

---

# The Sins of Leo McCarey

## **Abstract**

Leo McCarey has received little attention from film scholars. His sentimentalizing his Catholic background and his preoccupation with anti-Communism obscured the lasting value of much of his work. His concern with sin and forgiveness form a major motif of his works, from the early comedies to his later serious dramas.

## **Keywords**

McCarey, Catholic, Sin

## **Author Notes**

Richard A. Blake, S.J., is Professor of Fine Arts (film studies) at Boston College. He is a former film reviewer, for 35 years, at *America* magazine, and the author of *Afterimage: The Indelible Catholic Imagination in Six American Film Makers* and *Street Smart on New York films*. He is the Editor of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*.

## THE SINS OF LEO McCAREY

### I CATHOLICISM AND COMMUNISM

Leo McCarey's Catholic background undoubtedly colored his artistry, particularly his notions of sin and atonement, but few critics and historians have discussed this issue, or many of the other particular issues that arise from a close reading of his films in the context of his biography.

McCarey's slender bibliography comes as a surprise in the case of a film maker who received two academy awards for directing and one for writing, and five other nominations for writing, directing, producing and even one for song writing. He worked with the best comic talent in Hollywood. During his years with Hal Roach (1923-29), he directed several silent shorts for Charlie Chase and was instrumental in refining the style of Laurel and Hardy. As film gained its voice, he did *The Kid From Spain* with Eddie Cantor (1932), *Duck Soup* with the Marx Brothers (1933), *Belle of the Nineties* with a slightly inhibited post-Code Mae West (1934), and *The Milky Way* with Harold Lloyd (1936). He even directed a young Charles Laughton through a brilliant comic turn in *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1935).

It is more than a bit of wordplay to suggest that the lack of critical interest in Leo McCarey may stem from the "sins" attributed to him by scholars who followed in the aftermath of auteur criticism in the 1960's.<sup>1</sup> While auteur critics examined in great detail the works of his American contemporaries, John Ford, Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, and Howard Hawks, McCarey seemed to offer little of interest. Some years later, when film writers were comfortable investigating theological and philosophic themes in the works of Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, or Robert Bresson, American writers applied similar methods to the works of Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese, or George Lucas. In all this flurry of theologically-based film criticism activity, few seemed willing to look back at the films of Leo McCarey as providing a precedent

and context for his successors. As an exercise in idle curiosity, thumb through the indices of the standard comprehensive film history texts. It is truly astonishing to discover how few refer to him, and when he does appear, the reference might well lead to an entry on the Marx Brothers or Laurel and Hardy that mentions his contribution as director.

One can only speculate, of course, on this odd dearth of scholarly interest and respect. What I would like to suggest is that his “sins” made him something of a pariah, not in the sense of a vitriolic campaign to discredit his reputation, but rather as one whose work placed him outside the realm of serious academic discussion.<sup>2</sup> His work was not bad; it was just irrelevant. Several factors converge to lead to this conclusion. His early reputation had been built on light comedies rather than serious drama. This is not an automatic disqualifier. Think of Charlie Chaplin or Ernst Lubitsch. Something else is at work in the case of Leo McCarey. His most popular films were *Going My Way* (1944) and its sequel *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945). The stories of life in a Catholic parish, with the jaunty Father Chuck O'Malley (Bing Crosby), sparring with the grouchy but lovable pastor Father Fitzgibbon (Barry Fitzgerald) in the first and with the lovely but tough Sister Mary Benedict (Ingrid Bergman) in the second, not only were immensely successful with the box office, but they harvested a sheaf of Academy Awards. For *Going My Way* McCarey himself took home statuettes for best picture as producer, best director, and best script, Bing Crosby received one for best actor, Barry Fitzgerald for best supporting actor, and James Van Heusen for best song (*Swingin' on a Star*). *The Bells of St. Mary's* also brought in huge audiences, but it was less successful with the Academy. It did, however, earn nominations as best picture for McCarey as producer, best actor for Bing Crosby, best actress for Ingrid Bergman, and best song for James Van Heusen (*Aren't You Glad You're You*). With two top-grossing films and extraordinary peer recognition through the Academy, McCarey was at the

top of his game. According to tax records, he was reputed to have earned the highest income of anyone in the United States in 1945.

Tastes changed very quickly after the War, however. The Crosby pictures touched on nostalgia for the old ways of parish life that were rapidly being transformed into a new, optimistic future. Father O'Malley is a perfectly traditional parish priest, but one who wears a straw boater with his clerical black suit, dons his St. Louis Browns baseball uniform to mingle with his boys' choir, writes songs, has an ex-girlfriend in show business, and gently replaces the old fashioned, somewhat rigid pastor. He is thoroughly American with his love of baseball and his skill in popular music, and he replaces the Irish-born pastor in a parish that remains largely Irish, but with a sprinkling of Italians. He successfully navigates the bridge between the traditional ethnic parish of happy pre-war memories and the grand Utopian dream of a new multi-ethnic America.<sup>3</sup> In *Bells of St. Mary's*, Sister Benedict tells O'Malley that she was born in Sweden, but came to Minnesota as a girl, where she learned to play baseball. She wears the full floor-length habit, but she gives a boxing lesson to one of the boys in the parish and outmaneuvers a realtor to take possession of his building for a new parish school. In a country exhausted by war and yearning to return to the tranquility of the past while moving forward into a modern post-war world, the films struck a perfect balance.

In a very short time, however, the nation became embroiled in the Cold War and anti-Communist paranoia. In this darkened landscape of the next few decades, the sunny optimism of the McCarey parish films seemed to cast an odd shadow. Anthony Burke Smith, professor of religious studies, describes the shift graphically: "To many people, it seemed that the star on which Father O'Malley encouraged his followers to swing had imploded amid racial strife, economic dislocation, and the erosion of American power in Vietnam."<sup>4</sup> Writing in 1975, the

eminent film historian David Thomson refers to them as “appalling projects” and in the same brief paragraph “solemnly pondered balderdash.”<sup>5</sup> As the mood of the country soured, Catholics were likely to see themselves, and others viewed them, as fierce opponents of the Communist menace. In the public imagination, the jovial Father Chuck O’Malley, who accepted everyone cordially, became an embarrassment. What did he really stand for? Was he blind to the enemies of the Church and the country? Real Catholics were Cardinal Spellman in army fatigues, visiting the troops in Korea, or even Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R., Wisc.), rooting out Communists—real or imagined—from the government before they subverted America.<sup>6</sup>

In 1949, Leo McCarey unwittingly but emphatically reflected this change in Catholic mood and identity by writing and directing *You Can Change the World*, the title of a popular book by Father James Keller, founder of the Christophers, a loosely organized movement of popular spirituality. In this half-hour documentary, available on *You Tube*,<sup>7</sup> the popular radio star Jack Benny invites some Hollywood friends to his home to meet Father Keller: Irene Dunne, Ann Blythe, William Holden, Paul Douglas, and Loretta Young. Father Keller explains his idea of making the world a better place by encouraging men and women of all faiths to take a few minutes each day to help one another. The exhortation could have been written by Frank Capra for one of his “golden rule” films. As Keller’s presentation continues, he goes one step further. His plan involves encouraging good people to seek key positions in influential industries, like the media, government, and education. When asked, he denies that the movement is explicitly anti-Communist, but points out that the unspecified “they” are working to infiltrate influential institutions to bring down America. For most of the film the celebrities merely decorate the set, provide appropriate reaction shots, and ask (with some apparent discomfort) a few fairly obvious questions to keep Keller’s monologue going. One of his anecdotes involves a Russian

schoolteacher, held captive in the Soviet consulate in New York, who leapt from a third story window to freedom in America. Upon request, Paul Douglas recites segments of the Declaration of Independence that emphasize its point that human rights come from God, and by implication that without God there are no rights. It's fairly innocuous, until Keller makes the strange observation that too many people today are too concerned with the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and forget all the references to God in the Declaration.

References to Marx and Hitler give an indication of the bipolar mindset. It's God and America against forces of atheistic repression. Since America may be the last nation standing intact, he warns, good Americans must become vigilant in preserving freedom. Near the end of the film, Bing Crosby enters and sings a new song, "Early American," which reiterates confidence in the values of the Declaration. On a flimsy pretense, Keller then telephones Bob Hope on a movie set, purportedly in Houston. After a comic skit that shows the deft touch of vintage McCarey, Hope expresses regrets at not being at Benny's house with his friends, and endorses Keller's movement and his own take on the Declaration. Finally, Keller produces an "unknown" speech of Lincoln from 1858. With Benny's perennial sidekick Rochester (Eddie Anderson), an African-American, standing prominently in the foreground, he reads a section in which Lincoln bases the rights of all Americans in the Declaration.

An important observation must be made at this point, and it will be important in evaluating later critical treatment, or lack of it, in dealing with McCarey's films. The program, no doubt intended for airing on television in the days when the networks were obliged to provide free air time for public service broadcasting, clearly shows the blurring of lines between religious sensibilities and political activism in the cause of anti-Communism.<sup>8</sup> As the decades passed, one could readily fault Keller and McCarey for adding to the national paranoia, but to be fair one

must acknowledge that they were by no means extraordinary in this regard. After the establishment of the Iron Curtain, the Berlin blockade, the Maoist victory in China, the Soviet nuclear program, the Korean War, the Rosenberg executions, the Alger Hiss conviction and other events, many other segments of American society were swept up in the near hysteria. It was the era of *Red Channels*, HUAC (the House Un-American Activities Committee), loyalty oaths and blacklisting, and most notoriously of Senator McCarthy. Father Keller and Leo McCarey merely reflected part of a much wider phenomenon.

As Catholics, they might have had added motivation. The widely publicized arrests for treason and imprisonments of Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac in Yugoslavia in 1946 and Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty in Hungary in 1948 led many to the not unreasonable conclusion that Communists had singled out Catholics for special animosity. In addition, since in this pre-Kennedy era, many Americans still felt unsure about the loyalties of Catholics and wondered about their allegiance to a foreign power in the Vatican, Keller and McCarey quite possibly felt the need for Catholics to prove their commitment to the American way of life through opposition to the threats of godless Communism. For McCarey, whose commitment to Catholicism deepened as he grew older, and for millions of other Catholics, being a good Catholic meant being militantly and demonstrably pro-American and anti-Communist. The dangerous compromises to human rights condoned by those dedicated to “rooting out Communists” during those years only became more apparent to them as time passed.

After a three-year fallow period, McCarey deepened his identification with unalloyed anti-Communism through his next project. In 1952 McCarey produced, directed, and wrote (with Myles Connolly), *My Son John*. The story was clearly inspired by the Alger Hiss case. Whittaker Chambers, a former Communist, denounced Hiss to HUAC for being an active



Communist and engaging in espionage for the Soviet Union while he was employed at the U.S. Department of State. The charges and counter-charges dragged on from the first allegations in 1948 to Hiss's eventual conviction for perjury in late 1950. In 1952, Senator McCarthy was still at the height of his power. In 1950, the Senator charged that a Communist spy ring was functioning within the State Department. McCarthy's demagoguery would not be fully unmasked until 1954, when the famous televised Army-McCarthy hearings and the Edward R. Murrow documentary on his reckless tactics on his popular program, "See It Now," exposed the Senator's ruthless disregard for the truth and justice. He was formally censured by the Senate at the end of 1954. Hiss's alleged activity within the State Department and McCarthy's allegations about dozens of known but unnamed operatives fit neatly with Keller's fear that "they" would continue to find influential positions in government and use them to undermine American values.

Leo McCarey did his duty to God and country in this family melodrama. *My Son John* is a solemn film that lacks any of the light touches and ingratiating comedy that characterize his best work. The conflict of generations and disruption of orderly family life, common McCarey themes, grow to cartoonish proportion. If one does find comic elements in the interactions, they are unintentional on McCarey's part. Communism, for McCarey, was no laughing matter. In the film, Dan Jefferson (Dean Jagger)—sharing a name with the author of the Declaration of Independence—has become an active member of the American Legion after serving in the Second World War. He sings a jingoistic song about his "Uncle Sammy" in which he advises those who don't like Uncle Sammy's values to leave the country. Two of his sons, former high school football stars, are on their way to fight the Communists in Korea. A third son, John (Robert Walker), has an unspecified position in the Federal Government. The vagueness gives a sinister aura to his activity. Unlike his all-American brothers, John had gone to college, where he

was exposed to dangerous ideas. His return to the family precipitates the inevitable crisis. He adapts a derisive attitude toward his father's flag-waving patriotism. Lucille Jefferson (Helen Hayes), the harried mother, tries to mediate the tensions in her family. After an interview with Agent Steadman (Van Heflin), one of J. Edgar Hoover's F.B.I. investigators who has been following John's activities, she finally faces the truth and admits she has been duped by her son. Putting aside all her motherly instincts, Lucille accepts the fact that her son is a traitor.

Although religion plays a lesser role here than in the Crosby pictures, it still adds texture to this otherwise political conflict. The Jeffersons are Catholics. When they take their bemused son to church on Sunday, they stop off for a chat with Father O'Dowd (Frank McHugh). In *Going My Way* a priest with the same name and played by the same actor was Father O'Malley's best friend from St. Louis. In the earlier film, the two Midwesterners come to New York to bring their wholesome Americanism to a church rapidly shedding its ethnic roots in the process of becoming purely American. *My Son John* reverses the process. John Jefferson brings his corrupt citified and secular ideas to small town America. In both films, Father O'Dowd represents the successful fusion of religion and Americanism. In *My Son John* McCarey returns to the kind of bipolar analysis that Father Keller outlined. At one point, Dan becomes so exasperated with his son that he strikes him on the head with a Bible he has been holding. In a climactic scene, as Lucille seems to be undergoing an emotional breakdown, John tries to wrest a key, which ties him to a known Communist, from her.<sup>9</sup> When he forces open her hand, he discovers she has been holding a rosary. Lucille raises it to her son's face and claims that millions like her will rise up to oppose John's godless crusade. She joins Dan in reciting the Lord's Prayer for their son, and the prayer seems instrumental in his change of heart. John decides to use his commencement address at his alma mater to alert the graduates to the danger

of falling into a Communist trap, as he had. His former allies become aware of his change of heart and after a brief car chase, gun him down in front of the Lincoln monument before he can deliver his address. Fortunately, he made a recording of the speech, which Agent Steadman plays for the graduates. A cluster of Naval Officers, surely products of the college's N.R.O.T.C. program, sits together in the front of the auditorium. The film ends with Lucille and Dan entering a chapel to pray for their deceased son.

Ten years later, even after the country had grown calmer in its realization that the Cold War had become a fixture of modern life, McCarey reiterates his polarized vision of the confrontation between religion and Communism in *Satan Never Sleeps* (1962), his last feature film. Based on a novel by Pearl Buck and scripted in part by McCarey himself, the story unfolds in the period of the Maoist revolution in China during the late 1940s. The dynamic between the two Catholic missionary priests echoes *Going My Way*. Father O'Banion (William Holden), like O'Malley, who first appears wearing a straw boater with his clerical suit, dresses in a way to show he is orthodox, but progressive. He arrives at his new assignment wearing khaki pants and a leather bomber jacket over his clerical collar. He has been sent to relieve the ailing, but most properly attired, Father Bovard (Clifton Webb) before the Communists overrun the mission compound. O'Banion's makeshift clerical garb doesn't help the relationship, but the older priest's hostility stems from O'Banion's arriving several days behind schedule. Bovard wants to get out before the inevitable arrival of the Red Army. The cause of the delay is O'Banion's unsuccessful effort to send Siu Lan (France Nuyen) back to her family. Very young and childlike, new to the idea of Catholicism and not yet baptized, she has fallen in love with the American priest and is as determined to marry him as he is to send her home. Her presence provides one more irritant in the relationship between the priests. The older missionary priest is

less sympathetic than Barry Fitzgerald's urban pastor. Father Fitzgibbon was old-fashioned, but charming; Father Bovard is cold, arrogant, and gratuitously nasty. Fitzgibbon served his parish for forty five years and is crushed at the thought of having to retire; Bovard wants to get out as quickly as possible so that he can return to the United States for his own medical treatment.

In both the Crosby films, the romantic element in O'Malley's relationship with women lurks so deep beneath the surface as to be almost imperceptible. In *Going My Way*, he deals with an insecure young woman in his priestly role and renews his friendship with an old girlfriend from back home, the opera star Genevieve Linden (Risë Stevens). In *Bells of St. Mary's* he befriends a precocious but troubled teenage girl and her mother who is separated from the girl's father. As a caring counselor, he helps both of them put their lives in order. More pointedly, the attraction between him and Sister Benedict is palpable on the screen, even as it is totally suppressed by both characters. O'Banion's feelings are much more complex. Siu Lan, as the infatuated and uncomprehending teenager, provides the comic touches that mark this otherwise somber film. O'Banion is clearly embarrassed and even annoyed at the young woman's attention, but even as he squirms under the icy stare of Bovard, he undergoes moments of hesitation and doubt. While he never lets his guard down, it's clear that he occasionally enjoys her presence, feels flattered by her attention, and perhaps even entertains second thoughts about his commitment to priestly celibacy.

The film turns much darker when the Communists finally arrive. Their captain Ho San (Weaver Lee) is portrayed as a monster of comic book villainy. A former Christian from the mission, he relishes his power over the former authority figures in his life. He arrests Bovard before he can leave the country and brings him back to the mission. His unit sacks the chapel, burns the sacred objects and replaces the altar with a stage for re-education meetings and a huge

portrait of Mao. They wreck the dispensary and destroy its supply of medicine. They intimidate the sisters and their pupils at the mission school, and order the Chinese sisters to return to their home villages. Ho San turns his attention to Siu Lan, and when she rejects his advances, he rapes her within the hearing of the two captive priests, who are powerless to protect her. When he turns from her bed, she stabs him in the back. The wound becomes infected, but he learns that his men have destroyed the penicillin he needs. He allows O'Banion to go to another mission station to obtain the drug, promising to free Bovard when O'Banion returns. Ever treacherous, Ho San breaks his promise and imprisons both priests. The didactic intent is clear. The Communists destroy everything that religious people value, and they cannot be trusted to keep their word about anything.

Like John Jefferson, at last Ho San discovers the true malice of the Communists through the faith of his parents, who are gunned down in the ruined chapel as they try to salvage a charred corpus from the burned crucifix that once hung over the main altar. Consistently unlikeable, Bovard finally redeems himself by sacrificing his own life to allow O'Banion and the now pregnant Siu Lan to escape to Hong Kong. The film ends precipitously. Now safe in a church in Hong Kong, O'Banion baptizes the baby of Siu Lan and Ho San. Reconverted to Christianity, Ho San has married Siu Lan and taken responsibility for the baby he had forcibly fathered. As a sign of their affection and gratitude, they name the child Oh Ban Yon. Order is restored after the disruption of the Communist take-over. Religion has triumphed, and the three revel in their freedom from the Communists.

The militant anti-Communist theme that marks these late films of Leo McCarey led to a misunderstanding about his personal involvement with the political activities in the industry. As early as 1947, HUAC had begun hearings about Communists in the movie industry. This was

after the ideologically neutral Crosby films, and before the more political *You Can Change the World* with Father Keller, and before *My Son John*. HUAC centered on Hollywood writers with connections to the Communist Party, because, it reasoned, their scripts could provide propaganda to influence public opinion. This was the theme that Keller picked up on when he urged his hearers to make sacrifices, if necessary, to enter into these positions, because that is what “they” are doing. HUAC found ten of these witnesses “uncooperative” for their reluctance to name names of their associates, or even recognize the legitimacy of the committee’s inquiry. It must be noted that indeed the witnesses had been quite active in making pro-Soviet and anti-American statements. Since unpopular opinions and speech are protected by the First Amendment, the eight writers, one director and one producer, now known as the Hollywood Ten, were tried not for their statements, but for contempt of Congress because of their refusal to answer the questions of the committee and incriminate others. They were each sentenced to prison terms.

Clearly, the industry had a terrible public relations problem. In November of that year, forty-eight top executives met at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. After several days, they issued what is now known as *The Waldorf Statement*. The brief declaration stated that by their actions the Hollywood Ten have “been a disservice to their employers” and have “impaired their usefulness to the industry.” It stated their resolve not to re-hire any of them until they declared under oath that they were not Communists. Then they cast a wider net: “We will not knowingly employ a Communist or member of any party or group which advocates overthrow of the government of the United States by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional methods.” The blacklist had begun and would last nearly ten years. They were fully aware of the brutality of their strategy: “In pursuing this policy, we are not going to be swayed by hysteria or intimidation

from any source. We are frank to recognize that such a policy involves danger and risks. There is the danger of hurting innocent people.”<sup>10</sup>

Although McCarey would surely be sympathetic to such a development, he tended to stand clear of political activities himself. While Walt Disney and others were fighting Communists in the Hollywood unions through the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals through the 1940's, McCarey kept his distance, content to be known as a hard-drinking, hard-playing director of successful comedies. With the success of the Crosby pictures, however, he became one of the most prominent directors in Hollywood, and as such he faced enormous pressure to go public with his beliefs. In May 1947, he appeared before HUAC as a “friendly witness.” The story that he “named names” during his testimony became widely accepted. Robin Wood, for example, alleges: “He [McCarey] has never been forgiven for the—indeed unforgiveable—sin of naming names before the House Committee on Un-American Activities [sic] (HUAC).”<sup>11</sup> Jerome McKeever, in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, *The McCarey Touch: The Life and Times of Leo McCarey*, disputes this allegation. After reading through the transcripts of the hearings, McKeever concludes that beyond praising the work of the committee and denouncing the threats of Communism, he offered little by way of concrete information.<sup>12</sup> After citing Wood, McKeever concludes: “The trouble is, of course, he never named names. He never committed the ‘unforgiveable sin.’”

While Wood may be hasty in repeating this specific allegation, he was absolutely correct in asserting in the same paragraph that McCarey's work has been “undervalued and misrepresented.” It is not my intention to characterize the scholarly community as one of intolerant liberal (far less anti-religious or anti-Catholic) bias in paying little attention to this major figure. Rather, he had become known as a young director of comedies, who in his later

years got lost in sentimentalizing his Catholic heritage, and finally was drawn into the maelstrom of Cold War politics. He loses on all counts. With a few exceptions, few serious critics found much of interest in his films.

## II SIN AND GETTING ON WITH LIFE

One particular area, among many, that deserves some attention is his Catholic notion of sin, forgiveness and atonement that appears in many of his films and underlies the motivations of his characters.<sup>13</sup> Without some awareness of his sense of sin, it is difficult to discern whether his endings are happy or inconclusive, naïve or cynical. Leo McCarey's Catholic background needs some clarification to situate his ideas in a proper context.<sup>14</sup> His father arrived in the Los Angeles area from Edwardsville, Illinois, became a successful boxing promoter and then ran a liquor store. His mother Leona Mistral, for whom Leo was named, was born in France. He has been continually characterized as "an Irishman," but his heritage is more accurately American melting pot. He attended St. Joseph's elementary school in Los Angeles, in a middle class American parish of no dominant ethnic identity. The New York Irish parish he created for Crosby and Fitzgerald arises more from imagination than experience. His paternal aunt was a nun, Sister Mary Benedict, and provided both the name and the personality for the Ingrid Bergman character in *The Bells of St. Mary's*. His two siblings attended Catholic colleges, and he provided a Catholic education for his daughter Mary Virginia.<sup>15</sup> Leo McCarey did not follow the family pattern in this regard. He attended Los Angeles High School and later took a law degree at U.S.C. (By his own admission, his short practice of law was less than successful.<sup>16</sup>)

The mixture of religious and secular education is important. Although he grew up in a very Catholic environment, his formal religious training ended in elementary school. He brought a child's catechism understanding of his faith into a very complicated adult world. In addition,



he did not seem to be particularly pious in his practice of his faith. His first and only marriage, to Stella Martin, endured—a rarity by Hollywood standards. At the same time, he seems to have pushed the boundaries of fidelity throughout their years together.<sup>17</sup> His drinking became increasingly problematic and was compounded by dependence on painkillers, the result of permanent injuries sustained in an automobile accident, caused at least in part by his alcohol abuse. One indication of his troubled health is the fact that after the enormous success of the Crosby films, when he could have easily gotten backing for any film project he chose, his productivity slowed from his earlier pace. In the seventeen years after *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945-62) he made five feature films. By contrast, in the fourteen years prior to “Bells,” (1930-44), after he turned to making sound features, he made eighteen, including his very best work.

Catholics of McCarey's vintage would have learned from the *Baltimore Catechism* that sin is an offense against God, “which we ourselves commit.” Chapters on each of the commandments spelled out in great detail, what could be counted as a serious, or mortal sin, leading to eternal damnation, and which were lesser or venial sins, which led to temporal punishment in purgatory.<sup>18</sup> The rules were quite clear. But this moral landscape was not as bleak as an outsider might conclude at first reading. Catholics were quite comfortable acknowledging that they live in a communion of sinners as well as saints.<sup>19</sup> Since they realize everyone is a sinner to some extent, they cherished a system of remedies that balanced God's justice and mercy.<sup>20</sup> They have the sacrament of penance, or confession, and during McCarey's childhood, youngsters in parochial school routinely went to confession on Saturday afternoon every two weeks after their first communion. The priest not only absolved the sins but assigned a penance that would help atone for the malice involved in the act.

McCarey would also have learned about indulgences assigned to prayers and good deeds. It was highly quantified. A certain prayer might have a notation of 200 days, meaning that one's punishment in purgatory would be lessened as though one had performed a prescribed penitential act for 200 days. For children, this complex concept was frequently reduced to "getting 200 days off" one's temporal punishment. More elaborate prayers and observances might lead to a plenary indulgence, which would wipe the slate clean altogether.<sup>21</sup> Children became moral accountants. This is not a healthy way to quantify one's relationship to God, to be sure, and it did give rise to serious abuses over the centuries, especially when indulgences might be tied to cash contributions to the Church, but it provided some solid footing for youngsters to develop a moral sense. People, even good people, are capable of committing sin, and the reality of sinfulness is part of everyone's life. As they grow older, most learn to nuance their childhood certainties about good and evil. McCarey never recorded his thoughts on morality, but in his portrayal of sin and forgiveness, one can detect a residue of childhood certainty. If his religious learning had continued into college, or even high school, his sense of Catholicism, of sharp contrasts between Communism and Americanism, of good and evil might have been more richly textured.

As it is, his films reflect sin and forgiveness as part of the natural rhythm of human life. His characters act in ways that are "offenses which we ourselves commit." He does not attribute them to neuroses, as Woody Allen might, or group pressure, as Coppola or Scorsese might. For McCarey sin arises from the evil within. It's part of the human make-up. At the same time, his characters readily move beyond their guilt. They make mistakes, patch things up, and continue with their lives, in a rhythm like that of sin and confession. They seek forgiveness, and may or may not receive it, but it's the only thing they can do in the situation. At best, they learn a lesson and make "a firm purpose of amendment," that is, a resolution not to make the same mistake

again. In any event, they move on with their lives. Leland A. Poague insists that McCarey's characters ability to "move on," leaving the past behind them, is central to his concept of human existence. Writing of the ending of *Going My Way*, when just as the plots seem resolved, St. Dominic's burns to the ground, Poague generalizes: "Life is never certain. Churches rise, decay and are rebuilt. It is the process of living that matters."<sup>22</sup>

The pattern of sin and repentance appears as a tentative pattern in *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1935). The film is clearly in the tradition of McCarey's broad comedies, but it decisively moves beyond the comic star turns of the earlier phase of his career as, for example, *The Kid From Spain* with Eddie Cantor (1932), *Duck Soup* with the Marx Brothers (1933), and *Belle of the Nineties* with Mae West (1934). These films, like the Laurel and Hardy films before them, focused on the well-known personalities of the stars. The director merely had to fulfill the expectations of the stars and their publics. With *Ruggles* McCarey creates a form of film making more personal to him. His comic genius blossoms into something with more depth than the earlier showcases, and arguably, his Catholicism starts to assume a more important role in his work. Charles Laughton, perhaps best known to American audiences at the time as Nero in *The Sign of the Cross* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1932) and the title role in *The Private Lives of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda, 1933) might have been an unlikely Marmaduke Ruggles, but feeling the need to expand his repertoire, he wanted the part and especially wanted to work with McCarey. As an English valet suddenly thrust into a Wild West cowtown, Laughton displayed a flair for developing a comic character and was not beyond moments of slapstick. Like Chaplin, however, he was able to navigate through ridiculous situations without becoming ridiculous himself and thus losing the sympathy and credibility of his audience.

Ruggles “sins” by reinforcing an odious social structure. At first he accepts his status as a servant and then he allows himself to pose as a titled aristocrat, and enjoys his newfound prestige. As a “gentleman’s gentleman” staying in Paris, he learns much to his horror that his employer, the Earl of Burnstead (Roland Young) lost him in a poker game with a wild and woolly cattleman, Egbert Floud (Charles Ruggles) of Red Gap, Washington. When he learns about being sent to America, he comments that it is a country of slavery, little realizing that he has become human chattel himself. The Earl assures him that the Americans have changed their ways through the efforts of Pocahontas. This is slight reassurance. Even though he is terrified at the prospect of heading into the wilderness of North America as a servant to a family he never met, he accepts his lot. In a first outing with his new employer, he reluctantly drinks with him in abundance, and when he meets the very proper Mrs. Floud (Mary Boland), he is unable to stand upright. In this state, he fails both as a proper English butler and as a hard-drinking Westerner.

At Red Gap, the Flouds discover that the local paper mangled the story and informed the town that the distinguished Col. Marmaduke Ruggles has joined them as a houseguest. Not wishing to lose status in the town, the Flouds persuade Ruggles to go along with the charade. He affects the manners of an English gentleman. By so doing, he unwittingly reinforces the snobbery and class system upheld by Mrs. Floud with her social ambitions. Charles Belknap-Jackson (Lucien Littlefield), Mrs. Floud’s brother-in-law from Boston with a very British-sounding name, sees through the imposture, and when the Flouds are away, fires Ruggles. Ruggles is humiliated, sees his assuming the role of a gentleman for the lie it is, and determines to leave town. This constitutes his admission of sin. Since the train out of town is delayed Ruggles enters the local bar where he finds Egbert, who convinces him to stand up to Belknap-Jackson, since in this country “all men are created equal,” a key line in the Declaration of

Independence. The bar patrons know it is a theme that Lincoln reiterated at Gettysburg, but no one knows exactly what he said. That is, no one but Ruggles, who recites the great manifesto of liberty for all peoples, including himself.

Ruggles takes the words to heart. As his “firm purpose of amendment,” he resolves to leave service and go into trade by opening a restaurant named the Anglo-American Grill, a name that indicates a blending of cultures and castes, his past and his present. At the grand opening, the barriers collapse completely. The ranchers mingle with the town aristocracy, and the cattlemen even look respectable in their evening clothes. The Earl has come to Red Gap to retrieve Ruggles, who has resolutely declined the offer of reinstatement. For his own part, the Earl has become quite smitten by Nell Kenner (Leila Hyams), proprietress of the town’s dance hall and site of regular “beer busts.” Since the Production Code of 1934 was new and eagerly enforced, the other activities at Nell’s place are only hinted at. Belknap-Jackson is the sole exception to this ritual of integration. Ruggles overhears his cruel slurs directed at Nell and the others and as proprietor unceremoniously escorts his former employer to the door. He has earned his status, but he fears his action may have ruined any possibility of his acceptance into the community as an equal. As he expresses his doubts to his cook (and future wife) Mrs. Judson (ZaSu Pitts), he hears the voices in the restaurant joined together singing “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” not realizing that they are honoring him. Not only has Ruggles been rehabilitated, but the entire town has been healed of its class distinctions because of him.

Healing does not always come so easily, and indeed in his next film it does not come at all. *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937) was McCarey’s own favorite film, and today most critics would agree with him, but at the time of its release, it was a failure both critically and financially. Its grim subject matter, the Cooper family’s attempt to deal with aging parents, its

unblinking conclusion, and slow pace make the film hard to watch. Early critics dubbed it a “tearjerker,” but its emotional impact led Orson Welles to comment: “It would make a stone cry.”<sup>23</sup> Before the action begins, McCarey inserts the title: “Honor thy father and thy mother,” a commandment the Cooper children repeatedly violate. As the action continues, they are forced to confront the consequences of their sin, but rather than amend their initial act of ingratitude, they repeatedly worsen the situation. In the opening scene, when the Coopers gather for a family meeting, the parents explain that the bank is about to foreclose on their home and they’ve used up all their savings. They ask their grown children for help. After some discussion, they decide to split their parents after fifty years of marriage, since no one is in a position to “take” both of them. Barkley (Victor Moore) moves in with his shrewish daughter, Cora Payne (Elisabeth Risdon) in a small town, and Lucy (Beulah Bondi) joins her son George (Thomas Mitchell) and his wife Anita (Fay Bainter) in their New York apartment. The arrangement proves disastrous for everyone involved. Forced to sleep on a sofa in the living room, Barkley becomes cantankerous and disruptive. Lucy shares a bedroom with her vivacious teenage granddaughter, but long used to running her own household, she constantly interferes in her efforts to help with both housekeeping and parenting. McCarey presents the domestic clash of generations as both poignant and comic. Lucy’s intrusion into her daughter-in-law’s bridge party, for example, leads to both laughter at Lucy’s inappropriate attempts at conversation and pathos as we feel the embarrassment of Anita and her guests.

The situation worsens when Barkley develops a respiratory problem. For his health, they decide to send their father to California to be with another sister and their mother to a retirement home for women in suburban New York. After George informs his mother about Barkley’s future, Lucy tells him that she wants to go to the retirement facility. In fact, she has seen a letter

from the home, knows exactly what is going on, and pretends to take the initiative to spare George's feeling. Moments later, he and Anita confront their sin as they look into a mirror together. George says with bitter irony and remorse: "As the years go by you can always look back on this day and be mighty proud of me." At the end of the film, after Barkley and Lucy have rejected a final family dinner with their children in favor of taking some time alone together, they say goodbye on a station platform as Barkley leaves for California. Both realize they will never see each other again. He addresses her as Miss Breckenridge, to acknowledge that their marriage, a limited but happy fifty-year interlude in their lives, has in fact ended. The adult children express some regrets about not being at the station with them, when Cora says: "They'll think we're terrible." George replies: "Aren't we?" Robert (Ray Mayer), the youngest sibling, agrees: "You're telling it right, brother."

For McCarey, with his Catholic sensibility, confession is not enough. The acknowledgement of personal sin must be followed by a "purpose of amendment," if the penitent is to gain forgiveness. McCarey cannot forgive the younger Coopers. Even at this end point in the story, they might have searched for some way to keep their parents together, but no one raises the issue. Some financial sacrifice on their part could provide the penance they need to atone for their sins. Instead, they accept what they did, and even feelings of guilt will not motivate them to try to put it right. The tragedy of the parents' separation is thus reflected, and perhaps surpassed, by the spiritual tragedy of the children. They acknowledge their guilt, but they are unwilling to "amend their ways." As a result, forgiveness eludes them.

But sin need not inevitably lead to tragedy. On the theory that everyone enjoys a loveable rogue, it can also be matter for comedy, as McCarey shows in his next project, *The Awful Truth* (1937). The comedy saved his career, which was endangered after the box-office

failure of *Make Way for Tomorrow* earlier that same year. As bonus it brought him an Academy Award. (He thanked the Academy but added that he thought they had given it to him for the wrong picture.) The story begins with mutual infidelity. Jerry Warriner (Cary Grant) instructs a locker room attendant to keep a sun lamp on him. He needs a deep tan to show that he has been in Florida for the last two weeks. The script never reveals where he was or what he was doing, but his desperate need to deceive his wife raises suspicions. He invites friends to join him for a midday quaff, but Lucy (Irene Dunne) is not home to greet him and his guests. While they enjoy their first drink, she appears in a gorgeous evening gown, with her equally gorgeous voice coach Armand Duvalle (Alexander D'Arcy) in tow. They have spent the night together in an inn because their car ran out of gas. The explanation fails to convince anyone, but the script never elaborates on the issue. We never find out what, if anything, really happened.

Their marriage continues to deteriorate. They decide to get a divorce, but before the court order takes effect, they realize how much they love each other. In the pattern of screwball comedies, the lovers spar and embarrass each other, but in the end, just minutes before the divorce is finalized they become reconciled. As a screwball genre film, it makes no attempt to solve the question of who was unfaithful to whom and neither spouse promises unending fidelity. In the real world, these elements would be crucial to any reconciliation. With his Catholic acceptance of sin as an inevitable phase in the rhythm of life, McCarey allows them to go on together as best they can, realizing that they can cope with each other's foibles. When asked if his portrait of marriage reflected his personal experience, McCarey answered: "Yes. It told the story of my life—though the few scenes about infidelity, I hasten to add, were not autobiographical—they were imagination only."<sup>24</sup> As a serious Catholic, McCarey would have



found divorce unthinkable as a solution to any tensions in his own marriage, but it does provide a perfect device for far-fetched comedy.

McCarey intended to make *My Favorite Wife* (1940) as a quasi-sequel to *The Awful Truth* when he was sidelined by his automobile accident. Before shooting started, he had to pass the day to day direction over to Garson Kanin. Since McCarey was deeply involved with pre-production and post-production, one can reasonably add this to his filmography, albeit with an asterisk.<sup>25</sup> The cast includes McCarey veterans Irene Dunne as Ellen Arden and Cary Grant as Nick Arden. The same chemistry that McCarey created in *The Awful Truth* sparkles in this film. As a twist on Tennyson's "Enoch Arden," the film has Ellen, the mother of two children, marooned on a Pacific Island for seven years. Nick has her declared legally dead so that he can marry Bianca (Gail Patrick). Before the marriage is consummated, Ellen suddenly reappears at their honeymoon hotel, and she wants her husband and children back. Much of the comedy revolves around Nick's trying to find a way to tell Bianca the truth and Ellen's doing her best to derail his marriage to Bianca.

Since Nick is afraid to tell Bianca about his previous marriage, Ellen tries to force the issue. She pretends to be a friend of the family and encourages the children to perform, one a deadly piano piece, the other a recitation, for their "new mother." Bianca squirms in discomfort before excusing herself. Her plan to show Nick that Bianca would not be a suitable stepmother works perfectly. The situation becomes more complicated when Nick learns that during her seven years' absence, she was alone on the island with Stephen Burkett (Randolph Scott), and they referred to each other as Adam and Eve. Ellen deepens her guilt when she hires a pudgy, short, bald shoe salesman (Chester Clute) to meet Nick and pretend to be Stephen. Nick sees through the ruse, having already seen Stephen at poolside at the Pacific Club, where Stephen

flexes his muscles and does an acrobatic turn on the hanging rings before executing an Olympic dive into the pool. As was the case in *The Awful Truth*, the film never reveals the nature of the Adam-and-Eve relationship, although Ellen's schemes seem to indicate that she really has something to hide. The couple is charming and so obviously in love that an audience cannot hold infidelity and possible bigamy against them. What they did is past, and they're all ready to resume a happy family life together.

A similar pattern of sin and restoration occurs in the two "Affair" pictures: *Love Affair* (1939) with Irene Dunne and Charles Boyer, and its remake, *An Affair to Remember* (1957), with Deborah Kerr and Cary Grant. Because of their close similarity, the two films can be discussed together. Both couples circulate in the party set where a taste for pink champagne provides the image for genteel decadence. The men have lived on a modest inheritance and have given up promising careers as painters. They sail for New York to marry wealthy heiresses, and both quite clearly have left a trail of broken romances behind them. The women's past lives are treated a bit more delicately, but both have had careers as night-club vocalists and have drawn the attention of several men. After a shopping spree on the continent, they sail home to marriages to wealthy men. With marriage, the financial worries will vanish forever for all of them. The plot in both films revolves around less than admirable characters who use their attractiveness to provide a livelihood for themselves. Their planned marriages merely confirm the cynicism that has motivated their adult lives.

On shipboard both couples fall into an unexpected romance, which, of course, derails their plans for the future financial security through a marriage of expediency. Through the early scenes the couples meet through an unlikely coincidence, flirt, spar verbally, and gradually allow the chemistry to take over. In the best tradition of the screwball comedy, the audience sees

through the barbed dialogue before the characters do and knows they are falling in love even as they berate each other. Whether the romance becomes an actual shipboard “affair” remains ambiguous. In the age of the Code, the dialogue suggests their determination to keep their distance, to avoid appearing in the gossip columns. Still, the working title for the first film was *Love Match* before it became *Love Affair*, and the word “affair” reappears in the title of the second version.

Their relationship turns dramatically when the ship docks at Madeira. He claims he is going ashore to visit his grandmother, and she, aware of his reputation of “having a girl in every port,” insists on going with him to catch him in his deception. When they arrive at the villa, they find the grandmother in her private chapel. She invites them to go in and say a prayer, even though, she slyly observes, he has not been in a chapel since he was an altar boy. They kneel in prayer before a statue of the Madonna. It proves a moment of conversion for both of them. During tea, the grandmother reveals his artistic talent, and he expresses a sense of shame for having abandoned his gift. Returning to the ship, each has doubts about the mercenary nature of their intended marriages. They acknowledge that they have found true love in each other, but will wait six months to see if they can actually change their lives before they make a commitment to each other. If the experiment succeeds, they will meet at the top of the Empire State Building on the first of July.

The experiment goes well. He has returned to his painting and becomes modestly successful; she has resumed a singing career in a supper club. Neither depends on a wealthy partner for support. On her way to their rendezvous, in her eagerness to arrive at the appointed hour, she steps out of a cab and into the path of an oncoming car.<sup>26</sup> Waiting alone until the observation deck closes for the night, he feels certain that she has changed her mind. As a result

of the accident, she may never walk again, but since she does not want him to marry her out of pity, she never contacts him. She teaches music to children; his painting career prospers. When he discovers her address, he visits her to give her the shawl his grandmother, now deceased, wanted her to have. Finding her disabled, he pledges his love. They move on together in hope of a miracle that she may one day walk, and “come running to him.” At least their love will sustain them. After their prayer and conversion at his grandmother’s chapel, they have turned from their self-centered lives and found happiness in each other.

Prayer, or at least Catholic virtue, also provides the catalyst for a conversion of sorts in both Crosby films. In *Going My Way*, since the principals are two admirable priests who are surrounded by equally admirable friends, the sin and conversion motif is relegated to two subplots. The parish is home to a gang of mischievous boys, led by Tony Scaponi (Stanley Clements). The action starts when they break a window during a stickball game and run away, leaving Father O’Malley (Crosby) to pacify the home owner and pay the bill. Later, Tony and his sidekick try to smuggle a stolen turkey across the rectory garden. They give the turkey to Father Fitzgibbon (Fitzgerald), but O’Malley learns from the police where it came from. He doesn’t berate the boys or bring them in to admit their theft to the pastor, but rather invites them to a baseball game. His kindness wins them over, and O’Malley turns the gang into an accomplished choir for St. Dominic’s. The second conversion involves Ted Haines, Sr. (Gene Lockhart), a banker who holds an impossible mortgage over the church. He is determined to foreclose and build on the property. He also opposes his son’s wedding to a young woman O’Malley has helped. When he sees their happiness as his son prepares to go off to war, and realizes the priest’s role in making it possible, he relents. When O’Malley, a former professional songwriter, sells his latest tune to a publisher and uses the income to put a dent in the mortgage,

Haines softens and cancels the rest of the mortgage as a donation to the church. Exposure to the inner meaning of St. Dominic's parish leads him to realize that it is worth more than the cash value of the property. His conversion has made him a happy man.

The conversion in *The Bells of St. Mary's* closely follows the pattern of Haines's change of heart. The dilapidated parish school at St. Mary's drains the resources of the parish, while a new office building goes up on adjacent property. Against all probabilities, the sisters pray that its owner, Horace Bogardus (Henry Travers) will eventually give them the entire building for a new school. When Sister Mary Benedict tells him her aspiration, he stares at her in disbelief. Not only does he plan to go ahead with his office building, but he intends to buy St. Mary's school, tear it down, and use the property as a parking lot for his employees. If the parish won't sell, Bogardus threatens to have the city council, which he chairs, condemn it. Bogardus may be a tough business man, but he has a weak heart. O'Malley seizes on this information, and with the collusion of the attending physician, suggests that generosity may be as good a remedy for a weak heart as medication. Gradually these thoughts lead him to a profound conversion. Due to his newfound generosity, the parish gets his building, the sisters reaffirm their belief in the power of prayer, and Bogardus gives promise that he will find happiness in his remaining years on earth.

As we have already seen, the anti-Communist films that follow these Catholic films, also depend on the theme of sin and forgiveness. John Jefferson, in *My Son John*, has undoubtedly served the Soviet cause, but due at least in part to his parents' prayers for him, he records his confession for the instruction of the graduating class. His public rejection of the Party and his murder by its operatives demonstrates repentance and atonement. At the end, he becomes more hero than traitor. Likewise, in *Satan Never Sleeps* the brutal Maoist commandant converts back

to Christianity after he sees his parents gunned down in the ruins of the mission chapel, and the self-centered Father Bovard sacrifices himself to enable the others to escape.

The notion of sin in McCarey's films embraces a wide range of moral defects, from self-conscious acts like adultery and treason to more subtle disorders, such as greed, snobbery, and ingratitude. His sinners can be charming or obnoxious, unwitting or cunning. The constant theme that runs through McCarey's best work involves a belief in the possibility of change. With the help of a communion of saints, or at least of good people, his characters consistently migrate from one moral universe to another and so reinvent themselves. Leo McCarey always holds out the possibility of redemption for anyone, and revels when they seize the opportunity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sarris is generally thought to have introduced auteur criticism to American film scholarship with his 68-page article, "The American Cinema" in *Film Comment* 28 (Spring 1963). The revised and expanded version of this essay was published as *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (New York: Dutton, 1968). In the initial article, Sarris put McCarey in the third tier of directors (18). By the time the work came out in book form, Sarris had raised him to the second level "The Far Side of Paradise" (99). Some 20 years later he wrote: "There can be no question in my mind that . . . he belongs in the auteurist pantheon," or top-level. "Auteurism Turns Silver," *Village Voice*, (June 7, 1988), 99, cited in Wes D. Gehring, *Leo McCarey: From Marx to McCarthy* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2005), xx. Although the author treats McCarey's politics in some detail, the "Marx" of the title refers to the Marx Brothers. His collaboration with them in *Duck Soup* (1933) established his reputation as a master of sound comedy.

<sup>2</sup> As a matter of personal confession, I made this mainstream error of judgment by omitting McCarey from my own book, *Afterimage: The Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000). Like most of my colleagues, I did not feel his work merited inclusion. This present essay should have been a chapter in that work.

<sup>3</sup> See Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 73-84 for an extended analysis of "Going My Way" as a film of cultural transition.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 223.

<sup>5</sup> David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, third ed. (New York: Knopf, 1994), 500.

<sup>6</sup> Using the Christ and Culture paradigm of Reinhold Niebuhr, Mark Massa has studied this change in mood among *American Catholics at Mid-Century in Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Crossroad, 1999). See especially his synopsis of his thesis, 16-19.

<sup>7</sup> Leo McCarey. *You Can Change the World*. (The Christophers, 1949) 28 min., 5 sec. From You Tube: <http://www.christophers.org/page.aspx?pid=1245>. (Accessed Nov. 17, 2012)

---

<sup>8</sup> Gehring, p. 209.

<sup>9</sup> John's associate in Washington is named Ruth Carlin, who is in custody for her alleged espionage. The name of the character suggests a reference to Judith Coplon, a State Department employee, who in 1949 and 1950 was twice found guilty of spying. Her convictions were overturned the following year because of the FBI's illegal activity and subsequent perjury in covering up their misconduct during the investigations.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: Hollywood in the 1940s* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997), 303-313 traces the harsh reaction to the Communist threat in Hollywood back to labor disputes in the studios. Some executives, most prominently Walt Disney, believed Communist infiltration of the unions to be the root of the trouble.

<sup>11</sup> Robin Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University, 1998), 141.

<sup>12</sup> Jerome M. McKeever, *The McCarey Touch: The Life and Films of Leo McCarey* (Case Western Reserve University: PhD Dissertation, 2000) 77. McKeever's work was extremely helpful in tying together the strands of this complicated story, and his research into primary sources has been invaluable in separating rumor from reality. The fact that this work has never been published supports my thesis that McCarey holds little interest for academics and critics.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Harrill, "Leo McCarey," in *Senses of Cinema* 23 (December 2002), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/mccarey/>. In discussing the improbable reconciliation scene at the end of *Satan Never Sleeps*, he notes the importance of forgiveness, which he calls "possibly the most important theme of Christianity," in McCarey's films. Accessed August 12, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> The biographical information included here has been compiled mainly from Harrill, Gehring, and Smith.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, 155-57.

<sup>16</sup> Bogdanovich, Peter, *Who the Devil Made It? Conversations With Legendary Film Directors* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), 384.

<sup>17</sup> Gehring, 145.

<sup>18</sup> For an updated form of the *Baltimore Catechism*, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1994; trans., U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994). See entries on "Sin" nos. 1846-63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1870. The summary of the chapter on sin begins with a scriptural citation; "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all (Rom 11:32).

<sup>20</sup> On the "Sacrament of Penance," *ibid.* nos. 1422-1433.

<sup>21</sup> On "Indulgences," *ibid.*, nos. 1471-79. It must be noted that this more recent version of the catechism does not assign numerical values to individual prayers and good works.

<sup>22</sup> Leland A. Poague. *Billy Wilder & Leo McCarey. The Hollywood Professionals, Vol. 7.* (San Diego, Cal.: A. S. Barnes: 1980), 182.

<sup>23</sup> Gehring, 138.

<sup>24</sup> Bogdanovich, 412. Some historians might contest this statement, made by a man near the end of his days. McCarey was a hard drinker and loved to party, but whether his relationships with women went beyond playful flirtation is a question one should approach respectfully.

---

<sup>25</sup> Gehring, 165.

<sup>26</sup> McKeever quotes screenwriter David Ogden Stewart who recalls that this melodramatic device was developed by a suggestion from the Hays Office that she had to atone for the sins of her past life through the accident, 303. If so, it supports the thesis of sin and atonement. It may reflect the double standard of morality that she had to pay a price for her sins, possibly the shipboard "affair," while he is held less culpable for more flagrant behavior in his past.

### References

Blake, Richard A. *Afterimage: The Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000.

Bogdanovich, Peter. *Who the Devil Made It? Conversations with Legendary Film Directors*. New York: Ballantine, 1997. 379-446.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1994; trans., U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994.

Gehring, Wes D. *Leo McCarey: From Marx to McCarthy*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2005.

Harrill, Paul. "Leo McCarey," *Senses of Cinema* 23, December 2002, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/mccarey/>.

Massa, Mark. *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team*. New York: Crossroad, 1999.

McCarey, Leo. *You Can Change the World*. 1949. <http://www.christophers.org/page.aspx?pid=1245>.

McKeever, Jerome M. "The McCarey Touch: The Life and Times of Leo McCarey." PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2000.

Poague, Leland A. *Billy Wilder & Leo McCarey*. The Hollywood Professionals, Vol. 7. San Diego, Cal.: A. S. Barnes: 1980.

Sarris, Andrew. "The American Cinema," *Film Comment* 28 (Spring 1936) 1-68.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*. New York: Dutton, 1968.

Schatz, Thomas. *Boom and Bust: Hollywood in the 1940s*. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1997.

Smith, Anthony Burke. *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War*. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2010.

Thomson, David. *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Knopf. 1994.

Wood, Robin. *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film. Hollywood and Beyond*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.