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# The Catholic Vision in Hollywood: Ford, Capra, Borzage and Hitchcock

María Elena de las Carreras Kuntz

This article explores the different ways in which a Catholic view of the human condition is reflected in the cinema of John Ford, Frank Borzage, Frank Capra and Alfred Hitchcock. The belief system at work in the canon of these Hollywood filmmakers of the studio era is rooted in a Catholic understanding of the human person and his relationship to others, to the world and to God. Notions of love, sin, redemption and communion – as taught and lived in the Catholic tradition – are central to understand the worldview of four filmmakers who were raised in the Catholic faith.<sup>1</sup>

Ford (1894–1973), Borzage (1894–1962) and Capra (1897–1991) share a common immigrant background: they were born in the last decade of the 19th century into large European families of rural background who had left the Old World searching for a better future in the United States. Ford and Borzage were first generation Americans of Irish and Italian/Austrian/Swiss origins, respectively; and Capra was born in Sicily and immigrated to the US at age six. As noted by their biographers, the cultural and religious patterns of these hyphenated families were absorbed by their children and combined, in the case of Capra with long-lasting repercussions, with the prevailing values of the Anglo Protestant establishment.<sup>2</sup>

Hitchcock (1899–1980), on the other hand, was born in London into a middle-class family, of English and Irish descent. He noted to Francois Truffaut: 'Ours was a Catholic family and in England this in itself is an eccentricity'.<sup>3</sup> He attended Catholic schools, including the Jesuit St. Ignatius College, a formative experience that left a lasting influence. 'It was probably during this period with the Jesuits that a strong sense of fear developed – moral fear – the

fear of being involved in anything evil. I always tried to avoid it', he acknowledged to Truffaut.<sup>4</sup>

Frank Capra was the most explicit of the four directors in discussing his religious affiliation. Capra's biographers and critics agree that the power and consistency of the filmmaker's moral vision are rooted in his own life and experiences. Even if Joseph McBride's biography *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (1992) shows that Capra's 1971 memoir should be read with qualifications, it still provides the point of departure to examine the extent to which Capra's moral vision is shaped by the Catholicism into he was born. There are many revealing references in Capra's *The Name Above the Title* to the Catholic faith in connection with his personal life and work. An individualist by temperament who did not accept his religious heritage as a given but gradually came into it, Capra writes that in his early adulthood he was a 'Christmas Catholic'.<sup>5</sup> In the mid 1930s, the astonishing success of *It Happened One Night* (1934) triggered an artistic crisis, which resulted in a conversion experience, not unlike the one faced by many of his characters. He relates that the admonishment of an anonymous little man catapulted him back to action: 'The talents you have, Mr. Capra, are not your own, *not* self-acquired. God gave you those talents; they are His gifts to you, to use for His

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**Fig. 1.** The young Frank Borzage, a star of westerns for Thomas Ince, about 1915.

[All photos courtesy of Richard Koszarski Collection.]

purpose. And when you don't use the gifts God blessed you with – you are an offense to God – and to humanity.<sup>6</sup> Whether Capra wrote the facts or printed the legend about this defining episode, as McBride notes, it doesn't alter the autobiographical resonance of Clarence, the guardian angel in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946): through him the hero becomes aware of the effects of his God-given talents.

In later years, through his wife, Lucille Reyburn, who had converted to Catholicism, Capra returned to the faith. He defined himself 'as a Catholic in spirit; one who firmly believes that the anti-moral, the intellectual bigots and the Mafias of ill will may destroy religion, but they will never conquer the cross'.<sup>7</sup> If his films are seen as a form of submerged biography then one can understand why in so many of them Capra is fashioning plots that reflect his personal

conflict: the clash between a Catholic moral view – an idealist hero – and his desire to be a successful Hollywood director – the materialistic world which his memorable villains inhabit.<sup>8</sup>

John Ford's Catholicism is also a known fact: a complex personality, he was a man of faith and deeply held convictions. His biographers – beginning with grandson Dan Ford – attest to this fact but fall short of exploring the full implications of this lifelong fidelity to the Church, which resulted, for example, in the conversion of his Protestant wife. They tend to dwell (sometimes rather negatively in the case of Ronald L. Davis) on what they perceive as the *Irish* qualities of Ford's religious beliefs, like superstition, childishness and the adoration of the Virgin Mary. The two most recent biographers, Joseph McBride and Scott Eyman, tend to emphasize the ethnic component of Ford's Catholicism, examining it primarily in relationship to the life rather than the work.

Hitchcock, an intensely private person, did not disclose publicly the importance of Catholicism in his adult life. He was a parishioner of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Beverly Hills, where he attended Mass with his wife Alma Reville, a close collaborator during his entire career, who converted to Catholicism before their marriage in 1926. Like Ford, Hitchcock was reluctant to discuss his cinema other than in cinematic terms. So to assess the Catholic outlook that French critics saw as shaping his work, one has to look at the evidence of the films. When Truffaut asked Hitchcock if he considered himself a Catholic artist, the filmmaker was not so much evasive as cryptic: 'Maybe one's early upbringing influences a man's life and guides his instinct. I am definitely not antireligious; perhaps I'm sometimes neglectful.'<sup>9</sup>

Dealing with Frank Borzage's Catholicism is not possible on a purely biographical level. Borzage grew up in a Catholic family who had settled outside of Salt Lake City, staunch Mormon territory. According to his Swiss biographer Hervé Dumont, Borzage had not been baptised and did not want to convert to the family faith at the time of his death. In 1997 I interviewed Borzage's nephew Frank, who confirmed this information. Frank Borzage, Jr., commented on the long-running family joke about the unbaptised Borzages faring much better in life than the Catholic ones.

Dumont points out that the enigma of Borzage – an extremely private person – can start to be unraveled by noting that at age 25 the filmmaker had

become a Mason and was active in his Culver City, California Lodge. Dumont, in his definitive biography (unavailable so far in an English translation), makes the case that the Borzage canon should have a Masonic interpretation, whose thematic model is Mozart's *The Magic Flute* with its hero's Gnostic journey of enlightenment through the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The contention of this article is that the Borzage *canon* – not the biography – reflects a Catholic view of love in its theological meaning of *Charity* or *Agape*, unselfish love, self-sacrificing and freely given, an analogy to the love of God for his creatures.

In the last decade, the most compelling arguments about Catholicism in film – in English-language scholarship – have been advanced by Lee Lourdeaux in his book *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America: Ford, Capra, Coppola, and Scorsese*.<sup>11</sup> The author argues that the Catholic identity of these four directors – notwithstanding the crucial differences between first and second generation hyphenated Americans – can be probed by examining how three key Catholic ideas and beliefs are rendered cinematically: communion, mediation and sacramentality. Central to Lourdeaux's view is the notion that ethnicity and Catholic beliefs are two sides of the same coin, that is, an Irish and Italian way of being Catholic results in certain types of themes and imagery. This appreciation of the artist's ethnic background is undoubtedly useful to account for certain thematic and visual aspects in the work of a director: Buñuel, for example, cannot be fully grasped without understanding his lifelong rebellion against the Catholic Church of 19th century Spain; nor Fellini's brand of anticlericalism outside of Italian culture. But an emphasis on ethnicity will tend to disregard how a Catholic identity can be reflected in filmmakers like Hitchcock or Borzage, whose ethnic identities do not play a crucial role in their canon.

One should be careful in assigning values to an artwork by virtue of ethnicity or religious affiliation. Yet the specifically Catholic concepts of communion, mediation and sacramentality are central to explaining the key films and overall themes of these classic American filmmakers.

### Communion

In theological terms, communion is the belief that our relationship with God does not excuse us from our responsibility towards our neighbor, for whom we should care, especially for one in need. We have

been created in God's image and resemblance and by virtue of this filiation we are all, the living and the dead, part of the same body – the communion of saints – held together by the redeeming power of love. In this sense, Capra's main narrative trope (an idealist hero rising up to defend the common people) partakes of this notion. A joyful sense of community, of belonging to something larger than themselves, of being part of a family and family-like institutions, is at the heart of Capra's works of maturity from *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) to *It's a Wonderful Life*. But it is also present very forcefully in earlier films, like *American Madness* (1932), the social melodrama about a Quixotic banker (Walter Huston), whose business philosophy is to lend on character, not collateral, and who is repaid handsomely by hundreds of small customers when bankruptcy seems imminent. The comedy *Lady for a Day* (1933) operates on a similar principle: Apple Annie is helped by her beggar friends, a racketeer and his associates, and the New York elite to impersonate a lady of distinction so that her daughter will marry a Spanish aristocrat. *Lost Horizon* (1937) shows the Utopian Shangri-La, a mysterious community in the Himalayas following the teachings of their Lama, a two-hundred year old French missionary.

Capra's films celebrate the values associated with life in a community – solidarity and selflessness as the best way to live a fulfilling existence – but do so in a non-ethnic way, unlike the second generation Italian-Americans represented by Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Michael Cimino, who tend to keep the forms, rather than the spirit, of communal activities. Lourdeaux notes that Capra's communities – however idealised, one may add – are a blueprint for the principle of subsidiarity so fundamental in the Catholic social vision. This doctrine posits, and Capra shows, that in order to protect the social order, and especially those most vulnerable and needy, intermediate institutions are needed. These family-like organisations provide protection against anarchy, the despotism of the powerful and the intrusions of the state.

The idea of communion – be it the celebration of community life or the union between the living and their dear dead – is a visual hallmark of Ford's world. Rituals like births, weddings, burials, dances and meals cement the links amongst the community and bring to the screen some of Ford's most memorable moments. The Irish rituals of courtship play a comic role in *The Quiet Man* (1952). The dance is an act of

**Fig. 2.** Former flame Marjorie Rambeau is out of the picture when Loretta Young captures Spencer Tracy with her home-making skills in Borzage's *Man's Castle* (Columbia, 1933).



thanksgiving for the rugged pioneers of *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939). The people of Tombstone celebrate with a folk dance the building of a church in *My Darling Clementine* (1946). Dances bring solace to the weary farmers of *The Grapes of Wrath*, and refinement to the frontier outposts of the cavalry trilogy, *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *Rio Grande* (1950), as well as *Two Rode Together* (1961), each a study of leadership in times of crisis. Burials have a moving solemnity in *The Lost Patrol* (1934), *The Long Voyage Home* (1940), *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Battle of Midway* (1942), and *They Were Expendable* (1945). Burials matter because these films describe the dignity and courage with which characters face danger and death. Death, in turn, does not break the union between the living and the dead, and characters often talk to their dead friends. In *Judge Priest* (1934), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *The Sun Shines Bright* (1953) and the Ford episode of *How the West Was Won* (1962), husbands share their joys and sorrows with their long-deceased wives as if they were still alive. In other films, the ghosts of the loved ones accompany the living in their journey as a symbol of

unity, as in *3 Bad Men* (1926), *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) and *3 Godfathers* (1948).

Frank Borzage dwells on a different manifestation of communion: the links among human beings are actualised through the transformative effect of love, primarily that between a man and a woman. This is the overarching theme of the Borzage canon. Love is a healing and redemptive force that propels the lovers and those who surround them into a transcendental dimension, a spiritual realm beyond death, time and space.<sup>12</sup> The quintessential Borzagean narrative involves a couple braving the storms of life – mainly poverty and war, but also intolerance and selfishness – to find, through their love and suffering, a safe port. The opening intertitle of *Street Angel* (1928) summarises the defining theme of Borzage's whole work: 'Everywhere ... in every town ... in every street ... we pass, unknowing, human souls made great through love and adversity'. The two other pairings of Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell, *7th Heaven* (1927) and *Lucky Star* (1929) are delicate romances about the power of love to transcend the harshness of life.

Initially, the treatment of romantic love may

seem traditional, following generic Hollywood conventions. However, the understanding of how love shapes the dynamic of a couple follows a unique Borzagean route. In his films, love is a process that starts as Eros, a sensual attraction, and becomes, through redemptive suffering, *Agape*, the selfless care and concern for the well being of the loved one and others.<sup>13</sup> In the most overtly religious films, *The Green Light* (1937), *Disputed Passage* (1939) – two pictures where agnostic doctors become believers – *Strange Cargo* (1940), a Christian parable in the guise of an adventure film, *Till We Meet Again* (1944), where a fearful religious woman accepts the designs of Providence to enter a hostile world, and *The Big Fisherman* (1959) about Simon of Galilee becoming a fisher of souls, the love of the couple becomes a subtly stated analogy of God's deep love and joy of his creation. God is everywhere, Ray Milland, an American pilot hiding from the Germans, tells the French novice who saves him in *Till We Meet Again*. The psychological crime drama *Moonrise* (1948) shows a young man responsible for a murder who redeems himself through the love of a young woman.

By means of delicate visual ellipses, the sexual union is accomplished at an early stage of the relationship and seals the formation of the couple. What begins as *Eros* – a physical longing that is soon fulfilled – triggers a process of spiritual growth through which the two become one flesh and soul. Quintessential Borzage films like *7th Heaven*, *Man's Castle* (1933) and *China Doll* (1958) show the process by which a fiercely independent – but incomplete – man slowly enters into the realm of domesticity inhabited by the woman, who 'makes an empty house into a home, a home into a haven', in the words of Ray Milland. A shy Janet Gaynor turns a shabby Montmartre attic into a domestic paradise, in *7th Heaven*. In *Man's Castle*, Spencer Tracy is torn between the pull to abandon a pregnant Loretta Young or stay, and thus relinquish his cherished freedom. The dilemma is visually and aurally laid out: the beckoning whistle of passing trains versus the stove he has bought her to be paid in installments. In *China Doll*, the blasé war pilot Victor Mature learns to enjoy the home his 'temporary' Chinese wife has made of the shack assigned to him.

The passage from *Eros* to *Agape* is marked by a simple but solemn ritual of marriage. The exchange of vows is sacramental, that is, a sign of the action of God's grace upon the lovers. Catholic priests – sympathetic characters who understand the unusual cir-

cumstances surrounding the couples – bless the hasty weddings of soldiers called to the war front in *7th Heaven*, *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) and *China Doll*. Priest-like mediators provide the spiritual atmosphere where couples in danger can exchange vows. The preacher in *Man's Castle* performs a moving ceremony, remarking that although they are not in a church, in the eyes of God, Spencer Tracy and Loretta Young are husband and wife. *Man's Castle* contains meaningful religious epiphanies: Spencer Tracy reads from the *Song of Songs*, and the preacher cites the First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 1, verse 27: 'God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; he chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong'. In *Three Comrades* (1938) Margaret Sullavan and Robert Taylor exchange vows among friends in the restaurant where they have courted. The mother in *Mortal Storm* (1940) blesses the cup of wine exchanged by James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan before fleeing from the Nazis.

The sting of death has no power over couples made one by love and suffering. The dead enter a spiritual, disembodied stage, and watch over the living. As in Ford films, the dead and the living are part of a mystical body, held together by love, as the ending of *Three Comrades* eloquently shows.

Borzage also excelled in capturing the lighter side of romantic love. In many comedies, he delights the audience by showing the very instant love is born, be it the hit of Cupid's arrow at first sight, or the tender moment when reciprocated feelings are confessed. The scenes are always staged in a similar manner: camera, lighting and music create a private space for the man and woman caught in an intense romantic spell. Kay Francis and George Brent are magnetically attracted to one another in a crowded room in *Living on Velvet* (1935); Spencer Tracy, a street-smart New York cab driver, courts on a busy sidewalk a flustered Romanian immigrant played by Luise Rainer in *Big City* (1937); under the Spanish moon, a sophisticated Marlene Dietrich falls for the bashful Gary Cooper in *Desire* (1936); a Spanish redheaded *señorita* (Maureen O'Hara) is swept away – and wed by – a daring Dutch pirate (Paul Henreid) in *The Spanish Main* (1945).

However, in Borzage's universe, the trajectory from *Eros* to *Agape* – the transformation of selfishness into selflessness – is not confined to romantic love. In the films infused with a religious sensibility,

*Agape* coincides with a Christian understanding of the relationship between man and his neighbour, as a reflection of God's love for his creation. The rational doctors of *Green Light* and *Disputed Passage* realise in an epiphany that they can belong in the human family only if they sacrifice themselves for the good of others. Risking death, Errol Flynn tests on himself a vaccine for a deadly disease, and John Howard behaves heroically during a Japanese bombing. The redemptive value of sacrifice is at the core of the beautiful romantic drama *The Shining Hour* (1938), where the goodness and immolation of Margaret Sullavan heals a whole family, transforms a cynical lady played by Joan Crawford and saves two marriages.

In many Borzage films spiritual growth is achieved through physical loss. The director renders in visual terms the paradox at the heart of the Gospel: the grain of wheat must die in order to give fruit. Even though the Gospel message is never made explicit, film after film shows that love overcomes the havoc wrought by selfishness, poverty and war. In the Borzagean universe evil is a force that causes moral degradation, and there are not so much villains as weak characters who inhabit a spiritual hell. This is especially true of the anti-war films made between 1932 and 1940: *A Farewell to Arms*, *No Greater Glory* (1934), the remarkable anti-Nazi trilogy: *Little Man*, *What Now?* (1934), *Three Comrades* (1940) and *The Mortal Storm* (1943) and the French Resistance drama *Till We Meet Again*. They are not topical political denunciations but timeless explorations of what dehumanising behaviour, violence and legalised brutality – in sum, spiritual chaos – can do to the human soul. In some instances, the only heroic response is martyrdom, as beautifully embodied by the young novice in *Till We Meet Again*, who learned of love and evil by risking her life.

*Strange Cargo* is perhaps the film that best shows the individual and communal implications of *Eros* transformed into *Agape*. It is a Gospel narrative of the redemption of assorted sinners, among which is a repentant prostitute, told as a romantic adventure with glamorous Hollywood stars dressed in rags throughout the film. In an isolated penal colony, Cambreau (Ian Hunter), an enigmatic man who emerges from nowhere, leads a group of prisoners to freedom through the jungle. Only tough guy Verne (Clark Gable) and Julie (Joan Crawford), a hardened prostitute in search of better horizons, survive the perils of the journey and fall in love. The rest of the

criminals die at peace with themselves, having reached redemption through the serene example and words of Cambreau. After the mysterious man dies and resurrects in a climactic sea storm, and later disappears, Verne decides to return to the colony and pay his debt to society, while Julie waits for him. The trajectory from *Eros* to *Agape* has been completed. The Christian allegory is unmistakable: Cambreau functions as a Christ figure; he gives Gable a map with the escape route drawn on a Bible; Gable courts Crawford with the *Song of Songs*, a sacramental act that triggers her conversion. *Strange Cargo*, certainly an unusual film for its time, with its mix of sensuality and spirituality, was condemned by the Legion of Decency. The Catholic organisation deemed offensive the portrayal of the Christ-like figure and irreverent the use of the Scripture. Time has shown the Legion was woefully shortsighted in its judgement of one of the most Catholic films made in Hollywood.

### Mediation

Closely associated to communion, mediation is the idea that people need someone or something – a person, nature, symbols – to resolve conflicts. Christ is the mediator *par excellence*. Ford and Capra consistently use mediating figures. The Borzage hero is not defined by mediation traits but by his capacity to reflect love by analogy with Divine Love. The Hitchcock hero – an ordinary man or woman facing extraordinary evil – is neither a mediator nor a reflection of transcendental love. He is defined by the willingness to fight evil and by the price he has to pay.

In Capra's narrative pattern, the hero functions like a mediator between the needs of the community and the entrenched forces of greed: Dickson in *American Madness* (1932), Deeds in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1930) Vanderhof in *You Can't Take It with You* (1938), Smith in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), Doe in *Meet John Doe* (1941) and Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) play that role. In the most Christ-like of these figures – Smith and Doe – there are concrete allusions to their 'crucifixion' at the hands of the powerful. If anything, the trajectory of the archetypical Capra messianic innocent is one of passion, death and resurrection.

Music not only mediates between the opposites – as the harmonica duet in *You Can't Take it with You* (1937) – but also contributes to the creation or reaffirmation of a communal spirit: the impromptu singing of 'The Man in the Flying Trapeze' on the bus



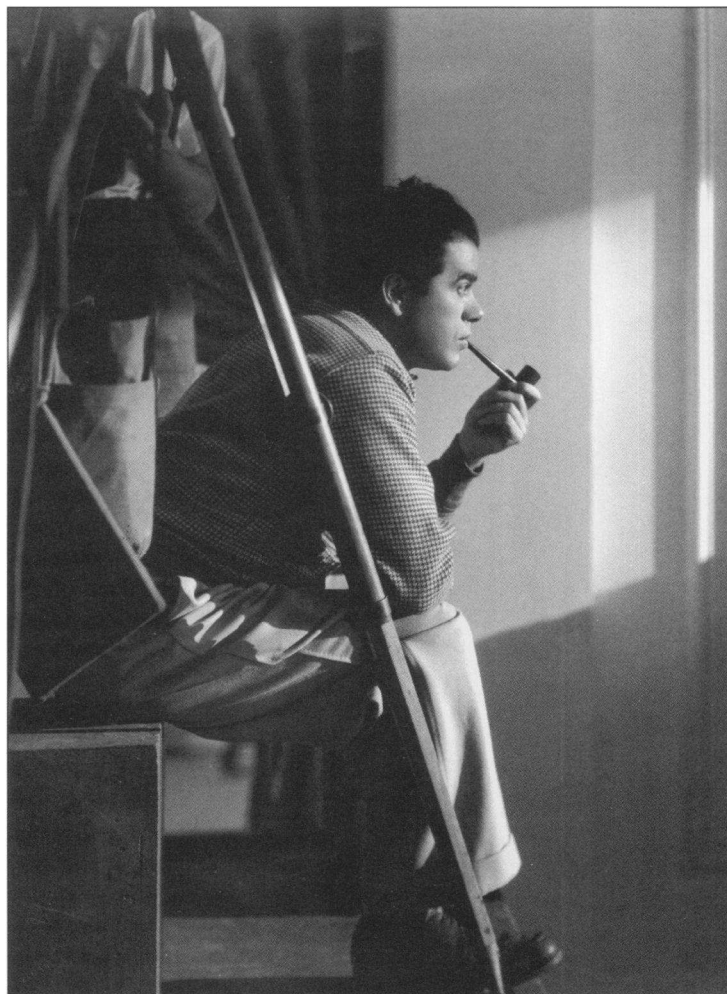
in *It Happened One Night* (1934), the tuba playing of Deeds in Mandrake Falls, the singing of Auld Lang Syne at the end of *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

Other types of recurrent mediators are the benevolent fathers and father figures, who dead or alive steer the heroes and heroines towards the common good. To cite one of many, the dead father in *The Miracle Woman* (1931), whose Christian ethic standards end up destroying the religious scam cooked up by his vengeful daughter, Barbara Stanwyck.

The Fordian hero is characterised by a secularised Christ-like trait, the willingness to be a mediator – to the point of self-sacrifice – for the good of the family, the community, and even the nation, as in the case of *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939). The hero, a man or a woman and even a child like Shirley Temple in *Wee Willie Winkie* (1938), strives to moderate intolerance (social prejudice, war, discrimination) by mediating between the opposing forces of chaos (the lawlessness of the West, the exploitation of the weak or poor) and repression (the letter of the law, rigid traditions).

What makes Ford's heroes so interesting is their human scale: they are not larger than life. They embody contradictions, complexities and flaws. In Catholic terms, they are of fallen nature, susceptible of redemption. They succeed but also fail. They are unique creatures: Tom Joad leaves his family to become a union organiser in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), Nathan Brittles wisely averts war with the Indians in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), a compassionate and astute Lincoln defends innocent people from a lynch mob in *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939); Hannah Jessop redresses the moral wrong she has done in *Pilgrimage* (1933); an idealist pastor confronts prejudice and the weight of rigid traditions in the small Welsh community of *How Green Was My Valley* (1941); Judge Priest shows how tolerance is possible in the deeply prejudiced Kentucky town in *The Sun Shines Bright* (1956). Ford sums up the mediator type in his last feature *7 Women* (1966) making the worldly heroine – an agnostic among Protestant believers – the only one to live the spirit of the Gospel by sacrificing herself for the community.

In *The Fugitive* (1947) Ford and screenwriter Dudley Nichols transform Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory* about the individual redemption of a 'whiskey' priest into a full-blown allegory of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection: an ordinary priest ends up fulfilling heroically the Gos-



pel's command to love one's neighbour. At the end of the film, a new priest named Serra – like the Franciscan founder of the 18th century California missions – will step into the shoes of the martyred hero, assuring the continuity of the church faithful. Ford wrote to producer Darryl F. Zanuck that 'my heart and my faith compel me to do it'.<sup>14</sup>

Three of the more complex – and written about – Ford heroes are Ethan Edwards (a hero and anti-hero) in *The Searchers* (1956) and Ransom Stoddard and Tom Doniphon (one hero split in two characters) in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). They reflect a view of the West as a moral landscape where good and evil can still be discerned – civilised behaviour is better than lawlessness and revenge – but the heroes cannot fulfill successfully their role of mediators without sacrificing themselves to a nameless limbo 'between the winds'. Edwards returns her

**Fig. 3.** Frank Capra contemplates the needs of the community on the set of *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Columbia, 1934). [Photo by Irving Lippman.]





**Fig. 4.** Victor McLaglen and Margot Grahame as the drunkard and the Magdalen in John Ford's *The Informer* (RKO, 1935).

niece to the white world but is destined to roam and wander; Doniphon is the unsung cowboy hero of the Old West who made the New West possible by willingly bestowing on Stoddard, a man of law, credit for the shooting which propelled his career.

### Sacramentality

Distinctively Catholic, sacramentality is the capacity of material things – people, objects, places, the cosmos – to carry, so to speak, the presence of God. To see God in and through His creation.

In Capra's filmic vision one way this is reflected is in the portrayal of the little people and their inherent dignity. Even though it is true that they also have the potential to become a mob – as the dark *Meet John Doe* (1941) shows – it is even truer that the common men are the meek of the Gospel. 'The meek can inherit the earth when the John Does start loving their neighbors', says Doe at the end of his first radio broadcast. Capra commented on several occasions that the underlying idea of his movies was actually

the Sermon on the Mount, an explicit reference to the core of the Christian moral doctrine in the New Testament, which opens with the Beatitudes – paradoxical in purely human terms – and found in the Gospel according to Matthew and Luke.<sup>15</sup>

Like Capra, Ford shows an undisguised – for some, overly sentimental – affection for the poor, the dispossessed, and the humble, that is, for those blessed by Christ in the Beatitudes: the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), expelled from their land; the Mexican peasants who keep the Catholic faith in spite of brutal persecution in *The Fugitive* (1947), Ford's nod to the countries behind the Iron Curtain; the Mormon families in search of their promised land in *Wagon Master* (1950); and the blacks and the prostitutes in the moving Christian allegory of *The Sun Shines Bright*.<sup>16</sup> Ford's particular fondness for the sinner translates into the recurring characters of drunkards and Mary Magdalens, who are endowed with redeeming values of wisdom and Madonna-like purity: Doc Boone and Dallas, the drunken doctor and saloon girl of *Stagecoach* (1939), chased from town by self-righteous ladies of the league of decency; Maria Dolores, the fallen woman who helps the priest in *The Fugitive* (1947); Doc Holliday and Chihuahua in *My Darling Clementine* (1946); and the vulnerable brute Gypo Nolan in *The Informer* (1935). In Gypo Nolan, Ford and screenwriter Dudley Nichols transformed the renegade Irish Communist of Liam O'Flaherty's original into an entirely different creature, forgiven before dying by the mother of the friend he betrayed.

Ford also utilises the landscape in a sacramental manner. In the lingering shots of Monument Valley – where he made nine of his Westerns and which he turned into a universal symbol of the American West – the director conveys a unique sense of beauty and mystery, establishing a sacramental relationship between man and landscape. Ford turns it into a primordial space where the children of God are faced with the basic issues of life: family, community, justice, solidarity, repentance, forgiveness and mercy. Or, as McBride writes: 'Ford's poetic way of conveying the transcendence of the eternal over the temporal'.<sup>17</sup>

In their film work made for the US government between 1942 and 1945 as part of the war effort, Ford and Capra also brought to the screen this distinctive approach to the inherent dignity of each human person. Heading a combat photography unit, Ford personally shot and edited the poetic documentary



**Fig. 5.** Alfred Hitchcock working with Thornton Wilder on the *Shadow of a Doubt* script (Universal, 1943).

short *The Battle of Midway* (1942), from the point of view of the soldiers who fought it, so that their sacrifice and heroism could be seen and felt by the audiences at home. As part of the secret photographic missions for the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner of the CIA, he documented the Doolittle raid against Tokyo taking off from the carrier *Hornet* in 1942, dwelling on the 'faces of ordinary seamen, supporting the heroic mission', as McBride notes.<sup>18</sup>

As the executive producer of the *Why We Fight* series commissioned by Chief of Staff General George Marshall following Pearl Harbor, Capra laid out the basic rhetorical device of contrasting the American democratic ideals – including the value of religion – to the dehumanising ideology of the Axis powers. The director's predilection for the common people – and their suffering – is a constant theme of the series. It comes across most forcefully in the last episode, *War Comes to America*, a celebration of the American values he so prized in his 1930s films. *The*

*Negro Soldier* (1944) not part of the series, sets this propaganda film about the contribution of American blacks in a still segregated Army, in a vibrant Christian church gathered for Sunday worship.

Borzage shares with Capra and Ford a sacramental sense of reality, but in his films it dwells on the human face. Some of the most memorable moments in Borzage are the intensely spiritual farewells, foreshadowing death: Helen Hayes at her deathbed in *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) to the music of 'Death and Transfiguration' from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*; Frank Morgan, as the German Jewish professor talking to this wife for the last time in the concentration camp, in *The Mortal Storm* (1940); Margaret Sullavan dying in Jimmy Stewart's arms, also in *The Mortal Storm*, sacrificing herself for her husband and friend in *Three Comrades* (1938).

For these three directors, music – an instrument of mediation – also plays a sacramental role; it is a means to create a communal sense and a

reminder that we are connected to a reality transcending our senses. To mind comes the beautiful scene – and unnecessary for plot progression – of the blind orphan singing 'Caro Nome', from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, in Capra's *Here Comes the Groom* (1951). The use of traditional and religious melodies throughout Ford's cinema provides cinematographic short-cuts into his universe, incarnating the essential Fordian themes, for example 'Shall We Gather at the River' symbolising an ideal community in countless films. In *Borzage* the experience of beauty is generally rendered through music. It performs a radical transformation, delicately portrayed in the television play *The Day I Met Caruso* (1956), by changing forever a little Quaker girl's austere view of joy.

### Catholic narratives

Ford, Borzage, Capra and Hitchcock also have signature narrative forms that lend themselves to a Catholic reading of the human condition. The Catholic understanding on this matter is that human nature is weakened by original sin but capable of redemption, through the exercise of free will.<sup>19</sup> Salvation or damnation are not predestined, and it matters how we choose to behave, for in this choice lies what we will become.

In Borzage's films, goodness, beauty and truth – attributes of God in classic Catholic theology – move a person, a couple, a family and a community to transcend the limits imposed by a flawed human condition, become whole, and thus fulfill their humanness. In his stories of conversion through love, there flows a predilection – like Capra and Ford – for the little people, for the weak, the wounded, the innocent, the children, or all God's creatures blessed by Christ in the Sermon of the Mount. It was not by chance that Borzage's last picture was *The Big Fisherman*, and its climax that very passage of Gospel. In his films about love, beauty, suffering and sacrifice, Borzage translated the beatitudes of the New Testament to the Hollywood screen.

### Hitchcock's tales of original sinners

The archetypal Hitchcockian situation involves an ordinary man or woman who is suddenly involved in an out-of-the-ordinary situation. This disruption is caused by some manifestation of evil: a malevolent person, a secret organisation, political agents (Nazis or communists), a sinful past of sexual origin, or an unbridled element of nature. The plot is played out as the confrontation between these good but not

flawless heroes, and the forces of destruction, chaos and disorder unleashed against them. Except for a few instances of ambiguous endings – *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963) – good triumphs over evil and the moral balance is restored, but not without the providential intervention of chance. The protagonists, and also the characters caught in the turmoil, do not come out of these ordeals unscathed; they pay a price, either in a loss of innocence (*Rebecca*, 1940; *Foreign Correspondent*, 1940; *Shadow of a Doubt*, 1943), the acquisition of guilt (*Blackmail*, 1929; *Sabotage*, 1936), or more disturbingly, through their contamination with evil (*Torn Curtain*, 1966; *Topaz*, 1969; *Frenzy*, 1972). In their seminal 1957 study on the director, Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer defined this intertwining of good and evil as the 'transfer of guilt'.<sup>20</sup> In the later films, not untouched by hints of despair, evil is clearly presented as the absence, or the slaughter, of love: *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *Marnie* (1964), studies of isolated or obsessed individuals confined in emotional or pathological traps.

In the two films with specifically Catholic subject matter, *I Confess* (1953) and *The Wrong Man* (1957), the protagonists are men of faith: one a priest, played by Montgomery Clift, and the other a family man and New York musician of Italian descent, Henry Fonda. Both stand accused of crimes they have not committed – a recurrent Hitchcockian motif – but neither can prove his innocence: The priest has heard the confession of the murderer, and is therefore bound to secrecy; the musician has been misidentified as a robber in a police lineup. The machinery of authority is about to crush them when providence intervenes: without violating his vows, the priest is able to reenact a public avowal of the murder by the criminal; in *The Wrong Man*, the real robber is caught in a scene immediately following the protagonist's anguished prayer to the Sacred Heart. The climax of this documentary-style film, based on a true story, is the close-up of a praying Fonda dissolving over the emerging face of the real culprit.

The spreading presence of evil is a constant in the Hitchcockian universe. The films are not theological ruminations about the nature of evil, but a presentation of its horrific consequences, mainly its 'desecrations of beauty and purity', as Truffaut summarises its impact.<sup>21</sup> Like the biblical Job, the characters forced to confront evil do not understand its origin or magnitude: the shy new mistress of Manderley, symbolising the possibility of redemption, is

nearly destroyed by the obsessed housekeeper mourning the death of evil Rebecca, a character unseen and unheard in *Rebecca*, but whose malignant presence threatens the living. In *Rope* (1948), two college graduates murder a friend in an aesthetic attempt at moral emancipation. *Psycho* offers a chilling picture of hell in the guise of a journey into the mind of the psychopathic murderer Norman Bates, with whom the audience has emotionally identified until the surprising twist at the end. A psychotic son acts as if a pact to exchange murders has really taken place in *Strangers on a Train* (1951); the explosion of the merry-go-round at the end symbolises the chaos he has generated. In this light, *The Birds* can be seen as a doomsday parable about contemporary man paralysed and helpless before a force of evil beyond his understanding.

The most effective agents of evil are invariably seductive, well-mannered and clean-shaven gentlemen – occasionally a mysterious, elegant woman as in *The Paradine Case* (1947). Since one of Hitchcock's techniques is to provide the viewers with information withheld from the characters so as to create suspense, the design of malevolent men is particularly interesting. Joseph Cotton in *Shadow of a Doubt* is a suavely sinister killer of rich widows, who explains his amoral behaviour to the audience during a family meal. The camera dollies in on his profile and when a voice-over remarks that widows are human beings, he turns his face to the camera as if daring the viewers to respond, and chillingly states: 'Are they?' The charming German Robert Young and Claude Rains are in fact ruthless killers in the picturesque landscapes of Switzerland and Brazil, in *Secret Agent* (1936) and *Notorious* (1946).

In the war drama *Lifeboat* (1944), about the Allied survivors of a German submarine attack who rescue a diabolical Nazi officer and eventually kill him, Hitchcock came the closest to openly voicing the moral and religious issues faced by a group of people in an extreme situation of physical and spiritual confinement. 'What do we do with people like that?' is a question asked twice by a character. It encapsulates a moral dilemma with no easy solution.

Shaping the design of a Hitchcock character is the belief in man's fallen nature, or what British critic Robin Wood discusses as the 'inextricability of good and evil', one way of referring to the doctrine of original sin.<sup>22</sup> This intertwining does not mean that good and evil are interchangeable factors in a universe of moral relativism. On the contrary, what

comes across so forcefully in Hitchcock's work is the unshakeable presence of moral absolutes, rooted not surprisingly in a Judeo-Christian worldview. Maybe the Jesuit emphasis on casuistry channeled the future filmmaker's awareness of the factors intervening in the concreteness of a moral situation.

In a Hitchcock film not only is the moral dimension of a key act shown with clarity, but also the awareness of the character in such a moment: Claude Rains deciding to poison his wife in *Notorious* (1946); Oskar Homolka sending his young brother-in-law away carrying a ticking bomb in *Sabotage* (1936); the mothers who must choose between the lives of their kidnapped children or disrupting an act of sabotage in both versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934 and 1956); the spying of the reporter in *Rear Window* (1953); the detective manipulating a woman to satisfy his romantic obsession in *Vertigo*; the woman stealing \$40,000 in *Psycho*.

The heroes are imperfect or fight against a dark past: the guilt-ridden protagonists of the period drama *Under Capricorn* (1949) and the psychological thriller *Spellbound* (1945), an obsessively curious James Stewart in *Rear Window*, the moral weakling portrayed by Farley Granger in *Strangers on a Train* (1948), the unfaithful wife in *Dial M for Murder* (1954), an irresponsible Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* (1959), the sour protagonist of *Frenzy* (1968). By the same token, the agents of evil sometimes show moral qualms, like the troubled spies played by Oscar Homolka and Herbert Marshall in *Sabotage* and *Foreign Correspondent*, and the woman kidnapper in the 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

Interestingly, when a scene shows a killing committed by a decent character, with whom the audience has been led to identify, Hitchcock skillfully dissociates the act from the actor: the killing still violates the Fifth Commandment, even though the perpetrator was forced to act in self-defense. The most haunting example perhaps is in the Cold War spy drama *Torn Curtain*, where an American scientist working as a spy in East Germany kills a communist secret agent in a gas oven. Like the equally horrific scene of the bathtub murder in *Psycho*, the act of killing a human person – however despicable – and disposing of the corpse, is an ugly, arduous, dirty task. This is the premise developed in the black comedy *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), where the director indulged his British penchant for the macabre and for ironic understatement.

Hitchcock is far from assigning to himself the

role of a moralist, or a Catholic apologist, for that matter. In the television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–1965), however, the director seems to relish playing the role of a stern father admonishing children who deviate from the good path, by means of modern day fables. The no-nonsense morality of the stories is conveyed through deceptively simple plots: what you do to others will be done to you. The most recurring narrative involves characters who murder and cannot extricate themselves from the physical and moral consequences of these acts, for example *Back for Christmas*, *Wet Saturday*, *One More Mile to Go*, *Lamb to the Slaughter* and *Banquo's Chair*.

### The moral epiphanies in John Ford

Ford's cinematic universe is built around a repertory of themes, notably family, community, justice, duty, tradition, self-sacrifice and redemption. The director favours three archetypal narratives, with strong symbolic components: journeys of ascension toward home, or a promised land; journeys of descent from lost paradises, which can be regained through redemption; and isolated communities or individuals facing dangers of a physical or spiritual nature.

Ford sets his characters in a moral universe where right and wrong, good and evil have an objective existence. The tragic moment in a Ford film is the crisis of an individual conscience, the moment when a character takes stock of who he or she is, a moment that 'allows them to define themselves' as Ford once remarked. 'It enables me to make individuals aware of each other by bringing them face-to-face with something bigger than themselves. The situation, the tragic moment, forces men to reveal themselves and to become aware of what they truly are. The device allows me to find the exceptional in the commonplace.'<sup>23</sup>

These moral epiphanies are always subtly staged, blended into the action. In *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (1936), Dr. Mudd, unjustly condemned for participation in the Lincoln assassination plot, honors his medical vows and saves his jailors from the plague. Mary Stuart will face death rather than give up her Catholic faith in *Mary of Scotland* (1936). In *Stagecoach* (1939) and *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960), the outlaw Ringo Kid and the brave black soldier choose to stay and help the stagecoach passengers and fellow soldiers from Apache attacks. Ethan Edwards breaks away from a cycle of rage and revenge

by not killing his 'contaminated' young niece, brought up as a Comanche in *The Searchers*. A compassionate doctor forgoes a lucrative practice to help the poor in *Arrowsmith* (1931). In *The Fugitive*, the persecuted priest returns to a dangerous country, and martyrdom, for the salvation of one soul.

The possibility of redemption is an omnipresent trait of Ford's universe. No matter how flawed, weak, proud or sinful, a character can choose the path of redemption, on many occasions through an act of self-sacrifice: the unfaithful wife in *Flesh* (1932), the amoral flyer in *Airmail* (1932), the possessive mother in *Pilgrimage*, the pathetic Judas figure of Gypo Nolan in *The Informer*; the misguided French governor of a Polynesian island in *The Hurricane* (1937); the martinet commander in *Fort Apache*; and the cynical Dr. Cartwright in *7 Women*. In *3 Bad Men* (1926) and *3 Godfathers*, two wonderful allegories about the Three Magi, the outlaws represent also the Good Thief of the Gospel in Western attire.

### Capra's gospel parables

Richard Griffith described the narrative formula Capra elaborated, in close collaboration with screenwriter Robert Riskin, as a 'fantasy of goodwill', in which a messianic innocent, not unlike the classic simpletons of literature, pits himself against the forces of entrenched greed. His experience defeats him strategically, but his gallant integrity in the face of temptation calls forth the goodwill of the 'little people', and through their combined protest, he triumphs.<sup>24</sup>

Graham Greene phrased the Capra formula in moral terms, referring to *Mr. Deeds*, but applicable to the entire canon: 'the theme of goodness and simplicity manhandled in a deeply selfish and brutal world'.<sup>25</sup> The formula was in place by 1936 with *Mr. Deeds*. It was retooled in *Mr. Smith* and taken to a dark extreme in *Meet John Doe*. To this trilogy of the common man should be added *You Can't Take It with You* and Capra's post-war comeback, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

These films can also be read as modern day parables, not unlike those found in the Gospel. They are stories drawn from real life experience, containing both a paradox and a challenge. *It's a Wonderful Life* comes the closest to the spirit of the Gospel, because it lays out a human conflict and explores its transcendental implications: how ought we to conduct our lives? At the heart of the film lies the clash between the desires of the heart and the needs of the

common good. The hero, Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, lives the irreconcilable conflict within himself until the end of the picture. Even though his nemesis Mr. Potter (Lionel Barrymore) typifies the classic Capra villain, he is more an external manifestation of Bailey's duality than an autonomous unrepentant Scrooge character. Most of the film is an extended flashback, in which an apprentice guardian angel Clarence (Henry Travers) reviews the life of this small town Building and Loan owner, who is contemplating suicide on Christmas Eve. The angel's challenge is how to prevent him from jumping off a bridge. By having the hero see what the life of the community would have been if he hadn't been born, Clarence – functioning as his conscience – triggers an experience of conversion. The 'unborn' sequence shows in very cinematographic terms how the absence of Bailey's goodness has meant the presence of evil: Bedford Falls, renamed Pottersville, is an urban hell of mean little people, beginning with his embittered mother and the wife he never married. The beautiful climax has Bailey surrounded by the warmth and affection of family and friends, whose joint efforts will pull the Building and Loan out of financial trouble. The protagonist's wry smile is a wink to the audience: he has seen, understood and accepted life in all glory and imperfections.

Capra wrote in his autobiography that it was a film 'to tell the weary, the disheartened, and the disillusioned; the wino, the junkie, the prostitute; those behind prison walls and those behind Iron Curtains, that *no man is a failure!* To show those born slow of foot or slow of mind, those oldest sisters condemned to spinsterhood, and those oldest sons condemned to unschooled toil, that *each man's life touches so many other lives.* And that if he isn't around it would leave an awful hole.'<sup>26</sup>

One of the reasons why the consistency of Capra's Catholic vision may not seem evident when first watching the films is because of the absence of obvious religious imagery as in Ford's films: churches, priests, rituals and bells. Capra's Catholic imagination can be traced not only through characters and plot structures, but by the way free will, sin, grace and redemption are worked out in his entire canon. Perhaps the single most revealing element in Capra's vision lies in the way he shows, from his first films, the power of goodness to transform sinful human nature. In many instances, and especially in his early work, goodness is translated as romantic love thoroughly metamorphosing the people who are



the object of affection, for example a contemptuous Broadway actor in *Matinée Idol* (1928), a cynical gold digger in *Ladies of Leisure* (1930) and the unfaithful husband in *State of the Union* (1946). *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944) presents a funny variant: the misguided love of two endearing eccentric ladies make them poison twelve lonely gentlemen to end their misery.

Like the Gospel parables – to which many of Capra's greatest pictures resemble – his films portray how love, a gift freely given, comes to ordinary reality and changes it extraordinarily; in other words, how the transcendent disrupts the course of human events. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, a work of theological optimism, the divine is above the earth and comes to it to propose salvation to a soul in despair.<sup>27</sup> The hero accomplishes salvation only after undergoing an experience of powerlessness. His prayer of desolation, 'Lord ... I'm at the end of my rope', rings with the loneliness of Gethsemane, the eve of Christ's crucifixion. The Passion pattern culminates with Bailey's resurrection. This spiritual rebirth is assured when he realises that life has the potential to be wonderful, in spite of its imperfections. His love – an analogy for God's love – has created a spiritual community, a tangible manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

**Fig. 6.** Capra's post-war gospel: *It's a Wonderful Life* (RKO, 1947).



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The cinema of John Ford, Frank Borzage, Frank Capra and Alfred Hitchcock bears the mark of a Catholic identity, reflected in the themes and beliefs at the core of their canon, both of which stem from

the religious tradition that shaped their worldview. These four directors excelled in a visual medium eminently suited to the Catholic concept of art as beauty incarnated in an imperfect world, susceptible of redemption.

## Notes

1. I began to study the cinema of John Ford, Frank Borzage, Frank Capra and Alfred Hitchcock in a series of articles for *Crisis*, a monthly Catholic magazine of culture and politics. Essays on these and other filmmakers whose worldview is Catholic, like Wim Wenders and Krzysztof Kieslowski, have appeared there since 1996. For this article I studied over 40 John Ford films from the more than 130 made between 1917 and 1970. I have reviewed 37 of Alfred Hitchcock's 53 films made between 1926 and 1976, plus 12 of the 20 episodes he directed for the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* TV show. Frank Borzage directed more than 100 films in 40 years, of which 46 from the silent era are thought to be lost. I reviewed more than 40 titles. Frank Capra directed more than 35 films, produced many propaganda films for the World War II effort, and directed four television specials. I saw over 24 films and the *Why We Fight* series, plus *The Negro Soldier*. My husband, Jonathan Kuntz, first inspired me to enjoy and study the work of these great directors. I have benefited immensely from his knowledge, passion and insight. Our marriage has been strengthened and enlivened by so many great films.
  2. Research for this article was based on several John Ford biographies: Andrew Sinclair, *John Ford, A Biography* (New York, 1979); Dan Ford, *Pappy: The Life of John Ford* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1979); Tag Gallagher, *John Ford, The Man and His Films* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986); Ronald L. Davis, *John Ford Hollywood's Old Master* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1995); Scott Eyman, *Print the Legend, The Life and Times of John Ford* (New York, 1999) and Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford, A Life* (New York, 2001).  
 For Frank Capra I relied on Joseph McBride's biography, *Frank Capra, The Catastrophe of Success* (New York 1992) and Capra's memoirs, *The Name Above the Title, An Autobiography* (New York 1985).  
 Hervé Dumont's biography was the main source for Borzage: *Frank Borzage, Sarastro a Hollywood* (Milan, 1993).  
 In the case of Hitchcock I used the biographies by John Russell Taylor (New York, 1978) and Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius, The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York, 1983) as well as Truffaut's
- book-length interview, *Hitchcock-Truffaut* (revised edn) (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).
  3. Truffaut, 26.
  4. Truffaut, 26. Note the opposite evolution of Hitchcock's contemporary Luis Buñuel, born in 1900, and also profoundly marked by a Jesuit upbringing. Buñuel love-hate relationship with the Jesuits and the Church has been explored by Manuel Alcalá, a Jesuit, in *Buñuel, Cine e Ideología* (Madrid, 1973).
  5. Capra, 67.
  6. Capra, 176.
  7. Capra, 443.
  8. See Charles Maland, *Frank Capra* (Boston, 1980), 91–92, 179–180, 182.
  9. Truffaut, 316–317.
  10. Dumont, 20–23.
  11. Lee Lourdeaux, *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America, Ford, Capra, Coppola and Scorsese* (Philadelphia, 1990).
  12. The first critics to note a consistent pattern of redemption and transcendence through love were Henri Agel and Michael Henry, both writing from a Catholic perspective. See Henri Agel, *Les grands cineastes* (Paris, 1959) and *Cinéma et nouvelle naissance* (Paris, 1981); and Michael Henry, 'Le Fra Angelico du mélodrame' *Positif* (July–August 1977), 12–15.  
 Two main critical assessments of Borzage's cinema in English are John Belton, *The Hollywood Professionals: Howard Hawks, Frank Borzage, Edgar G. Ulmer* (London and New York: The Tantivy, 1974) and Frederick Lamster, *Souls Made Great Through Love and Adversity, The Film Work of Frank Borzage* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1981).
  13. *Agape*, in Greek, 'banquet'. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Huntington, Indiana, 1991) contrasts the Greek terms *eros* (sexual love) with *philia* (friendship) and *agape* (charity). In a Christian context, 'agape refers to God's deep and active love for the world, expressed in His desire to save it from the power and consequences of sin and death. The term occurs in the early Church with reference to a community meal either before or after the Eucharist.'



14. Cited by McBride, *Searching for John Ford*, 438.
15. The Sermon on the Mount is found in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and St. Luke, Chapter 6.
16. McBride calls *The Sun Shines Bright* a morality play, *Searching for John Ford*, 521. In the context of this article, I prefer to call it a Christian allegory about imperfect people who can redeem themselves. The director's predilection for the Biblical allegory is evident also in *The Informer* (the Judas figure), *The Fugitive* (a Christ figure), *3 Godfathers* (the Three Wise Men). *The Sun Shines Bright* was 'really my favourites, the only one I like to see over and over again', Ford noted in 1968 (McBride, *Searching for John Ford*, 521).
17. McBride, *Searching for John Ford*, 9.
18. McBride, *Searching for John Ford*, 357.
19. From a Catholic perspective, the doctrine of original sin explains how human nature has a lack of facility in doing good. It maintains that human beings are not born with a positive inclination to moral evil. As a result of original sin, our persons are not ordered to God and the interior harmony which such an ordering brings with it. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.
20. Erich Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* (Trans. Stanley Hochman) (New York, 1979).
21. Truffaut, 20.
22. Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* (New York 1970).
23. Lindsay Anderson, *About John Ford* (New York, 1981), 192; and Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington, *John Ford* (New York, 1975), 21.
24. Richard Griffith, *Frank Capra* (London n/d). New Index Series, n.3.p. The citation is from the Prologue, n/p.
25. Graham Greene, 'A Director of Genius: Four Reviews', in Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn, (eds) *Frank Capra, The Man and His Films* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1975) 110–116.
26. Capra, *The Name Above the Title*, 383.
27. Stehen J. Brown discusses *It's a Wonderful Life* from a Catholic perspective in 'Theological Optimism in the Films of Frank Capra', *Theology* (November–December 1998), 437–444. He applies concepts developed by the Catholic Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar about the divine, the transcendent, and the revelation of God's glory.