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Popular and Catholic Cinema in Italy, 1944–1954

What Kind of Lessons about the Past Did the “Morally Sane” and Educating Film Communicate to Italian Audiences?

Abstract

Looking from the 1970s backwards, from the years of the Anti-Fascist consensus in large parts of Italian society, the famous neorealist Italian films overlay completely the vast popular film production of the first decade after World War II. However, during the years between 1948 and 1955, neorealism had a difficult standing in the predominant Italian Catholic-conservative political culture, and the Resistance against “nazifascism” vanished more and more from the screens. Christian democratic leaders and Vatican hierarchy aimed to moralize society by the most popular media of that decade: cinema. State administration tried to promote “morally good” films by using financial grants to lead Italian productions and co-productions towards an auspicious Catholic film, but by applying state censorship to undesirable topics as well. Vatican authorities tried to influence Catholic audiences by communicating film recommendations and by creating a system of Catholic oriented cinemas: commercial ones and especially parish cinemas. For economic and audience reasons the parish cinema system probably “failed” to moralize, at least following the standards given by the Vatican authorities, but popular Catholic cinema, as I suggest, worked quite well politically in organizing Catholic society. It worked still better in terms of forgetting about the Fascist past and believing in a self-exculpatory master narrative created by Italian post-war society.

1 Beyond Neorealism: Looking at the Popular Everyday Film

For later generations, especially those influenced by the subculture of the Communist Party or by the independent Left during the 1970s, neorealist movies are dominating completely the vast film production of the first decade after the World War II. A sort of

‘classical canon’ of neorealism¹ had been created – with a series of film icons that from a retrospective point of view are overshadowing all others: Roberto Rossellini’s “Roma città aperta” (1945) and “Paissà” (1946), Aldo Vergano’s “Il sole sorge ancora” (1946), Mario Camerini’s “Due lettere anonime” (1945), Giacomo Gentilomo’s “O Sole mio” (1945), Giorgio Ferroni’s “Pian delle Stelle” (1946), Carmine Gallone’s “Davanti a lui tremava tutta Roma” (1946), Mario Soldati’s “Fuga in Francia” (1948).² But for a contemporary observer, from 1948 onwards neorealism had a difficult standing in the predominant Italian Catholic-conservative political culture. Now, the Resistance vanished from the screens. Only with the anti-Fascist consensus grown with the Centro-Sinistra-Government and further strengthened during the ’70s, neorealism became a cineastic and cultural icon, seen by then – in a sort of orthodox interpretation – as “in Pasolini’s words, a product of Resistance, and Italy’s struggle for reconstruction and its inability to deal with the traumas of the past are best seen through the lens of neorealism”.³ Highlighted were especially those films dealing with the Resistance movement between 1943 and 1945, neglecting the cinema that engaged with the history of the Fascist *ventennio* and – as Ruth Ben-Ghiat has pointed out strongly – creating a model for what would be excluded from post-war cultural memory.⁴ For Elena Dagrada it was neorealism that “became the best ambassador of the Italian boot. It acquitted Italians from blame and conveyed resistance

1 Cf. the catalogue of films contained in: *La Resistenza nel cinema italiano 1945–1995*. Comitato regionale per il 50° anniversario della Liberazione, Istituto storico della Resistenza in Liguria, Supplemento della rivista “Storia e Memoria”, Genova 1995; for an excellent overview cf. Pietro Cavallo, *Cinema e Resistenza nella Prima Repubblica*, in: Aldo Agosti/Chiara Colombini (Eds.), *Resistenza e autobiografia della nazione. Uso pubblico, rappresentazione, memoria*, Torino 2012, pp. 185–207.

2 Maurizio Zinni, *Uomini in nero. Il fascismo nel cinema italiano (1945–1962)*, in: Pietro Cavallo/Luigi Goglia/Paquale Iaccio (Eds.), *Cinema a passo romano. Trent’anni di fascismo sullo schermo (1934–1963)*, Napoli 2012, pp. 290–320, at pp. 298, 319. From 1949 to 1955 only few films are still dealing with the Resistenza: “Un piccolo esercito nelle Langhe” (director Lulli, 1949), 1951 arrives Lizzani’s “Achtung Banditen”, in 1952 Oreste Biancoli’s “Penne nere”, and 1955 appears “Gli sbandati” di Maselli. Only 1959 arrives Rossellini’s “Il generale Della Rovere”. Obviously there were a lot of other topics in neorealist film, like in “Riso amaro”(director De Santis, 1949) or in other films. A deep analysis of the characterization of the twenty years of Fascist regime in neorealist films is offered by Giacomo Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945. The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory*, Basingstoke 2013. As in Carlo Lizzani’s “Cronache di poveri amanti”, one of the weaknesses in the neorealist analysis of the Fascist period was according to Lichtner “the unwillingness to make the Fascists a majority, or even a significant minority” (ibid., p. 60).

3 Catherine O’Rawe, *Back for Good. Melodrama and the Returning Soldier in Post-war Italian Cinema*, in: *Modern Italy 2* (2017), pp. 123–142, at p. 127.

4 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Liberation. Film and the Flight from the Italian Past 1945–50*, in: Richard Bosworth/Patrizia Dogliani (Eds.), *History, Memory, and Representation*, London 1999, pp. 83–

by showing the everyday heroism of an innocent, suffering population”.⁵ However, Italian Catholics did not notice or appreciate this subtle redeeming function of neorealism. They were hostile towards the neorealist style because it was considered politically too close to the left wing parties. Moreover, its final message described a rude reality, which did not leave any place for hope, as Giulio Andreotti clearly pointed out in an article criticizing De Sica’s film “Umberto D.”

This paper wants to highlight another aspect: Among the set of films produced from 1945 to 1955 an extensive amount of popular films, comedies, which aimed at entertaining people existed.⁶ Nonetheless, they were often equipped with small hints and hidden messages about how to look back to the Italian Fascist and dictatorial past. These messages travelled as small bits of subcutane, but potentially influential opinion making, oriented towards the creation of a popular consensus regarding the past, specifically, because of their seemingly unintentional interpretations of Fascism. What Italians thought about “ordinary Fascism” in their country, I suggest, was subconsciously influenced by popular cinema.⁷ This is to my opinion majorly noticeable for films dealing with the years of the so-called Fascist *ventennio* from 1923 and 1943, films that aimed to create a gap between the perception of the twenty years of autoctonous Fascist regime on one hand and the subsequent interpretation of the partisan warfare against “Nazifascism” from 1943 to 1945 on the other. This separation of the past in two different historical and interpretative epochs was reinforced, obviously, not only by cinema, but also by journalism and popular historical writing that often downplayed the bruteness of Italian *ventennio* Fascism, and contributed to create a new master narrative on the Italian Fascist past, “softening” the image of the regime by “forgetting” its repressive and violent aspects.

101; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Fascism, Writing and Memory. The Realist Aesthetic in Italy, 1930–50, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995), pp. 627–665.

5 Elena Dagrada, A Triple Alliance for a Catholic Neorealism. Roberto Rossellini according to Félix Morlion, Giulio Andreotti and Gian Luigi Rondi, in: Daniel Biltreyst/Daniela Treveri Gennari (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism, and Power*, New York 2015, pp. 114–134, at p. 117. Cf. Stephen Gundle, *Fame and the Ruins. Italian Film Stardom in the Age of Neorealism*, New York and Oxford 2019, pp. 9–10.

6 Film historiography tends to neglect this huge production in favor of a small group of aesthetically important films, as shown by the list of films used by Mariapia Comand, *Commedia all’italiana*, Milano 2010, which starts with “La grande guerra” (1959) and reaches “C’eravamo tanto amati” (1974).

7 Cf. Catherine O’Rawe, *Back for Good* (see note 3), p. 127, who underlines that it was principally the mode of melodrama – and not neorealism – which permitted “to enact the conditions of what was sayable about the Fascist past”.

How to forget about the dark side of the past and gaining consensus for a new moral post-war order? This was the question Catholic politicians and authorities tried to respond to by a twofold strategy: 1) influencing people in favour of a Catholic and anti-Communist society not only by politics, but by popular media as well; 2) using censorship and/or sponsorship to “moralize” people in the just direction. This paper addresses the way how these aims were planned and realized in using the most popular media of the first post-war decade in Italy: cinema. In this first introductory part I will give one example to show my interpretative approach and summarize the importance of cinema during the first post-war decade, in the second section the efforts to create a specific Catholic cinema system, in part three the production of “morally sane” and “educating” films, as seen by Catholic clerics or authoritative lay persons. My argument is a call to film historians to reflect about the hidden bits of interpretation on Fascism given by popular entertainment films. On this behalf, I suggest, Catholic cinema may have been influential, even if it ‘failed’ its principal aim to ‘moralize’ audiences in the way ecclesiastical hierarchies were wishfully thinking about. If we apply not a Protestant, but a Catholic way of thinking about ‘failure’ (i. e. sin), the moralization campaign was effective – and not only by looking on state censorship, which was very active, indeed.

The mechanism of how to influence people on the interpretation of the past can be illustrated through the example of an unspectacular movie, such as “La domenica della buona gente” (1953; produced during the summer 1952, with important actors as Sofia Loren, Ave Ninchi, Nino Manfredi and others) an entertaining movie, with some social undertone. A Sunday in Rome: A pregnant woman from the South (Salerno), who wants to kill her unfaithful lover, a Roman womanizer (but he himself is at the same time betrayed by his new girlfriend), is hindered in her plan, as she meets a young unemployed man who is about to marry. The post-war welfare society appears massively, not only in the opening scenes, which illustrate the extremely booming construction industry and the motorization in Rome, but even more in the figure of surprisingly fat mothers who are understanding the passions of their men escaping from family life into the stadium for the event of the day, the football game Rome vs. Naples. Fascism is not mentioned in any part of the film, people (the film plays in a Roman neighbourhood called Pigneto) enjoy their Sunday lives (football, bowling, eating, strolling and drinking coffee at Rosati’s in Piazza del Popolo or on Via Veneto). And yet, in the figure of the boccia-playing, jovial, family man who runs a writing office (so here is a connection with the film industry) in which his two daughters work for him. A precise message, which is subcutaneously injected, is clearly pointed out: that man was employed for 30 years in the Ministry of Culture, he had seen all the ministers, from Benedetto Croce (1920 Minister) to Giuseppe Bottai, “up to the last

Minister, who sent me at home”. That remark refers to the purge of the administration (the Italian version of de-Nazification) by the Italian post-war governments. The fact that the Republican minister – whose name is not quoted, but who must have belonged to the Christian Democrats and not to the Communists, who are completely absent in the film – dismissed the jovial small businessman, signalled to the audience that the latter has been a member of the Fascist party during the regime. The man is portrayed as an opportunist in the course of the film whom nobody can trust a word of what he is saying (the outraged outcry of his two daughters as he swears “on the lives of my daughters” is very meaningful) and yet he is not a bad person, as in the movie fundamentally malignant characters do not occur. The unspoken *basso continuo* is therefore the message that the Italians are not bad people.

The only priest appearing in the film is cleverly characterized as a football fan who sympathetically rushes through Sunday Mass, especially to get to the football stadium on time. He has only one ‘defect’: as coming from Naples, for the Roman cinema spectator he is cheering on the ‘wrong team’ and is treated by his Roman parishioners after the defeat of his club with a discreet humor. Enthusiasm for football is another element that links Fascist and Republican Italy in a high degree of continuity. The special trains with fans from Naples are reminiscent of the time before, only the interrupted career of a star footballer from the time of Fascism, who hopes to engage with a career as coach, is a counterpoint and may suggest to the audience that those who were during the time of the regime’s overly exposed personalities had a hard time making a career after the war. This film, completely forgotten today, had only a mediocre appeal to the audience at that time, in spite of its famous actors. But if we take the income sum as a comparison, it corresponded (looking at a period of seven years) about that of “Roma Città aperta”.⁸

The ordinary entertainment film in the early ’50s was completely different from the highly engaged neorealist masterpieces of the late ’40s. Especially from 1948 onwards politics had drastically changed in Italy, allowing the leading Christian Democratic Party to dominate the cultural climate, in particular the cinema. The very rapid growth of an affluent society permitted people to go more often to the cinema compared to the ’30s.⁹ The number of entrance tickets to the Italian cinemas increased from 416 million

8 From 1953 to 1959 “La domenica della buona gente” got revenues of sold tickets for about 100 million Lire. “Roma città aperta” reached around 124 million in the same seven-years-period from 1945 to 1952.

9 One of the leading diplomats in the Italian Foreign Office, Luca Pietromarchi, went very often to the cinema, even during the war, cf. Ruth Nattermann (Ed.), *I diari e le agende di Luca Pietromarchi*

in 1946 to 819 million in 1955, and the revenues of sold tickets grew from 14 billion to 116 billion Lire,¹⁰ which is quite astonishing not only because of the economic crisis provoking difficulties to US cinemas at the same time,¹¹ but also because this increase in revenues was several times higher than the inflation rate, so that the average price of a single entrance ticket raised from 33.65 Lire in 1946 to 141.6 Lire in 1955.¹²

According to Isola, in 1962, around two million Italians a day went to the cinemas, and the number of cinema halls reached then 10 500, compared to 1950, when there were around 7 100.¹³ The new films were placed in four different distribution cycles: first in the big metropolitan areas, second in the major cities of the provinces, the third round of distribution arrived months later in the smaller towns, and the fourth distribution round was constituted by the parish cinema halls.¹⁴ Before the birth of television in Italy in 1954, cinema was the most important popular media influencing Italian society. Since 1935, the cinema production was financed by state credit (Sezione Autonoma di Credito Cinematografico presso la Banca Nazionale del Lavoro), a system renovated with the law no. 448 of 26 July 1948 promoted by Giulio Andreotti.¹⁵ These promotion activities had

Diari (1938–1940). *Politica estera del fascismo e vita quotidiana di un diplomatico romano del '900*, Roma 2009.

10 Simone Isola, *Produzione e produttori da commedia*, in: Giovanni Spagnoletti / Antonio Spera (Eds.), *Risate all'italiana. Il cinema di commedia dal secondo dopoguerra ad oggi*, Roma 2014, pp. 137–158, at p. 137.

11 Sergio Liscia, *Cinema, TV e next media*, Milano 2003, p. 3.

12 The price for an entrance in a cinema in Milan (probably the top level at that in Italy) was oscillating between 200 (third-run-cinema) and 600 Lire (first-run-cinema) in 1953; cf. John Sedgwick / Marina Nicoli, *Popular Filmgoing in mid-1950s Milan. Opening up the 'Black Box'*, in: Daniel Biltereyst / Richard Maltby / Philippe Meers (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, New York 2018, Appendix 1. The “*Rivista del cinematografo*” in 1954 announced a contract between *Associazione cinematografica italiana* and SIAE that fixed maximum income revenues for all small cinemas (subdivided in three categories) which had to limit their prices for a cinema entrance at 70 Lire in order to pay less for music royalties (“*Notiziario A.C.E.C.: La nuova convenzione A.C.I. – S.I.A.E.*”; the journal was closely connected to the Catholic world as it offered the “*Elenco ufficiale dei films classificati dalla Commissione Nazionale di Revisione sulle norme della Vigilanti cura*”).

13 Isola, *Produzione* (see note 10), p. 143. In 1950, cinemas were distributed unequally over the country. More than 55 % of the cinemas were located in the North, 20 % in Central Italy, 25 % in the South.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 144. Detailed on the principles of distribution and life cycles of films Sedgwick / Nicoli, *Popular Filmgoing* (see note 12), Chapter 21.

15 Isola, *Produzione* (see note 10), p. 144.

been fixed by law for five years and were accompanied by the law no. 958 of 29 December 1949 (“Disposizioni per la cinematografia”).¹⁶

With the introduction of television in 1954, which coincided with the end of the first phase of the Andreotti film promoting law, the Italian cinema entered in its first post-war crisis and the market was characterized by a short recession phase. The Andreotti film-promoting law had facilitated an increasing number of Italian productions (reaching its climax in 1954 with 201 new productions). Since then the Andreotti-law had to be renovated every year and this procedure created instability, increasing costs, and higher interest rates for credits. Some of the major production houses disappeared. The Lux finished its production, Excelsa/Minerva failed; the state driven Cines was closed in 1958. The market concentration in fewer hands – with surviving production houses like Titanus, Cineriz, Dino De Laurentiis – led to a minor number of new produced films (each of them with higher production costs) because they had to attract as many spectators as possible in order to get their share on the market. However, the crisis was only temporarily and the former Andreottian regulation was reinforced by the law no. 897 of 31 July 1956. In the following years the production numbers rose to 213 films in 1961, opening to a very prolific period, which is considered the “Golden Age” of the Italian cinema.¹⁷

From April 1948 onwards, Italian politics was dominated by the hegemonic Christian Democratic Party, but influenced as well by the Vatican, which traditionally had a strong interest in educating the people, especially the youth, and of moralizing society (or rather re-moralizing it after the effects of an often very savage Second World War). Looking therefore on films in the first post-war decade, and on the high importance of that media not only in entertaining, but as well as an instrument considered valuable by those who tried to moralize and educate Italian audiences, is a very promising object of research. A lot of new sources and new analysis are available on Catholic cinema thanks to the groundbreaking research project on “Catholic cinema in Italy 1940–1970” led by the University of Milan.¹⁸ Studies on Catholic cinema in Italy have been promoted

16 Fabrizio Natalini, *La censura e la commedia all'italiana*, in: Spagnoletti/Spera (Eds.), *Risate all'italiana* (see note 10), pp. 159–192, at p. 164.

17 Isola, *Produzione* (see note 10), pp. 137, 139.

18 The research group organized several huge conferences on various topics; they collected hundreds of documents in different Italian archives on some hundred films. The documents will soon be accessible online on the website of the Research Project, hosted by the University of Milan. Tomaso Subini and Mariagrazia Fanchi are mainly involved in this important project. I am very grateful to Tomaso Subini for the generous access to the collected archival materials quoted further on as Unimi Collection. A series of articles has been published in the Journal “Schermi”, created by the

outside Italy as well, and with important outcomes. Nonetheless, the representation of the (Fascist) past in popular cinema in the first decade after the end of World War II has still to be analyzed in a more thorough way. Even if it is possible to examine the intents of the film creators, it is hard to figure out how ordinary people did perceive the films they had seen.¹⁹ Quantitative studies on Italian audiences²⁰ consider the economic success of a film; they rarely regard perceptions of the film made by the public. And film historiography often depends on the (mostly biased) aesthetic and political opinions uttered and published by the contemporary film critics when a new film was distributed.

2 Moralizing People: The Catholic Cinema System

How was cinema used in order to diffuse Catholic morality and identity?²¹ A twofold strategy was developed by Catholic activists in promoting “good films” and avoiding the production or distribution of “bad” ones through control. The strategy consisted in proposing religious topics via films and control production and / or viewing of non-recommendable films. “Promoting and controlling” was a classical double strategy. Since 1910, with the diffusion of the cinematograph, films were controlled by the Italian State administration. Prime Minister Giolitti invited the State administration to avoid the “representation of bloody deeds, of adultery, robberies and other crimes”, to hinder the distribution of films which “depict the public officials and police as negative and create sympathy with criminals”.²² Cinema control remained in use for the next decades: For

Research Group. Cf. Mauro Giori/Tomaso Subini (Eds.), *I cattolici, il cinema e il sesso in Italia tra gli anni '40 e gli anni '70*, in: *Schermi. Storie e culture del cinema e dei media in Italia* 1, no. 1, gennaio–giugno 2017; Raffaele De Berti (Ed.), *I cattolici nella fabbrica del cinema e dei media. Produzione, opere, protagonisti (1940–1970)*, in: *Schermi. Storie e culture del cinema e dei media in Italia* 1, no. 2, luglio–dicembre 2017; Elena Mosconi (Ed.), *Davanti allo schermo. I cattolici tra cinema e media, cultura e società (1940–1970)*, in: *Schermi. Storie e culture del cinema e dei media in Italia* 2, no. 3, gennaio–giugno 2018.

19 The national-socialist propaganda had similar problems in order to influence audiences in Germany during the years 1933–1945, cf. the important methodological and thematic reflections made by Clemens Zimmermann, *Landkino im Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 41 (2001), pp. 231–243, especially at pp. 231, 233.

20 For the state of the art, cf. Sedgwick/Nicoli, *Popular Filmgoing* (see note 12).

21 The important question how cinema was moralized by Catholic organizations has been raised by Biltereyst/Treveri Gennari, *Moralizing Cinema* (see note 5).

22 Natalini, *La censura* (see note 16), pp. 159, 163.

the Fascist regime censorship had to accompany the program of creating a “new Fascist man”. One of the first steps of the new Italian Republic regarded censorship, as well: With Law no. 379 of 16 May 1947 the Constitutional Assembly established a pre-production-control of films by creating a Central Office for Film at the Prime Minister’s Cabinet (that was run from 1947 to 1954 by Giulio Andreotti). Unconstitutional censorship was declared legitimate in the case of films and necessary to “protect public morality”.²³ An objective shared by the Catholic Church.

Since the 1920s, the organized Catholic world in Europe had been looking with great attention at the cinema and from the 1930s onwards, the highest authority of the Catholic Church had officially reacted to the new media.²⁴ With the pope’s encyclica *Vigilanti cura* in 1936 the Vatican hierarchy demonstrated to be aware of the importance of cinema as a media of influencing people. At this point, the topic of cinema control had been strongly raised. The cinema “should not be any more a school that corrupts but a precious means of education and human elevation”. The pope was especially welcoming censorship commissions and organisms that would give a ‘good direction’ to this media.²⁵ In 1934, the Vatican created a new organism, the Centro cattolico cinematografico (CCC) with the objective to catalogue all films distributed in Italy and to deliver judgements about the pastoral appropriateness of films. This structure continued to work under Pope Pius XII as well.

After 1945, every year around 300 new films (mostly US productions, but Italian, French, Mexican and other films as well) were classified in a booklet called “Segnalazioni cinematografiche” that was published twice a year and had a quite wide diffusion. The CCC-Office tried to convince all Parish priests to buy every six months the new version of the collection. In every guidebook all newly released films were reassumed and analyzed from the educational and moral point of view. Each page was dedicated to a different

23 Ibid., p. 163. On censorship cf. also Mino Argentieri, *La censura nel cinema italiano*, Roma 1974; Domenico Liggeri, *Mani di forbice. La censura cinematografica in Italia*, Alessandria 1997; Roberto Curti / Alessio Di Rocco, *Visioni proibite. I film vietati dalla censura italiana (1947–1968)*, 2 vols., Torino 2014.

24 Cf. Guido Convents, *Resisting the Lure of the Modern World. Catholics, International Politics, and the Establishment of the International Catholic Office for Cinema (1918–1928)*, and Dario Edoardo Viganò, *The Roman Catholic Church, Cinema and the “Culture of Dialogue”*. Italian Catholics and the Movies after the Second World War, both in: Biltreyst / Treveri Gennari (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema* (see note 5). Viganò highlights the Church’s “double pedagogy” regarding cinema, i. e. “to promote good films, classify all the others and communicate the judgment to the priests and the faithful”, in order to turn cinema from “a school of corruption into an educational instrument”.

25 Natalini, *La censura* (see note 16), p. 162.

film and the short description of the contents was accompanied by the judgement of the Catholic censor. The overall classification of a film was abbreviated in a capital letter. E meant Excluded; A stood for Adults only (Catholic adults we have to say); Ar for Adults with reserve; that meant those with a very high degree of moral standing. Only films that had a T-Classification (T for Tutti, for all) could be viewed by the Catholic masses, by adults and children (families), without problems of moral suspicion; but there was a further distinction in the family category: the T-Films could be watched only in public (commercial) cinemas, not in the Parish cinema halls. For the latter, the category P had been reserved (for Parish cinema). But there was a further label in use that indicated the morally most innocuous films: that was the O-classification (O like Oratory, that meant church-annexed youth-educating surroundings; schools, colleges and so on). We can ignore this classification, because in the booklets of the CCC for the late 1940s I could not find any film in the category Oratory / College / School. For both categories, P and O, there was a further distinction between films “visibile senza emendamenti” (O and P) and such viewable only after some modifications (“visibile con emendamenti”: Oc and Pc).²⁶

Furthermore, the CCC indicated not only the degree of restriction, but the quality seal given by the main critics as well, in classifying productions as “good” or “mediocre”. After having read the guidebook, a priest who wanted to choose a new film for his Parish cinema had to look only for the T-category with P-classification and exclude all films with E-, A-, Ar- and Tr-classification. The Tr-Classification (“tutti con riserva”) meant that mature Catholics were allowed to see the films in public cinemas only, not in Parish cinemas, and that the youth was not admitted. Such a classification was valid for example in the case of the film “Joan of Arc” (director Victor Fleming, 1948) starring Ingrid Bergman. In 1948, amidst the excluded films we find not only “Riso amaro” directed by Giuseppe De Santis, but also the French production “Fantomas” (director Jean Sacha, 1948) which was considered morally negative, because of scenes with brutal and criminal violence, and without counterbalancing positive elements even if the criminal at the end was punished and the police forces remained victorious. In “Riso amaro” “episodes of disturbing realism are alternating with violent scenes, followed by criminal actions. At the end a suicide. The plot appears morally negative, because based on sentiments and deeds

26 In the “Classifica ufficiale della Commissione di revisione del Centro cattolico cinematografico” we can read that for Oc and Pc “Le correzioni debbono essere indicate esclusivamente dagli Organismi all'uopo autorizzati dagli Ecc.mi Ordinari” (Roma, Archivio ISACEM: Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, Segnalazioni cinematografiche).

which have to be condemned”.²⁷ In “*Madame Bovary*”, a Goldwyn Mayer production of 1950 which was declared “excluded” as well, the censors criticized the “repeted adultery and the suicide”.²⁸

In 1949, only 10 films received the label P (Parish halls allowed), and other 49 films were allowed for all Catholics (T, youth and adults) in commercial public cinemas. The 2 categories included around 35 % of a year’s film production. Quite the same number of films was categorically excluded (56 films). In 1949, we can find the film “*The Great Gatsby*” produced by Paramount in the category of the excluded, especially because the film “presents plenty of negative elements, it contemplates divorce as a normal and acceptable solution and shows a lot of people without any sense of morality”.²⁹

The booklets worked, therefore, as an index of forbidden films for Catholic audiences. But did the Catholic masses accept the moral judgements of the CCC or did they go to public cinemas in order to watch the excluded, the forbidden or the mediocre films as well? It is not improbable that the CCC list may have worked as a deterrent only for a small and very obedient part of the Catholic-Italian society, but for the other part it probably raised the interest in what was ‘forbidden’.

The guidebooks were dealing only with the public viewing and the distribution chain of newly released national or international films. But Italian Catholic authorities had an interest in promoting ideologically “good films”, too. How to realize this objective? The question of how to promote Catholic values through the cinema had been addressed early by Luigi Gedda, key figure in the CCC.³⁰ As a first step of the new cultural strategy towards a cinematographically mediated popularization of Catholicism, the CCC became an active producer of films with religious topics that aimed to create positive myths and cinematographic icons. Therefore, Luigi Gedda was eager to construct a public image of Pope Pius XII to communicate the pope’s importance and popularity

27 Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, vol. 24, Roma 1948, p. 98, and *ibid.*, vol. 26, Roma 1949, p. 104.

28 *Ibid.*, vol. 27, Roma 1950, p. 216. The film “*Amore in città*” was excluded, too, with the following motivation: “The film presents some deplorable aspects of social life, but without conclusion. Indicates without pity the problems, but without giving any possible remedies.”

29 Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, vol. 26, Roma 1949, p. 176.

30 Simona Ferrantini / Paolo Trionfini, Luigi Gedda, i comitati civici e il cinema di propaganda. Un progetto di conquista politica e di moralizzazione della società (1948–1958), in: Mosconi (Ed.), *Davanti allo schermo* (see note 18), pp. 25–40.

to the world by addressing huge cinema audiences.³¹ After 1945, that strategy could still have been put more easily into action. This representation of the pope as a “public and universal icon”, a kind of living saint, bringing relief to the people, reached its peak with the documentary “Anno santo 1950”, where the Catholic masses are represented in the film as coming from everywhere to Rome on pilgrimage, emphasizing in this manner the centrality of the Church of Rome.³²

It is obvious that this attempt of promoting the pope as a universal model was only one element in the wider strategy of catching the attention of Catholic audiences, and cinema was only one of the means used to realize the Catholic desire to re-moralize Italian society. The struggle for the autonomy of Catholic youth education during Fascism had led to the building up of a very strong laic organization, the “Azione Cattolica” (AC), with several branches like the GIAC (Gioventù italiana di Azione Cattolica, the Youth organization of the Catholic Action, separated in young men’s and young women’s organizations) acting fiercely in order to direct Italian society in the sense of Catholicism. The AC-sub-organizations had special clerical advisors piloting or controlling all activities ran by the Azione Cattolica, as there were youth meetings; schools for “apostolate” and evangelization; contests in religious culture; devotional practices; internal seminars and exercises; conferences; catechism lessons; prayer activities; classes for study; diffusion of Catholic journals and so on. Cinema viewing has to be put in this context as one branch of activities to catch the attention of young Catholics. It is important to remember that in the 1950s a cultural war was ongoing in Italy against the Italian Left, the communist and radical-socialist subculture, a war that had been formalized with the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in banning communism (1. 7. 1949).

With two million spectators every day cinema was the most important popular media. The Italian audiences had to be attracted every day, and that meant especially by popular films. How to get Italian Catholic spectators into the morally “good” films? In this perspective, the structure of the local Catholic communities gained high importance

31 That worked especially in two films: “Pastor Angelicus” of December 1942 and “Guerra alla Guerra” (1946), both directed by Romolo Marcellini and produced by the CCC. Especially the documentary film “Pastor Angelicus” had a wide diffusion in foreign countries. Cf. Federico Ruozzi, Pius XII as Actor and Subject. On the Representation of the Pope in Cinema during the 1940s and 1950s, in: Biltreyst/Treveri Gennari (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema* (see note 5), pp. 158–172, at p. 164; Cristina Formenti, *Guardando all’America. “Pastor Angelicus” (1942) e la matrice del documentario italiano di produzione cattolica*, in: De Berti (Ed.), *I cattolici* (see note 18), pp. 21–44; Gianluca della Maggiore, “Guerra alla Guerra”. Cinema e geopolitica vaticana nella chiesa di Pio XII, in: *ibid.*, pp. 91–108.

32 Ruozzi, Pius XII (see note 31), pp. 162–163, 166.

and especially the Parish cinema which proposed to the local community the viewing of “good” films, i. e. those evaluated positively by the CCC. The priests had to control the recommendations of the CCC and choose the “proper” films. According to the research on parish cinemas done by Daniela Treveri Gennari the presence and significance of this category of cinemas was quite high. In Rome, for example, during the '50s there were around 58 parish cinemas against a network of around 130 commercial cinemas. Although the parish cinemas had smaller seating capacities (only 6 of them had more than 500 seats), they represented about one-third of the total number of movie theaters available, with a distribution in all areas of the city, and therefore accessible to all different kinds of audiences.³³ These considerations on Rome can be generalized for whole Italy: In 1949 there were about 3 000 parish cinema halls in Italy³⁴ and in 1956 number 5 449 had been reached.³⁵ The state controlled the opening of new cinemas by a Committee which had to admit new halls. In 1953, the Committee held 21 meetings and examined 1 472 applications: 1 061 were accepted, 411 refused. Quite a high percentage of new requests were regarding parish cinemas, but even some of those demands were refused.

It is quite obvious that there was often a big time lap between the production of a film and its viewing. The “life cycles” of a film were determined by the distribution channels and by public acceptance. Especially the parish cinemas often used old films (as a “fourth run”, after they had passed through the entire distribution system) and in particular American productions.³⁶ The overwhelming presence of the Hollywood productions and the problem of attracting audiences was a characteristic of commercial cinema as well. According to Sedgwick and Nicoli, in Milan with its 112 commercial

33 Treveri Gennari has analyzed audiences with an approach from below, using 325 questionnaires and 32 video-interviews with people who remembered the time when they went to the parish cinemas in the city of Rome; Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Moralizing Cinema While Attracting Audiences. Catholic Film Exhibition in Post-War Rome*, in: Biltreyst/Treveri Gennari (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema* (see note 5), pp. 272–285, at p. 275.

34 Roma, Archivio ISACEM, Serie Centro cattolico cinematografico, b. 4, fasc. 1: Circolare di Mons. Urbani.

35 Mino Argentieri, *Storia del cinema italiano*, Roma 2006, p. 83. For the number of parish cinemas in 1954 cf. Treveri Gennari, *Attracting Audiences* (see note 33), p. 273. The parish cinema sector was organized since 1949 by the ACEC (Azione cattolica esercenti cinema, the Catholic exhibitors' association belonging to the Catholic Action).

36 Between the films that were popular in parish cinemas, we can find films that should attract young boys, such as “The Mark of Zorro” (director Rouben Mamoulian, 1940); “Knights of the Round Table” (director Richard Thorpe, 1953), “Ivanhoe” (director Richard Thorpe, 1952); “The Lone Ranger” (director Stuart Heisler, 1956). Cf. Treveri Gennari, *Attracting Audiences* (see note 33), p. 278.

cinemas, in January 1954, were screened 598 films. Over half of them had little success and were screened only for 3 days or less. Probably 414 of 598 films were exhibited in fourth-run cinemas only. Looking on the top-20 list of the most successful films in that month, eleven films came from the USA, only seven were Italian productions. Zampa's "Anni facili" was the most popular Italian film at that moment, followed by "Lucrezia Borgia", an Italian-French coproduction.³⁷

If the commercial cinemas were vulnerable, the parish cinema halls were still more exposed to economic risks, because the priests needed quite a lot of films in order to make their cinema work. A number of 20–30 films a year can be considered an absolute minimum in order to attract the people belonging to the parish community. How could the priests guarantee this number of films if they ought to show only the few P- and O-Films? The question is therefore, if the parish priests' 'mission' – that is to moralize Catholic audiences while attracting them by cinema – did really work. Did it morally work, did it economically work? The mission was not easy to fulfil, especially considering the cinema viewing conditions of darkness and promiscuity that represented a problem for the Catholic authorities both in terms of decency and morality. The sources contain several complaints, especially from Southern Italy, but according to Treveri Gennari this situation was different in Rome, where the network of parish cinemas worked well as instrument for the Church's purposes and is therefore considered by this author a successful Catholic operation.³⁸

The Catholic success consisted especially in reducing the influence of Italian (and French) productions which received much higher amounts of negative classifications like "Not recommended" and "Excluded" as the most successful US-American films.³⁹

But the ideas of morality were not always economically sustainable. It seems, therefore, that several parish priests did not apply that form of control that Vatican hierarchy was soliciting. In 1949, for example, in the small city of Campagna, in the province of Salerno in Southern Italy, a Catholic businessman who ran a cinema (the "Cinema comunale") was complaining about the behaviour of a parish priest and his cinema. The commercial cinema owner followed the censorship recommendations in renouncing to screen some films, accepting an economic damage that resulted from not distributing

37 Sedgwick/Nicoli, *Popular Filmgoing* (see note 12), Tab. 21.2.

38 Treveri Gennari's interpretation is based on the memories of parish cinema goers collected by for her Oral History Project; cf. Treveri Gennari, *Attracting Audiences* (see note 33), p. 277.

39 Mariagrazia Fanchi, 'The "Ideal Film": On the Transformation of the Italian Catholic Film and Media Policy in the 1950s and the 1960s', in: Biltreyst/Treveri Gennari (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema* (see note 5), pp. 221–236, at p. 229; Treveri Gennari, *Attracting Audiences* (see note 33), p. 278.

what he called the “scandalous films”. Probably he meant with “scandalous” the E-category of CCC-excluded films, like Rossellini’s film “L’amore” (Love, 1948) and “Germania Anno Zero” (1948), which were banned from Italian parish cinemas as well. For reasons of obedience to the Church he felt obliged to distribute only the not-excluded films. Obviously, he wanted to show all other categories. But in the local “Seminario”, the educative and living place of the young future priests had been opened a cinema called “Sala Azione Cattolica”. In this place and in other parish cinema halls Catholic adults were allowed to view Catholic-Adult-Labelled-Films and the youth had been admitted, too. In his protest letter destined to the Vatican hierarchy at Rome he asked polemically: “is it sufficient that a room is consecrated in order to make disappear all restraints? The parish halls do they have a morally educating function or not? Or do they have commercial objectives that let vanish away all moral limits?”⁴⁰

It was not the first complaint of that cinema owner. As he told in his letter addressed to the pope himself, his first denunciation of this situation had had no effect at all, the local Catholic authorities (the Bishop of Campagna, Monsignore Giuseppe Palatucci) did not intervene, so the Azione-Cattolica-Hall had continued to show to all, to the male and female youth of the Catholic Action as well, films like “I Cavalieri della morte”, “Il Ciclone contro Zorro il Bandito”, la “Città rubata”, “Musica Proibita”, “La notte delle Beffe” and “Un uomo ritorna”.

The commercial cinema owner raised another point: he criticized that in the parish cinema room boys and girls were not seated in separated rows, but admitted to sit close together, hand in hand, in the dark room, obliged to commit “heroic acts of chastity”. If this concurrence was to go on in the same way in the future, the cinema owner menaced that he would be “obliged to compete with the priest’s Seminar about whom will be more efficient to push towards certain sins”.⁴¹ Obviously, he was not at all reassured by the fact that the Azione-Cattolica-Cinema in Campagna did not show films of the E-category which he did not distribute either, but the commercial concurrence with the parish cinema was still regarding the Ar-, A- and T-Films. For example the film directed by Zampa in 1949 “Campane a Martello”, classified for morally mature Catholic adults

40 Roma, Archivio ISACEM, Fondo Presidenza Generale XV, Serie Centro cattolico cinematografico, b. 4, fasc. 1: Letter by Raffaele Ceriello to the CCC, to the Secretary of State, to the Commission of the Consistory, the Central Presidency of the Catholic Action, and to Pope Pius XII, 7. 5. 1949. The letter with the same complaints which Ceriello had written to the Bishop of Campagna, Monsignore Palatucci, on the 14. 12. 1948, must have been ignored by Palatucci.

41 Ibid.

only.⁴² Who wanted to watch excluded films like “Fantomas” or “Totò cerca casa”, had to look for a non-Catholic cinema runner.

If this was the situation in a place in Southern Italy not influenced by the arrival of modernity, then the unners of parish cinemas in Northern Italy must have been still more openminded. What when the excluded films were the most interesting ones? Taking the lists of excluded productions into account, we can find films that became rapidly classics as “Gone with the wind” (“Via col vento”, director V. Fleming). The censorial repudiation of successful, but morally too challenging films created a further problem, when convinced catholics as runners of commercial cinemas not only felt morally obliged to adopt the CCC-censorship-criteria, but at the same time had little choice because they were obliged by severe contracts with the distribution companies to use for viewing what was delivered to them.⁴³

We can therefore have some doubt about the efficiency of the attempt to moralize audiences, especially when we consider that less than half of the parish priests running a cinema did buy the CCC’s film recommendations! There were only around 2°200 subscriptions of the “Segnalazioni” in 1949. And we can suppose that the Catholic youth wanted to watch at least those films reserved by the CCC to Catholic adults (the A-Cat-egory). It might seem quite paradoxically, but I would say that it was especially when failing to moralize, that the parish cinema was attracting audiences still better. Therefore, we can consider the parish cinemas as a valid distribution channel for popular films and their hidden messages on the Fascist past (those related to the two decades from 1923 to 1943, the so-called *ventennio*). It is interesting to note that in some cases, films dealing with the *ventennio*, as “Anni difficili” (director Luigi Zampa, 1948), were explicitly allowed by the CCC! The censors concluded in this case, that the film was to be considered as a positive one, “because of its condemnation of the methods used by antidemocratic

42 A comedy around a prostitute who had sent the money gained with the American soldiers at home, in deposit to the priest of her small island. Turning home, she realized that the priest had died and his successor had used the money to build up an institute for orphans. A conflict between local mayor, priest and the former prostitute aroused about the payments still necessary for the orphans, at the end resolved with a donation of her incomes to the orphans and the death of the priest.

43 Cf. the concise analysis of Fanchi: “While parish cinemas often ignored the directives on screening films deemed unsuitable for audiences, small-gauge cinemas could not bypass the directives of the CCC, since 16 mm-films were only distributed by San Paolo Film.”; Fanchi, *Ideal Film* (see note 39), p. 228.

governments and their disastrous consequences”. The film was not allowed for parish cinemas halls, but restricted to adults and to commercial cinemas.⁴⁴

In May 1949, Monsignore Urbani, Secretary of the Episcopal Conference for the Catholic Action, in a circular letter to his fellow bishops, was underlining the importance of parish cinema halls, opened in the Parish House or the in Oratory, especially to enable the youth to have access to morally sane films. According to Urbani, the parish cinema ought to be seen as an auxiliary school that accompanied the pastoral activities. Some bishops had already created “Advisory commissions” (*Commissioni di vigilanza*) and consortia for the distribution of valuable films. But the problem of the “scarce number of morally sane films” still created problems, and the financial expenditure was high for several parish priests. However, according to Urbani’s advice, the financial questions should never induce to screen films that are “not impeccable”. According to Urbani, the film industry should be forced to consider the parish cinema as a new economic force able to demand the ‘right’ films for their education purposes. Urbani believed that the ACEC could help the already existing Distribution Consortia (and the new ones to be created) to deliver good films to catholic cinemas at a modest price! In order to create a strong organisation, he asked all bishops to oblige their parish priests to associate themselves to the ACEC.⁴⁵

But several bishops did not regard this structure as sufficient to guarantee an adequate control of morality. A new structure was therefore created on diocesan level: the “Secretary of Spectacles” (Segretariato dello Spettacolo) depending from the “Giunta diocesana”. The members of this office were designated by the local bishop and assisted by a priest (“Consulente Ecclesiastico”). Their job was to control the parish priests and the morality of the Catholic cinemas, and of the distribution-chain. The main figure of the control apparatus was the President of the “Commissione diocesana di revisione”. In the case the local Bishop decided to use more severe criteria as the National Revision Committee (CCC), the moral valuation of the films could be made by the Ecclesiastical Consultant or by a specific Episcopal Delegate for the Cinema. On the national level, in 1949 it was Luigi Gedda acting as President of the “Commissione di revisione dei films” at the CCC.⁴⁶ Even if a film was allowed at the national level, the diocesane commissions

44 Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, Segnalazioni cinematografiche, vol. 24, disp. 24, Roma 1948, p. 187.

45 Roma, Archivio ISACEM, Presidenza Generale XV, Serie Centro cattolico cinematografico, b. 4, fasc. 1: Circolare Monsignor Urbani no. 6, AZ. no. 313/49.

46 On the censorship of the regional commissions, in the case of Lombardy, but for a different period, the years 1962 to 1967, cf. Mariagrazia Fanchi, In nome del padre. Il lavoro delle commissioni

could apply a new control, making judgements still more severe, so that the parish priests at the end had a very limited choice. No wonder that the educative mission did not work very well, as the Regional Delegation for Lombardy was underlining in November 1952: “Maybe for lack of production, maybe for lack of an ideal condition of the films presented on the market, it is a fact that, after the first good choices, the situation is degenerated into an unhappy programmatic commercialism projecting films that even if they are morally acceptable, do not present any positive element”.⁴⁷

Parish cinema was not running well. The government had to intervene. In March 1953, Andreotti, Undersecretary in the Prime Ministers Office, and head of the film control and financing branch, wrote in a letter to the ACEC that not all parish cinemas were observing the rules established and communicated by Andreotti’s department in the circular letter 9419/AG 37 from 23 May 1950. That means that after three years of control activity, the parish cinemas were not under control, neither by Andreotti’s administration nor by the ACEC. Now, in 1953, the ACEC was authorized to sanction reluctant parish priests by different degrees of punishment.⁴⁸ In order to increase its impact, the President of the ACEC, Monsignore Francesco Dalla Zuanna, transmitted the Andreottian order to all “Regional and Diocesan Delegates of the ACEC”.

As a longer lasting effect of this control mania, there was – according to Mariagrazia Fanchi – a disaffection of Catholic audiences regarding cinema. For Fanchi it was not so much the appearance of television that influenced the decline of cinema, but mainly a negative approach of the Catholic world to that medium, pushing key segments of the public, especially adult women and, during the 1960s, the lower middle classes, towards the new forms of domestic entertainment, such as television, radio and vinyl records. In the second half of the 1950s the censorial activities of the CCC became increasingly severe, pointing much more on State television.⁴⁹ Looking at the failure to attract certain audiences via cinema during the 1960s we should not forget, however, the effects of cinema on the public during an entire decade from 1945 to 1955, effects, which might be

cattoliche di revisione, fra istanze locali e direttive nazionali, in: Mosconi (Ed.), *Davanti allo schermo* (see note 18), pp. 121–135.

47 ACEC (“Direttive”, del novembre 1952) – Delegazione regionale per la Lombardia.

48 The following forms of punishment had been allowed: “richiamo; diffida; sospensione della licenza di esercizio” from 2 to 15 days, in the case of repeated infraction of the rules; and last but not worst: the ACEC could propose to the Undersecretary to deny the authorization to run a cinema (Undersecretary Andreotti to ACEC, 3. 3. 1953, prot. no. 4802/AG 37).

49 Fanchi, *Ideal Film* (see note 39), p. 229, 231–232.

caught better by analyzing its film production and distribution mechanisms, in so far as these were influenced by the Catholic authorities.

3 Catholic Film Production, Politics of Censorship and the ‘Culture War’ against the Left in Italy

The neorealist films of the years 1945–1948 constituted a big challenge for Catholic politicians and spin doctors. Some Catholic activists who were convinced by the influence of cinema on the masses, were searching for strong antipodes, in order to invade with Catholic messages the communicative space generated by cinema. Therefore, the Catholic world launched various production projects, “short, mid-length and feature-length films, produced by various small companies, which to varying degrees were inspired by religion”.⁵⁰ The most well-known of the small production companies were Orbis Film, Universalia and San Paolo Film. In 1945, Orbis produced, together with the CCC, a short film entitled “Who is God?” (“Chi è Dio?”), directed by Mario Soldati and written together with Cesare Zavattini and Diego Fabbri. Daniela Treveri Gennari and Marco Vanelli argue that the collaboration between leftist intellectuals and filmmakers on one hand and the Catholic Church on the other hand was very vital in the birth and development of neorealism in Italy, so that the origin of neorealist cinema would have taken place within the context of a Communist-catholic collaboration.⁵¹

But the success of those production houses was quite short lived. The economic risk of film production projects was high and there was a widespread intolerance towards the compromises required to guarantee the economic success of a film. There was a discrepancy between the defended Christian values that ought to be communicated to the public and the market mechanisms which had to be observed by Catholic production companies as well, such as the “use of stars, the lack of scruples in choosing subjects, the excessive wealth of technical and advertising means, to ensure the success of their films”, as film critic Lacalamita, the Director of the Centro sperimentale di cinematografia, close to the CCC, argued.⁵²

50 Ibid., p. 228.

51 Daniela Treveri Gennari/Marco Vanelli, Did Neorealism Start in Church? Catholicism, Cinema and the Case of Mario Soldati’s *Chi è Dio?*, in: *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 8 (2010), pp. 198–217.

52 Fanchi, *Ideal Film* (see note 39), p. 228.

One of the most active and intelligent figures who wanted to use the cinema as a media to launch an ideological ‘counteroffensive’ against the influence of the political culture of the left, was Father Félix Morlion, a Belgian Dominican with strong anti-Communist background sent in 1944 from the USA to Italy. Morlion, who aimed at a completely new form of Catholic propaganda against communism and the parties on the left, was introduced to Alcide De Gasperi by Luigi Sturzo and soon helped by young Giulio Andreotti who worked as his personal secretary. The Dominican monk was extremely convinced about the power of cineastic images.⁵³ He made a lot of efforts in order to create a Catholic cinema able to attract the masses. For Gianluca della Maggiore the group consisting of Andreotti the politician, Morlion the director (“always out of control”) and the secretary general of the OCIC André Ruskowski as the international reference point, were part of Gedda’s entourage, but contrasted by the strategy of Giovanni Battista Montini and Vittorino Veronese.⁵⁴

With the film promotion law, Giulio Andreotti, undersecretary at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, played suddenly a key role, because he became responsible for financial aids to the Italian film industry from 1947 to 1954. Catholic neorealism should substitute or overshadow the ‘ordinary’ neorealism considered as too close to the Italian left. Morlion was preparing the (religious) subjects, Andreotti promoting the films, i. e. producing, and Gian Luigi Rondi, a film critic, had to guarantee the success of the new films in the media by positive reviews. It is evident that there was an instrumental and ideological use of cinema with the aim to moralize audiences. Andreotti’s first ‘coup’ was that he convinced an important director as Roberto Rossellini to work for a Catholic film production: Rossellini was asked to direct two films for the Catholic Holy Year 1950, “Stromboli” and “Flowers of Saint Francis”. A third film realized by Rossellini with the same intent was “Europa ’51”. Tomaso Subini and Elena Dagrada have brilliantly reconstructed the operation of using Rossellini as “pioneer ... of Catholic neorealism, correcting the other [type of neorealism; LK] which did not seem Christ-

53 Dagrada, *A Triple Alliance* (see note 5), pp. 114–115. There is still lacking a biography on F. Morlion. But now cf. Lorenzo Grilli, *Gioacchino Volpe all’università ‘Pro Deo’ di Félix Morlion negli anni Cinquanta*, in: *Storiografia. Rivista annuale di storia* 23 (2019), pp. 141–183.

54 Gianluca della Maggiore, *Vittorino Veronese e il cinema. Un paradigma pastorale alternative nell’età della mobilitazione geddiana*, in: Mosconi (Ed.), *Davanti allo schermo* (see note 18), pp. 43–63, esp. pp. 44–45.

ian enough”.⁵⁵ It seems that Rossellini later on, in 1952, confirmed the importance of a Catholic interpretation of the world.⁵⁶

Giulio Andreotti was not the ideological brain in that operation. The spin doctor was Father Félix Morlion who was the mastermind behind this instrumental use of cinema. Tomaso Subini has pointed out the key role of Morlion to whom Andreotti had been “personal secretary” before being nominated Undersecretary of State.⁵⁷ Morlion participated in the Saint Francis film as a scriptwriter,⁵⁸ but his entire role was a much more important one, that of a CIA-related activist in a cultural war against communism, as Subini has argued. In 1945 Morlion founded the “International University of Social Studies Pro Deo” which soon became “the reference point for the ideological collaboration between the Vatican and the American government against the influence of Communism in Italy”.⁵⁹ Andreotti gave lessons in journalism at the Pro Deo University. At the Faculty of Journalism of the Pro Deo had been created a Film Department where film critic Rondi was teaching film analysis since 1948. Rondi was the Head of an International Institute of Cinema operating at the same Faculty with the concrete aim of producing Catholic neorealist films. Pro Deo’s film activities were financed by Andreotti’s ministry and by northern Italian industrialists.⁶⁰

Looking on Rossellini’s “Flowers of Saint Francis” (“San Francesco Giullare di Dio”), one can imagine that this film attracted a lot a young audience because of its intrinsic filmic quality. But did it moralize audiences, too? It is quite interesting to have a look

55 The quotation about neorealism is from 1952, expressed by Giovanni Battista Cavallaro (cf. Dagrada, *A Triple Alliance* [see note 5], p. 118); Tomaso Subini, *La doppia vita di Francesco giullare di Dio. Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion, Roberto Rossellini*, Milano 2013; id., *The Failed Project of a Catholic Neorealism. On Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion and Roberto Rossellini*, in: Biltreyst/Treveri (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema* (see note 5), pp. 173–185.

56 Pietro Cavallo, *La vita ricomincia. Comunità ed identità nazionale in alcuni film del biennio 1945–1946*, in: *Giornale di storia contemporanea* 3 (2000), pp. 59–111, at p. 89.

57 Subini, *Failed Project* (see note 55), p. 176 (referring to Giuseppe Casarrubea).

58 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

59 According to Subini who is quoting an expression used by Ennio Di Nolfo in a conference in 1989.

60 Subini, *Failed Project* (see note 55), pp. 177–179. Cf. the inauguration speech of Andreotti in November 1948 for the inauguration of the Academic year 1948/1949 at the Pro Deo University (Roma, Archivio Istituto Sturzo, Fondo Andreotti, *Discorsi* 1948). About the critics made by G. L. Rondi during the ’60s cf. Giuseppe Previtali, *Uno spettacolo osceno. La critica cattolica di fronte al fenomeno “Mondo Movies”*, in: Giori/Subini (Eds.), *I cattolici, il cinema e il sesso* (see note 18), pp. 103–118, and about his importance for the diffusion in Italy of the films directed by Bergman cf. Fabio Pezzetti Tonion, *Il cinema di Ingmar Bergman in Italia*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 135–148.

at the image of the people communicated by the film. We see barbarous pagans, stupid superstitious people without any kind of education. Suddenly, a theological discourse using Augustinus is introduced by a Catholic priest. The film seems mainly a fairy tale for children combined with religious moralization. The Catholic Church is efficiently depicted as the only moralizing institution in this barbarous world, a useful message for the “Holy Year” 1950 and the contemporary battle against atheist and anti-clerical soviet communism. On the other hand, the figure of St Francis depicted by Rossellini in his story-telling by episodes could hardly be more different from what Catholics were used to hear about the saint in the past three decades before Rossellini’s film.

It is quite surprising to find the same image of the ordinary superstitious-barbarous-ignorant people (in this case not placed in medieval times, but related to the Southern Italian peasantry) in his hilarious “Il medico e lo stregone” (1957), but director Mario Monicelli used this image in a completely different manner, because he contrasts ironically the alleged backwardness of the South to an idea of Central-Northern Italian “superiorism”. At the beginning of the film, a Southern Italian peasant is characterized as politically completely ignorant, in asking the medical doctor (Marcello Mastroianni) arriving from the North why he is not accompanied by policemen, considering him a banned anti-Fascist (“si vede che di te si fidono”), as if nothing had changed since 1943, as if for the people of the South the Fascist regime was still in power. That seems the only hint to past 20 years of Fascist regime present in that film, so that we can imagine the hidden importance of such a small bit of information.

But getting back to Morlion’s activities, it is important to notice that Morlion developed in 1950/1951 a more-years plan (1953–1955) to infiltrate and transform the communist milieu in Italy.⁶¹ As third element, together with the idea to penetrate into families and factories using young socially engaged priests trained during their studies at the Pro Deo University in order to combat communism, Morlion envisaged to use 20 % of the planned budget to finance “a cineforum activity”. This format, based on a presentation-discussion-formula, would spread extensively during the following three decades, especially in the industrial cities of Northern Italy like Milan. Subini quotes from an internal Dominican-order document with which Morlion argued: “Whilst communists are not influenced by church prayers, they cannot resist an invitation to a free of charge social film’s screening.” Morlion proposed therefore the use of “at least three vans equipped for projecting films in small villages and estimate the expenses for making copies of certain social (non political) films avoiding government documentaries, which initially could be counterproductive.” In his paper, Morlion added that “no communist branch chief can

61 Subini, Failed Project (see note 55), p. 175.

prevent his comrades from watching a free of charge screening”, and in order to attract even more this cultural offer, Morlion planned to announce “that a surprise film will be screened at the end”, so that the curiosity of the public in practice is attracted by two films. Morlion proposed to screen “socially engaged films” like Rossellini’s *Stromboli*, and to avoid political ones or governmental documentaries.

In January 1949, four months before the film-shootings started, Morlion sent his exploitation plan for “*Stromboli*” to Manuel Suarez, his superior as Dominican General.⁶² The problem was, that Catholic critics remained unsatisfied by “*Stromboli*”, it was criticized for its simplistic ending, and especially for the hastily introduced final miracle. Important newspapers like the “*Osservatore Romano*” and “*Il Tempo*” were not at all convinced about the film; the CCC published a negative review and classified “*Stromboli*” as film for only adults.⁶³ With “*Europa 51*”, the third film directed by Rossellini with Morlion as scriptwriter, according to Dagrada the great director showed his ‘subversive’ autonomy by producing a film “that deviated substantially from Morlion’s writings, Rondi’s reviews and Andreotti’s expectations”.⁶⁴ But Catholic intellectuals were already celebrating the victory over leftwing neorealism when they met at the Cinema Convention at Parma in December 1953. In his introductory speech Giancarlo Vigorelli gave an affirmative answer on his rhetorical question if the “Communist monopoly on Neorealism has found its sweet death at Parma?”⁶⁵

We can see, indeed, that Morlions ideas of influencing audiences did work much better in the case of another film that aimed to demonstrate that Catholicism would prevail even in a hostile surrounding. This film was named “*Don Camillo*” (director J. Duvivier; “*The Little World of Don Camillo*”, IT / FR 1952) and became rapidly the most successful Italian film of the 1950s. Morlion wrote a draft for a subject in October 1950, but although he developed the topic, he did not write the scenography alone, since

62 Ibid. According to Subini, the project of implementing a Catholic neorealism failed, not at least because of the personality of Rossellini itself, whose lifestyle could not at all be used as a model representing Catholic values, although Andreotti did not care a lot about the disappointment of the Vatican (ibid., p. 173) and the life of Rossellini stigmatized in the USA. Cf. Augusto Sainati, *Cattolici Doc? Definizioni, etichette, incertezze tra l’Italia e l’estero*, in: Mosconi (Ed.), *Davanti allo schermo*, pp. 15–23, esp. pp. 16–17.

63 Dagrada, *A Triple Alliance* (see note 5), pp. 121–122.

64 Ibid., p. 128.

65 Giancarlo Vigorelli, *Fine di un monopolio?*, in: *Rivista del Cinematografo* 27,1 (1954), pp. 9–11. In another article about the Parma Convention, it was Gian Luigi Rondi who depicted neorealism as “Christian art” (“*Neorealismo, arte Cristiana*”, ibid., pp. 12–13).

an entire staff was collaborating.⁶⁶ Morlion was a very intelligent psychologist, aware of how to manipulate better the masses. In an extraordinary description of the central theme behind *Don Camillo* he describes what he had discovered as the essence of Italian identity and of the psychology of the communist and socialist masses:

“Behind the violent impulses of rebellion of the simple man who embraces the ideas of the left, is mostly hidden a real, sincere anxiety of justice; when this feeling is stripped of all the unreasonable, preconceived political superstructures and, under the pressure of the dramatic problems of daily life is manifested in its bare simplicity, the man of the left ceases to be such in order to become simply ‘man’, man of ‘good will’ who fights in a way that all his fellow men can conquer the ‘peace on earth’. This feeling leads him in crucial moments to fight against his own political charlatans, who rely on his good faith and force his conscience to take him to act against his own, real interest.”

The film should therefore essentially try to “reveal the hidden truth of Italy, a country where the Christian tradition is still the true source of popular dynamism”. Looking from the 21st century back to the dynamics of the Italian Republic during the last decade of the 20th, Morlion seems to have been not so wrong with his analysis. In order to realize his purpose, a director “provided with a special Christian dynamism” and a sense of affectionate and benevolent satire was required: “Blasetti seems to respond with particular attention to these needs”, wrote Morlion referring to Blasetti’s films “*Quattro passi tra le nuvole*” e “*Prima Comunione*” as positive examples.⁶⁷

It was not so easy for Morlion to realize the idea of this film. In a letter of 21 August 1951 written to Guareschi by Amato, the producer let the author of *Don Camillo* know that during Christmas 1950 he had been travelling in the USA in order to propose the “*Don Camillo*” to Paramount, using the intermediation of Frank Capra, but Paramount did not accept. Furthermore, there was no famous Italian director available for that kind of subject: Blasetti and De Sica, Castellani and Camerini, everyone declined the invitation to direct the film (even Camerini and Blasetti who had been “registi cardine

66 Unimi collection AGG (Archivio Giovannino Guareschi): F. Morlion, “Note per una eventuale elaborazione di un soggetto cinematografico tratto dal volume ‘*Don Camillo*’ di G. Guareschi”, 17. 10. 1950, p. 1: “note ... da me redatte con l’ausilio di alcuni collaboratori dell’Istituto Internazionale Cinematografico della Università Pro Deo”. There were several changes to Morlions early ideas, maybe introduced into the scenography by Duvivier or Barjavel.

67 Ibid., Morlion, note, 17. 10. 1950, p. 2.

dell'industria cinematografica degli anni Trenta"⁶⁸) At the end, only French director Julien Duvivier accepted, but imposed his own scriptwriter, Barjavel, frustrating Morlion who wanted to be scriptwriter by himself.⁶⁹

The state censors ("Revisione cinematografica preventiva") gave a quite positive evaluation of the subject, but with a reserve: the fotograpy had to be judged later, in order to give a "real and definite judgement". And the kick of Don Camillo into the backside of Peppone after the confession had to be cancelled. The censorial apparatus was asking where in Italy the film was ambienced, it seemed to represent a strange countryside because there was no presence at all of any representative of law and order. The film presented for the censors "an imagined environment and a setting of the story like a fairy tale". But it seems that the critical remarks of the state censors had been largely ignored by their ministerial superiors, as there is an annotation written by an unknown hand (maybe by Andreotti?): "I have spoken with Rizzoli at Venice on behalf of the sequence regarding the confession" ("conferito con Rizzoli a Venezia per la scena della confessione", i. e. the kick into Peppone's bottom).⁷⁰ Eliminated this question, the state censors could give their immediate approval. The film was considered sufficiently balanced between Italian and French elements, both from the technical and artistical point of view. The further permissions arrived now rapidly by the State administration, the permit for public presentations of the film in Italian cinemas needed less than five working days.⁷¹ But Guareschi was not at all convinced about the scenography and still less about the actors: "Fernandel might be very able as an actor, but he has a face like a horse". And Gino Cervi is "too nice and too well-fed". Guareschi did not accept the transformation of his story into a "funny village farce".⁷²

68 According to Zinni, *Uomini in nero* (see note 2), p. 296.

69 Subini, *Failed Project* (see note 55).

70 Milano, Unimi Collection ACS58 (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Fondo Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo, Divisione Cinema, Concessione certificati di nazionalità): Appunto Roma 4. 8. 1951: "Don Camillo" (authors Guareschi, Duvivier, Barjavel), Trama, Giudizio favorevole.

71 Milano, Unimi Collection DGC23 (Archivio della Direzione Generale per il Cinema), fasc. 1550, correspondence 3. 3. 1952, 15. 5. 1952 and 2. 8. 1952.

72 Milano, Unimi Collection AGG16 (Archivio Giovannino Guareschi): Letter by Giovanni Guareschi to Angelo Rizzoli, Milano 19. 8. 1951 (but in a letter to producer Amato things are depicted in a different manner by Guareschi). The total cost of the production was calculated with 180 million Lire, subdivided in 41 million for the artists, 21 million for the director, the reduced version of synchronization was calculated with 2.2 million Lire (Milano, Unimi Collection, ACS61, fol. 4).

Although Catholic neorealism remained not more than an episode, some Italian leftwing intellectuals were quite convinced of the attracting force of Catholic cinema. Therefore they were denouncing the Catholic attempt to use the cinema for their religious and political purposes. When the French film “Monsieur Vincent” was shown at the Venice Film Festival, the socialist newspaper “Avanti” was criticizing strongly the strategy behind that film (and similar others). Whether you go to church or to cinema, the degree of indoctrination is quite the same; that was suggested by film critic Alfredo Panucucci when he wrote testually:

“France, which feares for the health of our souls ... has thus brought to life the life of St. Vincent, cleverly masked behind a modest and bourgeois title like ‘Monsieur Vincent’. Mr. Vincenzo, therefore, and not Saint Vincent ... The film is purely religious; perhaps it is the vanguard of the film-crusade that the Vatican is about to unleash on the world to take back souls – at least so they say – from the Marxist sin. America has already produced ‘Bernadette’ and other minors. France this ‘Vincenzo’. In Italy, the Vatican company *Universalisa*, rich in millions and perhaps even intelligent, after having purchased the ‘Dies irae’ that can serve its propaganda against Protestantism, is preparing to produce some boring topic like ‘Ignazio di Loyola’ and ‘Fabiola’. The day is approaching, continuing like this, that instead of going to the Mass we can go to the cinema ... The church knows how to do things with its craftiness ... Our task is not to discuss the sanctity of Signor Vincenzo: if he is more saintly –he who gives having got from others– or not those who suffer continuously in misery ...?”⁷³

Panicucci was complaining about the lack of critique on class and social relationships in Italian society. Maybe he was overestimating the influence of popular cinema on political behaviour in general, but he was right in judging the disastrous message given by the so successful “Don Camillo” on behalf of the Fascist past! Although the word Fascism was not spoken out and there was neither a hint on the criminal and liberty-killing attitudes of Mussolini’s regime, there were several small bits of meaning remembering

For the correspondence between Guareschi e Rizzoli e Duvivier in 1952 cf. Sainati, *Cattolici Doc?* (see note 62), p. 18.

73 Roma, Archivio ISACEM, Segretariato Moralità 1947, Relazione no. 14 per l’Archivio del Segretariato Generale: Relazione del Segretariato per la Moralità, no. 66, 15. 9. 1947: extract from L’Avanti, no. 209, 6. 9. 1947, article by Alfredo Panucucci. About “Fabiola” (director Alessandro Blasetti) cf. Paola Palma, *Fabiola. Storia di un appuntamento mancato. I cattolici e la coproduzione cinematografica italo-francese*, in: De Berti (Ed.), *I cattolici* (see note 18), pp. 109–130, esp. pp. 117–119 about the review made by Father Morlion.

powerfully the past. Especially, it was pronounced a positive judgement about the Italian monarchy by the only “intellectual”, the old school teacher, who on her death bed is generously (“even if you are a Bolshevik”) invoking God’s blessing for her former pupil Peppone – who appears quite poor in learning at class as a young boy, and with much school education needs as an adult as well, an image not so nice for a communist leader. The teacher’s last wish is to be buried and brought to the cemetery with a coffin covered by the flag of the last king (“Kings are never to be sent away!”): a highly provocative question for Peppone’s followers, resolved by the mayor in a dictatorial way which denounces his pseudo-democratic attitudes. So, the key scene about the past is Peppone mourning and bearing by himself the coffin of his former teacher with a visible piece of the Savoyard flag placed on it! In this manner, the film communicated to the public an ideal continuity between old monarchical Italy and the new post-war one (not taking into account the different treatment of the monarchy chosen by the Italian people via Referendum and by the Italian constitution) and proposed a positive judgement about the gone monarchy which – that is the clear message – ought to be mourned respectfully. Only one more episode in the film might be a hidden reference to the Fascist regime; that is the moment when the spectator discovers that Peppone had bribed the soccer referee in order to win the soccer game between the Catholic and the communist part of the local community. Don Camillo had tried to bribe him, too, but offering less money! Soccer games during Fascism often had had a political outcome and were counterfeit, in games between competing Fascist clubs as well. Even if we do not know whether Italians had taken cognisance of this mechanism, the hidden message in the film is that of continuity with the past and of a community of people with the same passion, i. e. the same identity, trying to bribe each other, but closely connected and staying together, overcoming the ideological differences. Emblematic for this mechanism is the love story of the young Romeo-and-Giulietta-couple.

So, if we look at the enormous success of the “Don Camillo”, we have to realize that Panicacci was not completely wrong in his reflections about the political situation, even if he wrote his article five years earlier.

On the opposite side, the Christian Democrats were instead convinced by the strong but negative influence of leftwing cinema, even on other authors. In the columns of the DC-Party-newspaper “Il popolo”, Mario Ungaro comments acidly about the films the public could view at the 1947 Film Festival in Venice:

“Almost all the films of this Festival have so far proved to possess something in common: a semblance of morality in the last hundred meters of film, and it does not matter that there are adulterers and crimes in large numbers, or incest, always accompanied by a final ‘educational’ sequence, deliberately planned, but it never

manages to achieve the true effect and the healthy purpose because it is false in its basis and assumptions. In fact, it is very handy to denigrate the sacred institute of family and then lead adultery on the path of repentance; it is too easy to show how the crime is evil, pleasing itself however in the realistic representation of it. Finally, it is simple to stamp in mourning, in pain, in repentance or other situations outside the law and against morals, just to find an excuse to devote to them a large part of the films ... And then: why so many crimes, always war, and always Nazism? People have almost understood that all those things are bad and reminding these to them too often, especially with fictional plots that can teach something to a bad guy more than to a good one, is counterproductive.”⁷⁴

The oblivion of the Nazi (and the Fascist) crimes of the past is here depicted as more productive and sane for society than the opposite.

If we try to draw a conclusion, we must say that during the '50s the Christian Democratic authorities aimed much more to repress undesirable films and especially to hinder the production of leftwing neorealistic films than to produce 'positive' popular films. Censorship was still the most important instrument to control the film market. "Don Camillo" remained an exception. In 1950, 30 % of realized Italian films did not receive the approval seal of the censor. The film producer Ponti was criticizing that it would actually be impossible to realize a film like "Roma città aperta" because the censor would answer that the Germans would not like it.⁷⁵ Films like "Guardie e ladri" and "Totò e Carolina" had problems with censorship,⁷⁶ "Totò cerca casa" (directed by Steno and Monicelli, 1950) was classified as to be excluded for Catholic audiences,⁷⁷ and in 1953 Guido Aristarco and Renzo Renzi were shortly thrown into jail because of an article in the review "Cinema Nuovo" proposing a subject on the Italian Armed Forces in Greece during World War II depicting soldiers more as lovers than as warriors. The

74 Roma, Archivio ISACEM, Segretariato Moralità 1947: Relazione no. 14 per l'Archivio del Segretariato Generale: Relazione del Segretariato per la Moralità, no. 66, 15. 9. 1947: article by Mario Ungaro published in: *Il Popolo*, no. 206, 3. 9. 1947.

75 Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico 1945-1959*, Roma 1993, p. 90.

76 Natalini, *La censura* (see note 16), p. 171.

77 But the film had a great economic success in Italy, cf. Clemens Zimmermann in this volume, at his note 23.

official reaction to the only written subject was a very strong intimidation to filmmakers to avoid unconventional images on the Italian war past.⁷⁸

And in 1952, Giulio Andreotti defended the importance of censorship when demanding from filmmakers like De Sica to not depict only tragic realities, but “give a minimum of advice that helps to make the world of tomorrow a little bit less icy for the multitude of people who are spending themselves in silence, suffering and dying”. And do not let the rest of the world think that the film is depicting an Italian reality, because that would be a bad service to the Italian Fatherland, he added.⁷⁹

Although the practice of control was not working so smoothly as Catholic censors were wishing⁸⁰ and although there were serious distribution problems that created a lot of economic difficulties for the Parish priests, it is quite obvious that in such a political climate there was no place for deeper reflection on the Fascist past. Aside from the neorealist accusation of Fascism, we can suppose that the hints and small bits of interpretation that were travelling sometimes in the popular films were therefore of a major importance then we might think today and we might therefore conclude that they probably contributed in a subcutaneous but thorough manner to help in creating a self-exculpatory master narrative on the Italian Fascist Past.⁸¹

78 Cf. Filippo Focardi, *Il “cattivo tedesco” e il “bravo italiano”. La rimozione delle colpe della Seconda guerra mondiale*, Roma-Bari 2013; Filippo Focardi/Lutz Klinkhammer, *Die italienische Erinnerung an die Okkupation Griechenlands*, in: Chryssoula Kambas/Marilisa Mitsou (Eds.), *Die Okkupation Griechenlands im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Wien 2015, pp. 55–65, at p. 60. Cf. Lukas Schaefer in this volume, at his note 15.

79 Natalini, *La censura* (see note 16), p. 169: Andreotti’s article was published in the Christian democratic review *Libertas*, 28. 2. 1952.

80 For example, Journals for the catholic Youth (like “Juniores”) were giving different film recommendations than the CCC and labels like “excellent” to productions classified by the CCC as “Ar”, that is “for catholic adults with mature morality only” (Archivio ISACEM, PG XV, b. 4, fasc. 1), as in the case of the film “Le avventure di Peter Pan” (1954, “Peter Pan”, Disney 1953).

81 On this topic, related to Italian politics and society, cf. Focardi, *Il “bravo italiano”* (see note 78); Filippo Focardi/Lutz Klinkhammer, *The Question of Fascist Italy’s War Crimes. The Construction of a Self-acquitting Myth (1943–1948)*, in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9 (2004), pp. 330–348.