Cinema Through the Holy See:

The Protection of Traditional Gender Roles in 1950s Italy

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Abstract

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This thesis look at the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the production and censorship of the Italian film industry in the 1950s. This is done in two sections. The first covers the background of the Vatican’s role and the opinion that the Church had as to what should be in a film and what should be excluded. Looking at Papal Encyclicals and speeches the pontiffs made to those in the film industry, a view of the general position that the Roman Catholic Church has towards the burgeoning film industry becomes clear. Secondly, the paper looks to analyze a major theme in the Roman Catholic Church’s critique of popular American and Italian films. Looking to the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico’s Segnalazioni cinematografiche, a pattern of negative reviews become evident for films that challenge the traditional gender roles of the Italian state. Along this same line of thought, films that support the Roman Catholic views on sexuality, marriage and traditional gender roles are lauded by the Segnalazioni cinematografiche.
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Introduction

In the early scenes of Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Cinema Paradiso* young Salvatore eagerly peeks from behind a curtain as the town priest sits in the deserted orchestra of the Italian town’s sole theater. The priest grows cautious as the man and the woman flickering on the screen move closer together, his fingers tapping the bell in his hand in anticipation. As the couple finishes their embrace with a gentle kiss the priest springs into action, pumping the bell above his head. The projectionist obediently and skillfully tags the objectionable material in the reel as it continues to spin through the film. With every subsequent on screen kiss, the priest and projectionist repeat the same process, purging the film of that which could infect the city. The priest’s duty complete, the projectionist carefully snips the objectionable images, splicing together what is left of the scene. Upon the first public screening of the film, two of the town’s members complain that in “twenty years I’ve never seen a kiss on screen… As if they’d let us.”

Years later, when Salvatore has grown and created his own films he receives a final gift from the projectionist, a beaten, faded reel of film. Placing the reel into the projector he is soon greeted by the flickering kisses that had been relegate to the cutting room floor. The faces of Rosalind Russell, Cary Grant, Rudolph Valentino and many more dance upon the scene, pulling Salvatore back into his childhood and the struggle between the priest and the projectionist that helped to shape his life.

This fictionalized representation (although Tornatore based the priest’s censorship actions on a real life priest from his childhood) of the role that the Roman Catholic
Church played in the film industry in reality functions on a much higher level than the simple parish priest cutting kissing out of films. With the advent and mainstreaming of the film industry, the pontificate saw the growing power, and possible threat, that this new medium had.

The goal of this work is to chronicle some of the early interest and involvement of the Vatican in the newly formed film industry, specifically how it influenced the ideology of popular films being shown to the Italian public (whether produced in Italy or imported to the country from the United States). To that end, through the use of both Vatican documents and relevant secondary sources, a clear view of the Vatican’s vision for the “ideal” motion picture industry will become clear and the methods that were put into place to achieve this ideal film will emerge. In addition, the major cinematic publications of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico (the Segnalazioni cinematografiche and, to a lesser extent, La Rivista del Cinematografo) shed light on aspects of the Italian popular cinema that were lauded or condemned. Though this analysis, greater insight into just how the Vatican wished to mold the Italian society though cinema (specifically in regards to gender relations in the modernizing Italy of the 1950s) will become evident.
Early Vatican Involvement in the Motion Picture Industry

The role the Roman Catholic Church played after World War II was clear in multiple aspects of Italian society. The creation and expansion of a Catholic political party, the *Azione Cattolica Italiana* association’s goal to create a purely Catholic newspaper for the purpose of disseminating Catholic principles across the country, and the attention that the Vatican paid to cultural issues (such as divorce and abortion) are clear indicators of the overwhelming awareness that the Roman Catholic leadership had of the power and control that they could wield in the changing Italian landscape. With strong political allies in the Christian Democrats and their founder Alcide De Gasperi, it would continue to work towards creating a state and an Italian society centered on Catholic values.

This preoccupation with molding a “New Italy” was expounded by Pope Pius XII and his plan for a “Christian reconquest” of the country. Under the ever present eye of the Vatican, the Pope’s message to the rebuilding nation would be heard through radio, cinema, newsreels and the newspapers to create a direct relationship between the Holy See and the flock. This control would be most overtly exerted through political affiliations with De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats. With this set up, the state apparatuses (such as the education system, the state controlled radio and television stations) functioned as arms of Catholic morals.¹ Since its political ally in the Christian

Democratic Party was doing most of the heavy censorship of the daily media outlets, the Vatican did not have to take such an overtly active role in the regulation of radio or television programming as it did with the more popular medium of film. With the Italian film industries growing output and the increased importation of foreign films caused the Vatican to attempt to institute strict controls in order to protect the morals of the faithful in the new Italian state.

While the control of the Vatican over the motion picture industry became greater in the post war era, its interest in films began well before World War II. On July 29th, 1936 Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical, *Vigilaniti Cura*, specifically on the motion picture industry and its relation to the faithful. This pronouncement marks the first official Vatican statement outlining its position in regards to the new burgeoning film industry.

*Vigilaniti Cura* begins by giving praise to the Legion of Decency, an American organization, for its efforts in protecting Americans from immoral imagery and subjects within the films of the United States. The Legion was organized just two years prior to the issuing of this Papal praise (1934) by a council of Catholic Bishops who took it upon themselves to provide “a moral estimate of current entertainment feature motion pictures.”

2 This group of American bishops would group the motion pictures into three categories, unobjectionable, which was called class A, objectionable, class B, or condemned, class C. To garner a C rating the film had to be “indecent and immoral…

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3 After 1957 a different rating system was used by the Legion. The same letter rating were employed, but the A rating was split into four groups to better classify the morally unobjectionable movies.
unfit for public consumption.” Vigilanti Cura credited these bishops with far reaching success in their two years of work, stating that:

It is exceedingly great comfort to us to note the outstanding success of the crusade that has led cinema, under your vigilance and under the pressure of public opinion, showing an improvement in moral matters. Crimes and vice are portrayed less frequently, sin is no longer so openly approved and acclaimed; false ideals of life so inflammatory for the young, are no longer presented in such a flagrant manner.5

This American example will be key for the Roman Catholic establishment in Italy, for the Legion of Decency provided the model for the Vatican’s crusade against immoral films at home. Even in this early encyclical Paul XI calls for the faithful across the globe to pledge, as they had done in America, to shun films which were an affront to Christian truth and value.6 This boycott of immoral films could become an ever more powerful tool in Italy than it had been in America, as Catholic censorship could pull a majority of the Italian market from a film, leaving too few audience members for the film to turn a sizable profit.

In regards to the content of the films, the encyclical paid significant attention to questions of morality, albeit without setting clear guidelines. The encyclical stated that the most important aspect of Church involvement would be to make the cinema a “moral, moralizing, educator” for the country. In addition, the papacy was calling for the Catholic press in all countries to “make great effort” in their attempts to guide the faithful

4 Black, The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 13.
toward the correct films for their consumption, one that would uphold their Catholic values. The analysis of individual films would catch any attempt to challenge the authority of the papacy or the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

In addition to Vigilanti cura, the encyclical of Mirana Prorsus, issued in 1957, helped to clarify the fear that the Church had towards the immoral possibilities that film had. Issued by Pope Pius XII, it stated that film had the ability to “drag (someone) into darkness, lead him into temptation, (and) put him at the mercy of uncontrolled instinct.”

The position of the Vatican, through these two encyclicals, towards the film industry was evident. It was a medium that needed to be controlled in order to keep it from corrupting the faithful.

More than simply issuing encyclicals, however, Pope Pius XII made two significant speeches in 1955 to American filmmakers and distributors, giving shape to what the Catholic Church wished to see stressed in the films. To begin with, he stresses much of Vigilanti Cura, calling for morality to be stressed in film content. Moving beyond this, however, Pius XII attempted to define what this moral or “ideal” film would look like. He said that these films would “increase his gifts of energy and virtue (so that he can) return to the right path.” Interestingly, Pius XII addresses how sin and evil can be addressed in film, stating that sin should not be shown whenever perversity and evil are presented for their own sakes; … if it is described in stimulating, insidious or corrupting ways; if it is shown to

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9 Pope Pius XII, “Exhortations to the Representatives of the Cinema World,” Il Film ideale, www.vatican.va
those who are not capable of controlling and resisting it. But when none of these causes for exclusion are present; when the struggle with evil, and even its temporary victory, serves, in relation to the whole, to a deeper understanding of life and its proper ordering, of self-control, of enlightenment and strengthening of judgment and action; then such matter can be chosen and inserted, as a part of the whole action of the film.\footnote{Ibid}

For Pius, this is the greatest duty of the cinema, to teach morals and only show evil if, in the end, it is ultimately defeated or shown in a negative light.

In his speeches Pius XII also makes reference to how the film industry should portray family values in the “ideal” movie. Pius believes that the family should be shown with a strong masculine figure who appreciates his role as both a husband and a father. The mother in this ideal film family should be a devoted mother and wife, staying at home to take care of her children. On a linguistic level, Pius describes the men with terms such as like “sincere conjugal love”, “virile,” “continent solitude” and “manfully.” Women, on the other hand, are described using phrases such as “wife and mother of stainless conduct” and “devoted to home and its intimacy because she knows how to find there all her happiness.”\footnote{Ibid} This description will be valuable for the Film Critics of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, as they will base many of their ratings on how the films deviate from this ideal in the 1950s Italian cinema.
Historiography of Vatican Influence in the Italian Cinema

While the Vatican recognized the importance of film since the mid 1930s, its involvement in rebuilding Italy after World War II brought the clerical establishment even closer to the film industry. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church’s significant role in the development of the post war Italian cinema can be seen as a recognition of the power that the new cinema had in rebuilding the war torn country. The Church wished to use this power in order to promote its own moral and cultural issues as a means of confirming and strengthening Italy’s status as a Catholic country.

Historians such as Stephen Gundle, Christopher Wagstaff and David Forgacs all agree that the Roman Catholic Church recognized the significance of the cinema as a tool for expressing and teaching Catholic thought. In his work, “From Neorealism to Luci Rosse,” Gundle suggests that the main interest of the Vatican in the films (both those produced by Italian backers as well as American imports) was to make sure that they did not degrade the power of the church in the changing Italian society. He concludes that not only was the Vatican successful in maintaining its power, but began to use the cinema to spread a distinctively Christian message to the Italian people.

Christopher Wagstaff’s “Italy in the Post War International Cinema Market,” in part outlines the role of the parish cinema for the Italian film industry. Specifically, he comes to the conclusion that the effort of the Vatican to provide a market for moral films was essential to control of the industry. In the 1950s, the opening of over 5000 parish cinemas aimed to control the culture message of the industry in that these were centers of
distribution in which the pontificate had the final say as to what would be shown. If a filmmaker did not meet the standards set out by the Church for a moral film then the director and producer would be cutting off a significant section of the Italian cinemas. While this did not officially mean that a film would fail, it was a factor of control that the filmmaker was aware of while making the final edits.

Finally, David Forgacs in his book *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1980* covers the strong relationship between the Christian Democrats and the Vatican, both of whom wanted to assert their power in the post war period through a strong control of the culture. Forgacs finds that the majority of Church control was, in fact, exercised through this indirect political means. The alliance with political power brokers would be an effective tool in the pontificate’s attempt to control the morality of the Italian people.

While these works show how the Vatican sought to control the Italian cinema, most existing literature focuses on the structural setup of the Church’s influence, or on the pontiff’s influence in relation to the government powers. Very little attention is paid, however, to identifying values protected and augmented by the Catholic control. In addition, there is little work on how the organizations within the Catholic Church (what would become the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico) identified different threats within the films themselves. Identifying the specific content that was coming under attack by Church censors sheds light on the areas of Italian culture that the Roman Catholic authorities felt needed the most protection from the modernizing, secular culture. These are areas which need more attention before a full picture of the Roman Catholic influence
in the Italian film industry, and their role in the molding of modern Italian cultural thought, can come to fruition.
The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico: Bureaucracy of Vatican Control

As a vehicle of moral control the Vatican created the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico. Organized unofficially shortly after Pius XI’s release of the *Vigilinti cura* this organization had many duties. First and foremost, as pontifical encyclicals and statements made clear, it was to advise the Catholic community as to which films to watch and which to avoid. In addition to the advisory duties, however, the organization also had the responsibility of choosing which films could and could not be shown in the parish cinemas. In 1948, in an effort to make the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico an official organization, Pius XII issued the Statute of the Papal Commission for Didactic and Religious Cinematography. Integrating the new commission with the existing priests and bishops, the stated goal of this official group was to

Study cinematic works destined to further knowledge of Christian doctrine and of the teachings of the Catholic Church, which will be spontaneously subject to revision by the Holy See. Judgment will also be extended to technical and artistic aspects insofar as these as these influence the religious and didactic value of the cinematographic work.\(^\text{12}\)

The mandate for the official Centro Cattolico Cinematografico became clear. They were to judge not only the plot aspects of the films, but the artistic and technical choices as they can often play a larger role in the moral content of the film.

To streamline the various tasks, the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico created the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, a weekly publication that would briefly review the films

and identify the morally objectionable aspects. These reviews, which were written by groups of priests in the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, would be circulated to parishes throughout Italy, letting each parish priest know which film was acceptable for their flock and which needed to be avoided. The priests were expected then to provide the short reviews to their parishioners as the “normal guideline service for Catholics.” Some parishes even went so far as to post these reviews in their churches for the parishioner’s reference throughout the week. At the end of each review the film was given one of six ratings (For All, For All with Appropriate Changes, For Adult, For Adult with Appropriate Changes, Not Recommended or Excluded). If the film was provided to the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico prior to the general release of the film, the rating was given to the filmmaker so that he could make the appropriate changes and resubmit the film for a better rating.

One of the lingering questions, however, about the Segnalazioni cinematografiche is how a film earned each one of these ratings? What was the difference between a film that was given a Not Recommended rating and a film that was given an Excluded rating? Outside of Pius XII general description of the “ideal” film, no clear standards or guidelines were laid out for the review process. In the end, much was left up to the moral eye of the censor. Without these strict guidelines from the Vatican, the priests tasked with review the films used a great deal of latitude in their condemnation of certain actions that they deemed contrary to Church teachings and to the betterment of the Italian people as a whole. We turn now to one of the clear areas that caused the Centro Cattolico

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Cinematografico a great deal of concern in the 1950s, the portrayal of women and the defense of the traditional gender hierarchy.
The Fight for Traditional Gender Roles in the Cinema

While the Roman Catholic Church set up the elaborate Centro Cattolico Cinematografico in order to monitor the content and message of popular cinema in Italy, the question still remains, what types of messages and content did the Vatican wish to support and what did they wish to censor? The official Catholic reaction to some of the most successful Italian and American films during the 1950s reveals some clear moral themes. While not the only theme, one apparent desire of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico is to reinforce traditional gender roles. Specifically, the films that were recommended by the Vatican through the Segnalazioni cinematografiche or La Rivista del Cinematografo were films that portrayed women as demure mothers or females in the subservient role to a strong male character. Those that received an “Excluded” or “Not Recommended” rating, on the other hand, were films that displayed feminized males, overtly sexual and/or overly powerful women. As we will see, these popular films have very different ways of demonstrating the shift in gender roles, but a disregard for Roman Catholic gender roles is one of the clear ways to being condemned by the Segnalazioni cinematografiche.

14The order and success of these films judged by their box office intakes (according to lists compiled in Carlo Celli and Marga Cottino-Jones’s New Guide to Italian Cinema and box office figures reported by Thomas Guback in The International Film Industry: Western Europe and America since 1945). The data Celli and Cottino-Jones used to compile their list came from several sources including Gianni Rondolino’s Catalogo Bolaffi del cinema italiano tutti i film dal 1945 al1955, 3 volumes, (Torino: Giulio Bolaffi Editore, 1979), Gianfranco Casadio’s Adultere, fedifraghe, innocent: la donna del “neorealismo popolare” nel cinema italiano degli anni Cinquanta (Ravenna: Longo, 1990), Maurizio Baronì’s Platea in piedi 1945-1978 (Bologna: Boletti, 1995) and the Associazione Generale Italiana dello Spettacolo’s Catalogo generale dei film italiani dal 1956 al 1965, (Rome: AGIS, 1965).
Among the films highly recommended by the Roman Catholic Church and received a great deal of support within the parish cinemas in the 1950s, five stand out as both Catholic critical successes and quite popular with the Italian public (all these films placed in the top ten grossing films in the years they were released). The highest grossing film of any analyzed here is Julian Duvivier’s 1952 work, Don Camillo, which earned one and a half billion lira in the box office.\(^{15}\) Secondly there is Duvivier’s sequel, Il ritorno di Don Camillo (The Return of Don Camillo) in 1953. Il ritorno di Don Camillo came in with a box office take of 900 million lire.\(^{16}\) After that came Ladislao Vajda’s 1955 work, Marcelino pane y vino.\(^{17}\) These films garnered the support of the Roman Catholic establishment in part due to their moral portrayal of women and support of the traditional gender hierarchy.

In addition to films recommended by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, a great deal can be learned about the Catholic views towards the defense of traditional gender roles by examining movies criticized by the Vatican. All of the following films received the lowest rating, either “Excluded” or “Not Recommended,” that the church could place on a movie. Included on this revealing list are Robert Lenard’s 1955 film La donna piu bella del mondo (The Most Beautiful Woman in the World), Vittoro De Sica’s L’oro di Napoli (The Gold of Naples) from 1954, De Sica’s 1953 work Stazione Termini (Indiscretion of an American Wife), Mario Mattoli’s 1953 film Un turco napoletano and Robert Rossen’s 1955 film Mambo. All these films were received harsh criticism by the

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\(^{16}\) Ibid

official Vatican censors in part for their presentation of the sexual power and control of women over men.

While the analysis will focus on the themes that the church wished to control, the American films must be considered in addition to the Italian movies. Indeed, any analysis of the post-war Italian cinema would be incomplete without inclusion of the American films that infiltrated the popular Italian cinema. As Hollywood productions were increasingly successful in Italy “there was even an indirect attempt to offer an Italian product which could function as a surrogate for the American cinema.” 18 When looking at the films of the 1950s, this indirect connection to their American counterparts must be considered in order to find common themes and aspects in the issues that were interpreted by the Roman Catholic authorities.

For this reason, in addition to the Italian films, American films that will be analyzed in regard to their portrayal of Catholic gender roles are John Huston’s 1951 work *The African Queen* (which was highly recommended by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico), Howard Hawks’ 1953 *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*, Billy Wilder’s 1959 movie *Some Like it Hot* and George Sidney’s 1957 work *Pal Joey* (the last three received very poor reviews from the Vatican authorities). Finally, while it predates the period covered here, the American film *Holiday* (produced in 1938, but shown in Italy in the early post-war period) will also be studied because it provides the model of how men and women should interact in the movies according to Vatican censors. Though a close

study of the films that garnered positive reactions as well as the “Not Recommended” and “Excluded” film, a clear view of the traditional gender roles that the Roman Catholic Church wished to protect and instill in the modernizing Italy will begin unfold.
The Modern Woman vs. The Catholic Woman, Gaining Freedom from the Domestic Sphere

There is no gray area when it comes to the Vatican’s view on the place a woman should hold within the society. It believes that a woman should be “the subordinate one of mother and husband’s helpmate, with its attendant virtues of modesty, submission and sacrifice.”19 This point of view, which did not shift from the Fascist view and goal of “confining women within the domestic space,”20 gave the definition of femininity through family and motherhood. This view of women did not coincide with the view of the new cinema bombshells gracing the screen, be it in Italian starlets such as Silvana Mangano and Sophia Loren, or American ones like Marilyn Monroe.

Sex and violence, the two main reasons in the Segnalazioni cinematografiche determined the exclusion of certain films from being viewed, went hand in hand with the lack of morality and religious belief. Focusing on sexuality, in an article for the Communist paper L’Unita, Mario Alicata, a cultural critic with the Communist Party, derided this “obsession with sex” and the Catholic establishment’s fear of “spreading of a pathological and uncontrollable eroticism.”21

Supporting this criticism from the left of the Catholic proclivity for an “obsession with sex”, Vigilanti cura, as mentioned above, and the speeches of Pius XII contains the

20 Anna Maria Torriglia, Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 9.
same references, although it is not referred to as an obsession but rather part of a greater
doctrine of film criticism. For these documents, however, the pontiffs show that overt
female sexuality is a threat to the Catholic family and something that must be curbed in
the Italian cinema.

Both *Some Like it Hot* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, which starred the seminal
American sex pot Marilyn Monroe, were extremely popular in Italy as well as being
condemned by the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*. By the middle of the 1950s, the
blonde diva was already on the covers of many popular Italian magazines, such as *Epoca*
and *L'Europeo*.\(^22\) The identification of Monroe with sexuality is evident in the two
movies through several aspects of the cinematography. The paradox she embodied
concerned whether her sexuality was innocent or promiscuous. The Catholic
establishment had no doubts. All the tight and nearly transparent costumes she wore in
*Some Like it Hot* were defined by the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* as “too scanty,”
making this aspect of the film “morally unacceptable.”\(^23\) In *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*,
Marilyn Monroe’s first success in Italy, the more demure but still clearly sexualized
costumes were still defined by the Vatican as often not suitable, together with a
“frivolous plot and offensive songs.”\(^24\)

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\(^{23}\) *A qualcuno piace caldo, Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, Vol. 46 (Roma: Edizioni del Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1959) 159.

Camera movements, such as the “side-on tits and ass positioning” analyzed by Richard Dyer in his book *Heavenly Bodies*, also helped to raise the image of the sexually empowered woman she always plays in her films, a category of woman that reemerged after the absence in the 1940s. The ability to seduce men for her own advantage, creating a threat to the traditional gender order that the Catholic Church wished to reinforce, corresponds to Marilyn Monroe’s character’s goals. She is blonde, fits the Italian definition of *maggiorate fische* (physically endowed, a term created for Italian beauty Gina Lollobrigida) and she becomes the embodiment of sexuality criticized by the Church authorities. What is alarming for the Catholic Church is that the desirability of Marilyn Monroe’s characters does not lead to any sort of downfall; rather it legitimizes her for her spouse and deprives sex of guilt. It is that “whore-virgin dichotomy” that Molly Haskell refers to when discussing the “dialectical caricature of the ‘sexpot’ and the ‘nice girl.’” The actress’s power lay in her vulnerability and in her innocent sexuality, which enabled her to exert control over those men who were susceptible to them. This was not a prostitute or any negative sexual begins, but a “good girl” who could also be sexually controlling.

Moreover, Monroe’s characters are rather conniving in their use of sexuality to achieve their goals. While it is true that in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Lorelei, played by Monroe, asks questions such as “Is this the way for Europe in France?” but this is not necessarily a sign of complete stupidity: she uses her knowledge of men to gain advantage in life. Lorelei even defines herself in the film as someone who becomes

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intelligent only when she needs it. This certainly contradicts Haskell’s belief that the roles played by Monroe, as well as Jane Russell and Elizabeth Taylor, were all “incapable of an intelligent thought”\textsuperscript{27} and reinforce the intention and premeditation of Monroe’s characters, whose mixture of stupidity, apparent helplessness and sexuality contribute to controlling the male protagonist in her work. In the end, the issues of the feminine image in these films are not simply centered on the objectification of the female form, but on the power that comes from this sensuality.

The use of sexuality in these films, to the horror of the Catholic officials, is actually legitimized at the end of the film through the creation of a monogamous marriage. The end of \textit{Gentlemen Prefer Blondes}, in fact, when the two female protagonists get married and their role of wife is visually legitimated by the wedding dress, is still not enough to gain the Vatican’s approval. The two characters chose romance rather than a career in show business and therefore have clearly preferred the domestic sphere to the public one. Even this finally, the creation of an approved Catholic union, does not free them from the guilt of their past in the eyes of the \textit{Segnalazioni cinematografiche}, garnering it the excluded categorization.

When Robert Corber sees Joan Crawford’s masculinization in the American film \textit{Mildred Pierce} (1945) as “an example of the bad things that supposedly befalls women when they leave the domestic sphere and enter the workforce,”\textsuperscript{28} he refers to that post war reorganization of the economy which had impacted Italy as well and against which the

\textsuperscript{27} Haskell, \textit{From Reverence to Rape}, xiii.
Vatican was strongly fighting. After playing a vital role in the World War II economy, women found it difficult to return to their roles of mothers and wives in the new Italian culture. Moreover, the expanding economic need for workers during the “economic miracle” of the 1950s made it necessary for many women to enter the workforce. Their working experience and need for workers in the new Italy had left traces in their self perception while the right to vote, introduced in 1946, gave them a new political force. Marilyn Monroe’s sexual and feminine portrayal of a working woman was even more controversial and alarming for a Catholic establishment which was anxiously seeking domestication of women. The issue would become even more distressing when the job women were involved in entailed using the female body for visual pleasure.

One of the aspects which concerned the Vatican, in fact, was the danger of displaying the female body for public appreciation. Richard Matlby, writing about the film’s opening scene, thinks that “the primary source of audience enjoyment in the scene is the pleasure we gain from watching Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell perform for an off screen audience; our reward is spectacular rather than narrational.”29 This visual aspect not in itself constitute an issue for the Catholic Church, however in the specific case of Marilyn Monroe, it would lead to legitimating the idea of taking pleasure by watching a sexual icon, whose glamorous and provocative costumes would also complement attention from a narrative defined by the Segnalazioni cinematografiche as “frivolous.”30

The immorality of the costumes and the identification of female body as spectacle was an issue also in the third banned American film, *Pal Joey*. The movie, set in a nightclub, included chorus girls who wear revealing outfits that appeal to the male patrons. This element was reinforced by the statements of the club manager, who said “Do you know what the people want? Legs.” This eroticization of women stood actually in contrast to the role played by the two main actresses, Rita Hayworth and Kim Novak. Hayworth’s costumes were quite demure, intending to take the mind of those around off her past as a chorus girl. In addition Novak’s cheap outsides clothing reveal her low social background. As in *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*, *Pal Joey*’s visual composition, not its plot line is condemned. The film is accused of presenting “numerous scanty costumes”\(^{31}\) and Novak’s characters uneasiness about her profession and about her illegitimate relationship with Frank Sinatra is not enough for the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico to judge the film favorably. Linda (Kim Novak) is still an unabashed cabaret star, therefore not moral enough for Vatican approval. She uses her femininity to attract a male audience to the show, encouraging their lust.

On top of this, all three of the American films contain characters that were making an effort to raise their social status through marriage into a higher social class. Money seemed to represent the main asset to the potential husbands for the female protagonists. Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is a “manipulative gold-digger (who affirmed) falling in love with a rich man is an easy as doing it with a poor one.”\(^{32}\) She is defined by her best friend as someone so interested in money that for her “money

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is her main hobby.” Sugar, in *Some Like it Hot*, dreams of meeting a man rich enough to have “a yacht, his private train and his personal toothpaste.” In *Pal Joey*, Vera (Rita Hayworth) has actually climbed the social latter, yet she still finds herself unable to forget her past as a chorus girl. Despite the fact that women’s desire to improve their social conditions rather than to raise big families was a trend in post war Italy, this was in direct contradiction with the message the Vatican wished to convey. Women had to return to their family values and forget the social mobility that was possible through work or even marriage. This was definitely not the threatening message that *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* director Howard Hawks’ believed to be presenting when he said

> It was simply a joke. In other films, you have two men who go out and try to find pretty girls for fun. We imagined the opposite and took two girls who go out and find a few men for fun: a perfect modern story; it pleased me a lot; it was funny.\(^{33}\)

The modern themes of empowerment and autonomous women were expressed by Hawks with heroines who show their independence through their positive forcefulness. Marilyn Monroe was in fact not only the symbol of sexuality but a symbol of non-domesticity, which certainly would be at odds with the Catholic Church’s family image. Lollobrigida was not only the first expression of the national star system but also the actress for whom the word *maggiorata* was invented.\(^{34}\) Loren had a similar, if not greater, level of


\(^{34}\) Maggiorata, roughly equivalent to buxom or voluptuous, would be applied to the Italian actresses of their period known more for their physical features rather than their acting ability. The term originated in director Alessandro Blasetti’s *Altri tempi*, in a scene where an attorney (played by Vittorio De Sica) defends Lollobrigida’s character Mariantonia by referencing her bust size instead of the merits of the case.
international notoriety, but also maintained a level or regional charm which was utilized in *L’oro di Napoli.*

The same issue is raised by the female protagonists in the Italian films given the “Not Recommended” or “Excluded” category by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, played by Gina Lollobrigida (in *La donna piu bella del mondo*), Silvana Mangano (*Mambo*) and Sophia Loren (*L’oro di Napoli*). Mangano, Loren and Lollobrigida were all expressions of a different type of women from the idealized motherly figure promoted by the Vatican. These three divas were the embodiment of the sexualized woman associated with the “American” image that was being popularized in Italy along the lines of Marilyn Monroe’s characters.

The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico viewed Loren’s appearance in De Sica’s *L’oro di Napoli* very unforgiving, giving it a “Not Recommended” for its costumes and the behavior of Loren’s character. Throughout the film, the focus of the camera and the men in the scenes with her is on Loren’s breast. The opening scene lingers on the character Sophie (Loren) kissing her lover, her top slightly undone. In addition, Sophie will flirt with customers, allowing the young men to see down her shirt as she pounds the dough at the pizza parlor.

The criticisms of these scenes are not greatly different from that leveled on *La donna piu bella del mondo* for “inappropriate costumes and indecent scenes” and on

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Mambo for “scanty costumes.” The three actresses are presented as the object of male desire and the expression of a sexuality so feared by the Catholic Church.

More than just the costume, however, actresses such as Loren, Lollobrigida and Mangano posed an even greater threat to the Vatican’s attempt to re-Christianize Italy. Specifically, these three contained “a certain raw earthiness that seemed natural and unspoilt… to which Italians could relate.” All were closer to the typical Mediterranean beauty, not the “blonde bombshell” of Marilyn Monroe, and far more relatable to the Italian audience. All three actresses had gotten their start in beauty contests, which began their transition into the Italian film industry. It is not surprising, therefore, that the films tend to emphasize the tight fitting costumes and the curves of the actresses for the Italian beauties as it had been with Marilyn Monroe’s films. In the opening scene of Pizze a credito (Sophia Loren’s episode of L’oro di Napoli), Loren is introduced in a tight white blouse while the camera lingers on her kissing her lover, while the final scene leaves the image of her curves as the camera follows her from behind, showing her form for the men around her in the film and the audience to appreciate. Throughout the scenes, the attention of the men around her is consistently on Loren’s chest, and she manipulates this to her advantage over the course of the action. The film also shows Loren’s form with multiple close shots, creating an erotic spectacle for the audiences gaze. Now we see a local beauty being shown in much the same way as Monroe in her popular American films.

38 Stephen Gundle, Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Ideal of Italy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 142, 154
Like Loren, Gina Lollobrigida’s costumes in *La donna piu bella del mondo* are very similar to the ones worn by the American starlets *in Gentleman Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like it Hot*. Lollobrigida plays the singer Lina who becomes a successful performer and dancer in a cabaret. Dancing, and the sexuality that is often associated with it, is openly condemned by the Vatican. Her performance in the film embodies a sexuality, much like Monroe’s characters, that is inoffensive and innocent in many ways. Lollobrigida has a:

Personality which uses sexuality not as a dangerous weapon, but encased behind a charming innocence; whose liveliness is pure and harmonious, but whose heart is driven by an overflowing sense of irrepressible energy, which is challenged by a sociality confined to family life… These characters are immediately recognizable and identifiable as genuine stereotypes.

This harmless sexuality that includes the characters portrayed not only by Lollobrigida and Monroe, but also Silvana Mangano and Sophia Loren, is perhaps the most dangerous aspect of these films for the Catholic establishment.

Again, however, it is the physical appearance and the costumes of Lina Cavalieri and of Giovanna Blasetti that seem to be the only expression of that immorality which the Church condemned in *Some Like it Hot* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Lina Cavalieri, in fact, is a woman defined by a character in the film with “only one imperfection: she is too honest.” Her honesty is not praised in the *Segnalazioni* of the Centro Cattolico Cenematografico, while what is said is that the film “takes place in an immoral and frivolous environment” which is the entertainment world, that same corrupted world from

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which her mother Olimpia wants to protect her and where *Pal Joey, Gentleman Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like it Hot* all take place. Giovanna Blasetti in *Mambo* belongs to the same world. She is a simple girl, who struggles to survive by working as a hop assistant and then becomes a dancer. Dancing brings her success; money and power over the men who had made her suffer in the past. As Giovanna says, “I had arrived, I had earned my money and they were on their knees.” It is the use of her power, however, that the *Segnalazioni* condemned and defined as being immoral. The positive feelings which emerge at the end of the film do not manage (in the eyes of the Vatican) to overcome the negative aspects of the plot. Giovanna is still a negative character, an overtly strong woman who works, is independent and uses her sexuality to control the men in her life.

The three Italian starlets not only embodied the sexuality that the Vatican wished to avoid, but they also challenged the image of womanhood that the Catholic Church was eager to restore to restore in post war Italy. Specifically they wished to promote that idea that a woman should give all her dedication to her children. It is not coincidence that the only episode of *L’oro di Napoli* praised by the Vatican through *La Rivista del Cinematografo* was called *Il funeralino*. Paolo Ojetti considered it to be “an inspiring interpretation of all human feelings.” It showed the suffering of a mother at the loss of her son, reaffirming the connection of traditional family values and motherly love for a child.

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40 *Mambo, Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, 64.
As motherhood is stressed not only for the Italian family, but as a quintessential aspect of Catholic femininity, the complete lack of matronly figures in the films criticized by the Church is a clear indication of the Catholic ideology pushed by the Vatican. Fertility and reproduction, the primary function of a Catholic woman, established their femininity and determined their role in society and completely missing in the films. Marilyn Monroe, Gina Lollobrigida, Silvana Mangano and Sophia Loren’s characters are more interested in material objects than in motherhood. Autonomy, social mobility and status are available to them through work outside the home or through marriage to a man of status. Both solutions do not entail maternity and are associated with shame and sin by the Church. As previously mentioned in regards to the American films, the Italian ones that received poor ratings from the Church also represented all female characters who want to assert their new role in society and free themselves from their constrained family lives and use work as a way of gaining independence.

The characters in these condemned films are strong women who work and are autonomous, but while the actresses portray characters that challenge traditional gender roles, privately modernity, domesticity and were widely publicized for the likes of Lollobrigida, Loren and Mangano. The press coverage of Lollobrigida’s pregnancy was a way of painting these stars as middle class, normal mothers, who had concerns that were on par with any other Italian woman. This was very different from the portrayal of the Hollywood starlet, in that

The motherhood of major Hollywood stars was not usually highlighted for fear that desirability and mystique would be shattered. In Italy the

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42 Brunetta, The History of Italian Cinema, 147.
stars were not cloaked in the same aura of artificial glamour; their appeal rested at least in part on their everyday qualities and the fact that they were ordinary.  

Female freedom as a challenge to traditional domestic values was even more evident in the other film by Vittorio De Sica, which fell into the “Not Recommended” category, Stazione Termini. De Sica’s work, despite having an international cast (Jennifer Jones and Montgomery Clift), still has a very Roman setting “so as not to lose touch with the reality of his country, without which (De Sica) would undoubtedly be unable to express himself.” In this film, Giovanni (Clift’s character) says that he prefers to consider himself Italian “because Italian men count for more.” Jones’ character, Maria, his American lover, is accused by Giovanni of being too modern in her outlook. He says “you American women are a little too emancipated” in reference to a change in habits. This brings about the connection to the shift in national habits which was becoming apparent in the modernizing 1950s. This progress was becoming especially apparent in the female protagonists.

Maria, leaves her extended family in Italy to spend time with her Italian lover, asserting her independence from the traditional family unit assert her immorality. In her letter to Giovanni, Maria says that “beside you I have forgotten everything, my husband, my conscience, even my daughter.” In the end, Maria rejects her lover in order to return to her family and therefore submits to her marital and maternal duties, placing her sexual freedom beneath to her traditional marriage role. Despite this reaffirmation of Catholic

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family institutions, film was considered to be immoral as the decision is taken not for the traditional support of marriage, but rather due to the concern over a scandal and Maria still promises Giovanni to love him, failing her duty as a wife.

The Vatican not only encountered works that were counter to their view of family values, however. Many of the top grossing films of the 1950s portrayed an image of women that was in line with the Roman Catholic establishment. The positive reception of the ecclesiastic establishment towards films such as Holiday and The African Queen do not come as a surprise considering how chaste and demure the female characters in these two films were in comparison to the films banned by the Centro Catolico Cinematografico.

In George Cukor’s Holiday, the protagonist is a young woman named Linda (Katherine Hepburn) who provides a view of femininity that is seen as the quintessential example for the “ideal” woman. Linda is a millionaire’s daughter who falls in love with Johnny Case (Cary Grant), her sister Julia’s (Doris Nolan) fiancé. While the idea of stealing a sibling’s mate may seem to counter the Catholic ideal, there is no condemnation of Linda’s actions.

Another reason of the understanding in the review of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico is that Linda is represented as the more “moral” of the two, so it is understandable that she ends up happy. Julia is interested in men in order to achieve a better life and economic security, similarly to the female protagonists in the films that received “Not Recommended” or “Excluded” ratings. Linda, however, views her wealth as a burden and isolates herself in a dream world, rejecting her financial benefits. In fact,
Linda is drawn to Johnny specifically because he has not been corrupted by “a respect for wealth” and she satirically reminds him that “money is our God.” The identification with money as a religious deity is a clear crack at her own family and by extension the values of the criticized characters. Linda represents, therefore, the image of a more traditional female archetype. She does not need to exploit her femininity in order to win a man’s affection. Hepburn’s portrayal of a strong and financially independent woman is acceptable to the Vatican because she rejects these aspects of her situation, striving for a traditional marital relationship. Her interest in men comes purely from a companionship point of view, and she neither uses nor shows her sexuality in order to win her partner. Linda bonds with men, using her body for acrobatic shows with Grant’s character rather than to try and attract sexually his attention.

Linda’s costuming, wiping out any sexual reference, almost reinforces the sense that she is not a sexual object. She is extremely thin, without any curves shown, and her sexless costumes serve to flatten her femininity. In addition, wide coats, long shapeless skirts, masculine shoes and modest blouses highlight Linda’s face, detracting from the body under the layers of clothing. When applied to Julia, costuming is just as important in defining her character. When Julia gets rid of Johnny, who has become a hindrance to her social climbing, she is dressed in a black dress with a wide low cut, not very different for the black transparent dress Marilyn Monroe wears in the final scene of Some Like it Hot. On the contrary, her sister Linda, whose outfit is a wide and demure coat that covers her entire body, is the character who refuses economic stability and social status in order to gain true love.
Moreover, Linda does not have or put forward any great career ambitions throughout the film. She is seen as a caretaker in her father’s house, maintaining the room her mother had created as a family sanctuary. In addition, when she is professed her love for Johnny to her family, she supports her husband, saying “I’ve got all the faith in the world in Johnny, whatever he does is all right with me.” She is willing to follow him no matter what, placing herself second to family and her duty as a wife. All of these actions make Linda the perfect wife in the eyes of the Vatican.

If *Holiday* is the ideal of how a woman should act in the pursuit of a chaste Catholic love, then *The African Queen* is an attempt to present an even greater chastity. In this film Hepburn plays Rosa, who is first and foremost the sister of a missionary. She is dependent on her brother, cinematically shown by her positioning almost always by his side or behind him and also from the choice of her pale and dowdy costumes which are appropriate to her role as the minister’s sister. She is not presented at all as a sexual character. Her brother defined her as being “not beautiful,” admitting that only God found her a place by his side and her prudish clothes do not attract the attention of the audience to her body.

Even when she is forced to undress herself, the camera leaves her completely out of shot, depriving any possible sexual inferences. When she comes out of the water she is wearing more clothes as underwear than some of the American and Italian bombshells wore as their stage costumes in the other movies. Rose’s character is a strong woman

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45 In terms of costuming for Hepburn’s character in the river there is a brief continuity error. When she is in the water her shoulders are bare, giving the impression that she has less clothing on, while when she climbs back on to the boat she is in a much more demure undergarment. It is this brief look at bare shoulder that is the most revealing shot of Rose’s character in the entire film.
with solid moral values and a determined personality. Her spiritual and religious beliefs are constant in the film and her moral qualities are certainly the antithesis of the values embodied by Marilyn Monroe’s characters.

The presence of spiritual and religious beliefs as well as family values in *Holiday* and *The African Queen*, and an absence of them in *Some Like it Hot*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Pal Joey*, are also certainly a decisive factor in classifying these American films as either For All or Excluded/Not Recommended. Family principles were clearly endorsed in *Holiday* by all of the characters portrayed. Despite the fact that Edward Seton, the father of the bride, seems mainly interested in his future son-in-law’s social background, he states that “getting married is an important step for a woman” and finally accepts that his daughter Julia wishes to marry someone from a different social status. The family’s internal conflicts seem to be partially forgotten when the happiness of one daughter is discussed; and Linda’s concern about her sister’s future is shown by her effort in keeping the couple together and by her joy of discovering that the father is finally given his approval. When she finds out her father has done so she exclaims “Mum would be very proud of this,” placing the attention on the complete family unit and parental control of the children.

In *The African Queen*, the same family values are expressed by the close relationship between Rosa and her brother, by the decision of Charlie and Rosa to make their relationship legal by getting married just before they are executed and by their reference to their wish to have children. Charlie states “we will not be short of stories to
tell our grandchildren.” Even with danger looming, the reassertion of the traditional family unit gives a sense of comfort and joy to the two characters.

The family values present in both films are also supported by a strong sense of Christianity, either explicitly through dialogue or through a sense of local. In *Holiday* the first conversation about Julia’s wedding takes place in a church, which the family regularly attend, while *The African Queen*’s opening takes place in the Methodist church that has been built in the African village where Rosa’s brother is celebrating mass. In addition, Rosa reminds Charlie that “God has not forgotten this place, as my brother’s presence here demonstrates.” Her brother decides to risk his life when the Germans invade the village because “a good pastor does not desert his flock.” Rose even thanks God for Charlie’s courage, even though Charlie is the immoral alcoholic.

All of the female characters of the films banned by the Centro Cattolico Cenematografico do not project this sense of family values, however, they are rather involved with and often define themselves by their secular worldly occupations. These include working women, dancers, singers, prostitutes or wives tempted by adventure to betray their vows. As for the other Italian movies that were included in the For All category by the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* (*Don Camillo, Il ritorno di Don Comillo* and *Marcellino pane y vino*), these pieces do not have female characters as their main protagonists. The women in these films are wives loyal to their husbands and look after their children. This traditional narrative reinforces the patriarchal order where female action and ambition is subordinate to those of men. It is this view of masculinity that we
turn to now when considering how it impacts the gender dichotomy represented in the popular cinema of the 1950s.
At the Expense of Modernity: The Endangered Masculine Ethic

The traditional concept of masculinity took a decisive hit both in America and Italy during times of economic turmoil. Before the American Great Depression and the Italian post war period there was a tendency to associate a man’s masculinity with his ability to provide. Indeed, Pius XII stressed that a good Catholic woman’s place was the home with the children, inherently leaving the onus of providing solely on the males shoulders. The economic turmoil robbed males of this ability, creating fear of losing control in not only their work environment, but in their home life as well. From a cinematic perspective, this fear of losing masculinity is seen in Vittorio De Sica’s *Landri di biciclette* (The Bicycle Thieves). The importance of the bicycle for Antonio is that it allows him to provide for his family; without it, he is emasculated. It is within this tumultuous economic setting that the Italian male will be protected by the Vatican critique of film in the 1950s.

Beginning with the American productions, Frank Sinatra’s character in *Pal Joey* is representative of both the male’s attempt to express power over females and the crisis of traditional masculine roles. Sinatra’s character underscores the predatory sexuality. His consistent use of “double entendres” through the course of the story and constant reference to sex were cited specifically in the Vatican’s decision to condemn the film. When he sees Linda going to bed with the hot water bottle he boasts “my girl doesn’t

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46 Timothy Connelly, “He is as He is- and Always Will Be: Clark Gable and the Reassertion of Hegemonic Masculinity,” in *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, edited by Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 34 (34-41)

47 *Pal Joey, Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, 120.
need one of those to get all warmed up.” In addition, when Linda wakes up after spending the night drunk on his boat, he says that he is ashamed of himself because he has not done anything with her. When she asks him why he is ashamed of his noble actions, he claims that it is because “I have always done so little of them.” Joey’s sexual power over women can be summarized by his attempt to entrap Vera (Rita Heyworth) and convince her to open a nightclub for him. He states “there are those who have a way with horses, I have a way with women. You simply have to remember that you are a man and you were born to dominate them.”

This aspect of Sinatra’s character, while not in the strictest teachings of the Catholic identity of family values, would not garner the strong condemnation by itself. Male dominance in the male female dynamic is the accepted tradition (even if it is overtly sexual). This self assurance which defines the male identity, the playboy type, was inconsistent with a different aspect of Sinatra in Pal Joey, one that was to garner greater condemnation from the Vatican. Specifically, Joey’s male protagonist marks a greater resemblance to the female protagonists in the other films condemned in that he is the object of desire. Sinatra is a singer and a performer, an occupation that objectifies him to the audience. In the scene where Sinatra sings “The Lady is a Tramp,” Rita Hayworth is the viewer of Sinatra’s spectacle. When Joey is on stage in front of his female audience he is often called a “charmer, a looker, a cad.” These remarks are very similar to the characterization of Marilyn Monroe’s characters that are defined by their looks.

In Gentlemen Prefer Blondes Lorelei Lee affirms that “at night Mr. Esmond finds it very difficult to say no to me.” And when she has to steal some photographs from the
detective, she counts on her sexuality to be able to achieve her goal. She proclaims “I’ll take the photos, he’s a man isn’t he?” In *Some Like it Hot* “the ambiguous lines” criticized in the *Segnalazioni* are not just part of Zucchero’s lines but also part of the two male leads, Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis, who in their female guises will admit to know that men only want one thing in addition to referencing the idea that women are the objects of desire. Lemmon (as the character Daphne) is embodying the male personal of Marilyn Monroe.

Much like Lemmon’s female personal, Joey stands as the male counterpart of what Lorelei Lee and Zucchero represent to the female world, the embodiment of sexual desire. This becomes clear with the swapping of traditional gender roles between Joey and Vera. Male sexualization and objectification places Sinatra into the feminine dynamic within the relationship. Sinatra’s character accepts the role of the dependent (both financially and sexually), but accepts this powerless role in order to gain possession of the nightclub. His image as a playboy is weakened by Vera’s sexual initiative and impenetrable confidence which contrasts Joey’s innocent powerlessness and new role of the object. At one point in the film, Vera calls him “blonde” as a reference not to the female cinematic association of Marilyn Monroe. It also questions the playboy’s role of male sexual dominator by referring to the character of the film with an adjective traditionally coupled with female characters, calling his masculinity into doubt. What the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* refers to as “indecent associations between the

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48 *A qualcuno piace caldo, Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, 159.
characters” is not simply the actions, but also the power structure of the relationship as a whole.

This approach visibly has the intention of disempowering the male protagonist and is also obvious from spatial and narrative aspect of the film. In the opening scene Sinatra immediately acts his role as a playboy who is on the prowl for sex and uses women for his own ends. His movement to San Francisco is driven by the fact that the police are after him and he has been with the underage daughter of the mayor. In addition, Sinatra’s character in the film is not only more interested in Vera Simpson for her usefulness in his financial predicament but is also dependent on her sexual haughtiness. It will not be until the end of the film that Joey redeems his masculinity and frees himself from Vera’s control.

The lack of control and authority for Joey throughout the film makes the situation immoral in the eyes of the Church establishment because it subverts the relationship between masculinity and patriarch, jeopardizing the traditional male role in the Italian society. This was an obvious aspect of contention with the Catholic Church, which wished to reinforce conventional gender roles and underpin the more traditional, conformist idea of male authority in the changing Italian society.

Sinatra’s image in Pal Joey is in stark opposition to Grant’s character Johnny Case in Holiday, and to a certain extent to Humphrey Bogart’s character Charlie Allnut in The African Queen. These are two representations that were held in high regard by the Catholic Segnalazioni cinematografiche.

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49 Pal Joey, Segnalazioni cinematografiche, 120.
The Catholic Church’s positive reception for Bogart’s film was, in part, influenced by the audience that the American film star had with Pope Pius XII on his way to Uganda to film the movie. Another aspect that could have influenced the positive reaction to the film was the Italian press’ interest towards Lauren Bacall, who followed Bogart in Africa during the filming, supporting her marital duties and helping with the domestic activities. Finally, it was also significant that Bogart commented to the press that he was “prouder of her than he ever was when he saw her on the screen, because she was in a woman’s place.”

Cinematically speaking, *African Queen* offered a great deal that coincided with the masculine and family values that the Roman Catholic Church wished to perpetuate. The film was highly regarded by the Catholic Cattolico Cinematografico because of the characterization of Charlie. Initially Charlie is a tough, confident man who refused to get overly emotional, typifying his masculine power. By the end, Charlie is redeemed by Rose, becoming a different man and is committed to marry her, even imagining a future together with children to recount their adventures with. This plot line shows not only the power of masculinity, but the redemptive power of the family and faith, all aspects that the Vatican could support.

Not only Christianity and family values, but also self sufficiency and social obligation are shown in *The African Queen*. When the two central characters decide to blow up a German boat against all odds, it is through strong willpower. In a more individual way in *Holiday*, it is demonstrated when Linda decides to help her sister gain

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happiness. The identification of social responsibility marks a clear connection to the social outreach programs that aided in the Church’s growing role in post war Italy.

In *Holiday*, the values of social responsibility and involvement become central to the male character Johnny Chase. Johnny epitomizes of what a devout man should be, even though he does not express any great religious devotional qualities in the film. He displays a detachment from the material object (which causes his future father in law to define him as “anti-American”), he projects honesty and interest in the personal feelings of family and friends. He tells his future wife “I love you. That is what matters, isn’t it?” This devotion to family and marriage is seen as a “breath of fresh air” by Linda, but the Roman Catholic Church sees this devotion the same way in its *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* review.

More than just Grant’s character garnered the film an unblemished positive review from the Catholic authorities. The university professor Nick Potter and his wife Susan also display a positive, family oriented message. These two act as de-facto parental figures for Johnny, manifesting the social values of family, friendship and community that were integral to the Catholic message.

These positive Catholic messages helped to overcome the negative characters in *Holiday*, specifically the character of Julia. She is much more like the Marilyn Monroe character, with her blonde hair, tight fitting costumes, and an obsession with the material world. She claims that “making money is the most beautiful thing in the world.” She prefers a sumptuous engagement party to a small family gathering and is happy that her life had been laid out for her by her rich father. Money is the principal motivation for the
characters in *Pal Joey*, *Some Like it Hot* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and this was an aspect that the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* found morally unacceptable. Since it plays such an insignificant role in *Holiday*, the film was lauded by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico.

There are many similar themes when looking at the Italian films condemned by the Vatican. The issue of money is often associated with the male protagonists. In *Mambo*, Vittorio Gassman plays Mario Rossi, a character defined by his girlfriend Giovanna (Silvana Mangano) as a “debt ridden crook.” Mario convinces Giovanna to marry the count Enrico Marisoni in order to gain financial stability from their wedding and gain even greater independence after the count’s death. The profit was greatly criticized by the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* because the holy sacrament of marriage was represented as nothing more than “a cynical speculation on the spouse’s misfortune.”

Marisoni’s illness also creates the opportunity for disrespecting the purity of marriage and to invert the traditional role of breadwinner for the family. In the film it is Giovanna who has the job, gains financial security and supports Mario. In addition, Mario and Giovanna live together. This is condemned by the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* as Mario’s resistance to the traditional, holy marriage bond. Resisting the traditional social relationships and responsibilities is enough to constitute a negative review from the Vatican authorities. Mario’s self centered, narcissistic individual actions

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51 *Mambo, Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, 64.
do not portray the values that the church saw as integral to the recreation of the Italian state.

Neither of the two male protagonists in *Mambo* is able to provide Giovanna with the values that the patriarchal Catholic family depends on, finical security and reproduction. The issue of reproduction associated with a traditional and conformist social order is seen as well in the total absence of father figures in the films criticized by the Vatican. For example, Vittorio Gassman’s role in *La donna piu bella del mondo* shows a “physicality and sexual energy which would indicate his force and virility” but which, as in the example of Mario in *Mambo*, is unable to reach its pinnacle with the achievement of paternity.

In post war Italy the church was attempting to reassert the power of the father within the social norms, creating a more traditional and clearly defined gender hierarchy for the family. The task of raising children was the mother’s main duty and fatherhood was not certainly associated with an active participation in the child rearing process.

Over the years in Europe “traditional men may not see any need to engage in balancing between home and work.” Fatherhood, therefore maintains the traditional concepts of masculinity. Sexual procreation is a sign of manliness, as is the role of provider, but it remains quite distinct from the feminine role of the care giver. If the Mediterranean man

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“does not publicly manifest the honor of masculinity through ‘virile performance’ he is shamed, cuckolded and feminized.”

Along a similar line of public displays of masculinity, in *La donna piu bella del mondo*, Gassman plays the role of Sergei, a prince of a great physical presence and even prowess on the screen. This athletic figure, shown particularly in a scene in which Sergei rides on horseback and becomes the object of Lina’s (Gina Lollobrigida) attention for the first time, is in contrast to the weaker male characters of the film, specifically Tenore Silvani, whose sexual prowess in nothing that would attract Lina’s attention.

When Sergei returns to Paris and sees Lina at the theater, he makes a bet with his friends that he will be able to court the most beautiful woman in the world. His assurance, especially after one of his friends tells him that she is the desire of all the men in Paris and that she has rejected them, is not unlike the Sinatra character in *Pal Joey*. Sergei must now be put on display, being judged by Lina’s desire and, inevitably, becoming subordinate to it.

The sexual acts in *La donna piu bella del mondo*, much like those in *Mambo*, are methods of asserting the masculinity of the male leads. Sergei, Mario and Enrico, however, do not honor masculinity from a Roman Catholic perspective because sex is not in the act of procreation. At no point in the plot of either film is there any sign of impending fatherhood. The three are lacking in one of the aspects of the traditional patriarchal spirits. For Sergei and Enrico it is paternity, while for Mario it is financial

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Wood, “From Bust to Boom,” 142
stability through earnings. The inability to accept these basic Roman Catholic requirements for family life leaves them in spiritual peril.

While most of the Italian films referenced thus far have been dramas (or at the lightest dark comedies), the most famous comic actor of the era, Totò, was not immune from the hand of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico. His film Un turco napoletano, directed by Mario Mattoli, was placed into the category of Excluded by the Segnalazioni cinematografiche because it presented “numerous scenes with scantily dressed women, ambiguous lines and crude gestures, and a series of events that render the film unacceptable from a moral point of view.” In the film Totò’s character, Felice Sciosciomocca, pretends to be a Turkish eunuch sent to Don Pasquale in order to care for his wife and daughter. Thinking that Felice is a eunuch, the women and their friends spend a great deal of time alone with him and in various states of dress. Outside of the clear scenes of scantily dressed women, the remainder of the criticism seems shallow at best, not enough to garner the harshest rating at least. Rather, much like a majority of the films in excluded category, Un turco napoletano deals with the idea of masculinity and virility. The honor of the females and the family comes into doubt as well, for if the women cannot be protected from the false eunuch, the interloper Felice, then the males have failed in a primary duty of the provider. This connection between the family, honor and masculinity comes into conflict with one another when Felice is revealed and he is forced from his position. This might set the family honor right; however the threat was too much for the Segnalazioni cinematografiche.

In contrast to these negative portrayals of the masculine position in the 1950s Italy, the films that were given positive reviews from the Segnalazioni cinematografiche paint the paternal, masculine control in almost a heroic light. This is especially evident when looking at Don Camillo, Il ritorno di Don Camillo and Marcellino pane e vino.

The two films of Julien Duvivier (Don Camillo, and Il ritorno di Don Camillo) were not only some of the highest grossing films upon their Italian release they were also some of the best funded films of the era. Don Camillo brought in 216 million lire for the production. This high level of funding has been interpreted, and justifiably so, as a concerted effort by the Roman Catholic Church to fund the morally “ideal” films that would follow “the traditional values of religion, family and respect for those positions of authority.”

Duvivier’s films (while a third in the Don Camillo series exists, it is not included in the analysis because it did not receive the “For All” rating like the first two) centered on the relationship between the Catholic priest Don Comillo and the Communist town mayor Peppone. The first film in the series was completely lacking of any sense or hint of eroticism. Moreover, family unity and community life played an integral role in the plot, garnering the Segnalazioni cinematografiche to praise the film for its “sentiment of human kindness.” In a review of the film in the Catholic Rivista del Cinematografo, the relationship that Don Camillo had with God is stressed, referencing his consistent

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conferences with God on his issues with Peppone.\textsuperscript{58} This strong desire to work with those around (specifically the communists) in order to better the life of those in the city is praise worthy in its own right for the Vatican authorities, but the attempt to “re-Christianize” the communist sections by Don Camillo was mirroring the actions of the real world Roman Catholic Church in the post war period. This spreading of Catholic influence is something that was more than praise worthy for the Segnalazioni cinematografiche.

More than the clear pro-Catholic plot lines, the masculine representation of the family man Peppone is praised by the Segnalazioni cinematografiche, despite the fact that he is not overtly religious. Peppone is described by Buzzonetti as a man whose “somewhat Stalin like moustache was not enough to alter the inner conditions of fundamentally Christian soul.”\textsuperscript{59} In the film, Peppone pushes his son to be baptized, even with his Communist affiliation. In addition, he goes to confession from the priest and attends mass. Peppone is participation in the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church at a greater rate than many who profess to be faithful. So while Peppone’s communist ideals are criticized by the church, he is seen as a positive character.

This becomes important when viewing Peppone’s masculinity, something that received praise from the Vatican. Peppone is controlling, but in no means violent toward his family. In many ways Peppone is the secular version of Don Camillo. They are firm paternal figures that inspire devotion from those around them, not power through fear or through sex. This is in sharp contrast to the power and physicality of the men in films

\textsuperscript{59} Buzzonetti, “Don Camillo,” 20.
like *Mambo* or *La donna piu bella del mondo*. Their masculinity is purely physical and athletic. This masculinity based on sex and the physical always ends in what the Church deems an “immoral outcome.”\(^{60}\) The masculinity approved by the church, that of Done Camillo and Peppone is a softer, more stable leadership, helping restore order to a unruly society.

The final film praised by the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* for its positive portrayal of men is *Marcelino pan y vino*. Like *Don Camillo*, it also has a strong religious setting. In the film, a young Marcellino is found abandoned on their doorstep by a group of monks and they take him in. In their charity and care for others, the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico praises the film for its overall “religiousness (and the) presence of the supernatural in the lives of the men.”\(^{61}\) The community that is formed by the friars in the film and the care that the men show for one another is a value that the Vatican believed to be necessary in the post war Italian state. On a gender level, all the monks are removed from any sexual situation or feeling, reaffirming the holiness of the order. The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico sees *Marcelino pan e vino* as a perfect example of power that comes from a pure masculinity, affirmation of a holy power and a family that lives and works together in harmony with their religion protecting and saving them in their time of need.

Both the Italian and American films that gained popular success in Italy in the 1950s show a clear sense of the Roman Catholic Church’s fear of a modernizing society.


In that vein, though the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, the Vatican would attempt to push back against any modernizing message that went against its teachings. These “Excluded” or “Not Recommended” films lauded the life of the bachelors, allowing their playboy lifestyle to shirk the sacrament of marriage for what they deemed an immoral life. Also challenging this traditional marriage were the themes of working women, who challenged the domesticity of the Roman Catholic ideology by making their mark in the public sphere. All of these push the traditional values that the Vatican had hoped to rebuild Italy upon. The Centro Cattolico Cinematografico condemned any film that did not show women being restricted to the home and motherhood, as well as encouraging masculinity to be reintegrated into a more acceptable gender hierarchy. In the end, the box office success of the banned films proved the goals of the Roman Catholic Church for the films of the 1950s to be less than successful. Italian modernization was not to be stopped, and the representation of this modernity on the Italian screen would not be curbed by the Vatican.
Conclusion

There is a pervading belief that the most important contributions and most influential works of the Italian film industry were those that gained international recognition as masterpieces. Films such as Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* (Rome, Open City), Federico Fellini’s 8½ and De Sica’s *Landri di biciclette* fall into this category. These are incredible films and they were important for the international prestige of the Italian film industry as it approached the golden age of the 1960s, but they do not provide the full picture of the Italian film industry in the post war era. By looking at the popular cinema, through box office returns, a greater insight is gained not only into the views of the people, but also the culture that those in power wished to model for the Italian people. It is for this reason that both the government and the Vatican gave so much attention to the Italian film industry: both realized the cinema’s power to tap into the pulse of the people.

While the Vatican would always advise directors to keep in mind the Christian reality and value structure, its main efforts were focused on influencing the reception of the audience through reviews in the *Segnalazioni cinematografiche* and *La Rivista del Cinematografo*. In short, it was more important for the Roman Catholic Church to create a moral audience than to create moral directors. This moral Italy needed to be cultivated though a protective patriarch guiding their opinions, thus the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico and their rating system took on the role of the censor for the Catholic world.
The study of these Vatican film reviews reveals that the portrayal of woman in film was one of the main concerns for the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico. When the film lingered on the feminine physique, the Vatican would intervene and/or condemn the film. The Catholic Church feared more than any other vice in the movies a challenge to traditional gender hierarchy, and to a subservient role for women in Italian society. Along this logical line, any level or suggestion of sexuality and female empowerment was considered a threat to the Catholic family and any representation in films that portrayed the “correct” family establishment was happily accepted by the Church. Italian films such as La donna piu bella del mondo, L’oro di Napoli and Mambo were treated with some of the harshest Vatican criticism (along with American imports such as Some Like it Hot and Gentlemen Prefer Blondes). The association of female sexual independence and power, coinciding with the male subordination to and incorporation of femininity, was seen as a clear challenge to Catholic morality and in turn to the Italian state in the 1950s. These were transgressions that could not be ignored by the Pontiff and would not be allowed in his new Catholic culture.

Don Camillo, Directed by Julian Duvivier, 1952.

Gentleman Prefer Blondes, Directed by Howard Hawks, 1953.

Holiday, Directed by George Cukor, 1938.

Il ritorno di Don Camillo, Directed by Julian Duvivier, 1953.

L'oro di Napoli, Directed by Vittoro De Sica, 1954.

La donna piu bella del mondo, Directed by Robert Lenard, 1956.


Marcelino pan y vino, Directed by Ladislao Vajda, 1955.

Pal Joey, Directed by George Sidney, 1957.

Some Like it Hot, Directed by Billy Wilder, 1959.

Stazione Termini, Directed by Vittoro De Sica, 1953.

The African Queen, Directed by John Huston. 1951.

Un turco napoletano, Directed by Mario Mattoli, 1953.
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